

## History

The history of the *Ottawa Watercolour Society* (OWS) is steeped in this abbreviated life story of Morton Baslaw (1924-2016).

OWS was founded by Morton in 1976 and he served as its first President. The Society's first exhibition was held in 1977 and 83 juried exhibitions and numerous non-juried shows have been held since.



Morton was born and raised in Ottawa and served in the Royal Canadian Air Force as an Air Force Photographer. On his return from the war front he studied at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, graduating in 1948. This is where he was first introduced to watercolour.

Morton returned to Ottawa and opened a graphic design business in 1955. It flourished with notable clients such as Pure Spring Ginger Ale, Campeau Corporation, Lapointe Fish, the Jewish Community Centre, the Ottawa Humane Society, The Boy Scouts, Canada Post and Macies.

Among a few of his many achievements, Morton created designs for Expo '67 and the opening of the National Art Centre. But he continued his devotion to watercolour, developing a unique style that was marked by an intense attention to detail and colour. His work focused on landscapes and interpretive realism that were usually painted on location. He pursued his love of watercolour painting with regular visits to the Gatineau Hills, small towns and rural areas in Ontario and Quebec. He also painted while travelling to Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and the Yukon.

Morton held his first show at the Chapel Street Jewish Community Centre in 1966. After his solo show, his work was shown at the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Cultural Branch of the Government of Alberta.

Named an Exhibiting Member of the Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour and the Ontario Society of Artists, Morton exhibited his work extensively with these prestigious organizations in 1970 and 1974. He began teaching at the Ottawa School of Art (OSA) in 1972, and became the President of OSA in 1978. He continued to teach watercolour at both the OSA and Algonquin College through the 1980s and 1990s.

Morton worked on many creative projects throughout the 1990s, including the design of the Canadian Mint's commemorative coins for the 1992 Albertville Olympic Winter Games.

Morton's work was honoured by many exhibits and Art Societies over the years, and received a special tribute by the *Ottawa Watercolour Society* in 1988. His paintings have been exhibited across Canada and internationally, as far away as Africa and Israel.

The *Morton Baslaw Award*, normally presented by the current Past President of OWS, is one of ten Awards given for outstanding artwork. If you are the recipient of this Award, you have been bestowed a special honour.

Morton is also credited for the development of the graduated process of Membership with OWS from Affiliate to Associate to Fellowship.

Morton passed in 2016, but his memory and considerable contributions to the *Ottawa Watercolour Society*, and other institutions within the arts community live on.

Of course, there have been enormous contributions made by the Past Presidents and Members of the Executive in the years following. It is through the ongoing efforts of all these dedicated volunteers, that OWS has continued to thrive - even through the world-wide Covid-19 pandemic.

*Contribution by Linda Sheard, OWS Exhibitions*