

## Robert Schlegel: Italian Journey July 30 – September 27, 2025

**Opening Reception: First Friday, August 1st, 5:30-7:30 pm**

*Schlegel family in attendance!*

**First Friday Artwalk: Friday, September 5th, 5:30-7:30 pm**



Karin Clarke Gallery is pleased to present *Italian Journey*, a large, solo exhibit of more than thirty smaller and medium-sized works by the late and much beloved Oregon artist **Robert Schlegel** (1947-2021). Many of these paintings on paper and canvas were created during a trip to Italy in 2006, which Schlegel devoted to plein-air painting, sketching, and studying the country's artistic heritage. Included are charming Tuscan hill towns, rolling hills punctuated by cypress trees, as well as figures, still lives, and some of Schlegel's distinctive Oregon landscapes and houses. Most of these works are being shown for the first time and all were recently framed for this special show that will surely delight viewers and collectors alike.

Contrasting with the more subdued earth tones of his Oregon landscapes and farmhouses, Schlegel's Italian paintings feature a vibrant interplay of complementary colors: deep-green trees and bright red rooftops, ochre fields and purple shadows. As always, compositional structure is paramount: "There's something about structure within me that I can't seem to ever get rid of," Schlegel once said on PBS. Following

land contours or the meanders of a river, his landscapes are often based on a series of dynamic triangles and diagonal lines brought to harmonize with the curves and verticals of trees. Meanwhile, in his cityscapes, triangular structures and diagonals are integrated into a complex pattern of horizontal and vertical lines, softened in turn by the organic shape of vegetation. Schlegel also liked to juxtapose landscape and manmade structures, and Tuscany offered him plenty of opportunity to do so.

This emphasis on structure, on how colors, lines, planes, and shapes contrast and interact, certainly served his lifelong intent to "move away from being photographically representational" and to explore instead the fertile ground between abstraction and realism. Another crucial element, and one very much at the root of the immense appeal of his work, was his willingness to suggest expressively rather than precisely reproduce reality, to make room for mistakes, and to give free rein to spontaneity and a singular vision often informed by whimsey. A playful stroke or mark, an eloquent distortion, or a deliberate indeterminacy frequently inflects his pieces and gives them a unique twist, mood, or quality.

Schlegel cited Giorgio Morandi as one of the painters who influenced him. *After Morandi*, with its arrangement of overlapping bottles and shaky outlines, signals at once its direct inspiration from the Bologna artist. Yet it is also instantly recognizable as a Schlegel, with its bold and casual brush lines and found paper as support – here a page from a telephone book. Schlegel, rather than providing an impression of solidity and durability, brings in an element of playfulness and an intimation of ephemerality.

In this context, Schlegel's series of bottle-shaped vases with flowers might almost be construed as a more indirect and colorful tribute to Morandi. Coincidentally, the irregular shapes of the vases, the wavering contours of vessels and blooms also appear in Morandi's paintings. But Schlegel, as is his wont, conjures up a lively texture out of visible brushstrokes, charcoal marks and even collage, all of which make the still life objects seem alive. Echoing shapes and colors also provide rhythm. Here too, the mood is playful, sometimes with a hint of melancholy as if wilting might be imminent.

In this selection of Schlegel's works, solidity of form seems to belong to figures, rather than still life objects, whether the human subjects themselves appear awkward or self-assured. Schlegel's people are often ordinary and unassuming. Their features may be realistic, askew, or impossible; merely suggested, blurred, or hidden.

Yet each is seemingly caught in the process of being themselves and each possesses an unmistakable specificity in the way they hold themselves, inhabit their bodies awkwardly or with poise, appear oblivious or self-conscious. And we feel we know something important about them.

Schlegel earned a BA from Willamette University and an MS from Portland State University. A lifetime resident of Banks, Oregon, he became a full-time painter in 2002 until his untimely death in 2021. He shared a studio with his brother Bill, also a printmaker and painter. His work has been exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibits in California, Montana, Oregon and Washington, and is included in many institutional collections across the country. The Hallie Ford Museum also recently acquired a selection of his work to add to their permanent collection. Additionally, Schlegel was featured on Oregon Public Broadcasting's Art Beat in 2016.

Schlegel's family will be attending the opening reception on Friday, August 1<sup>st</sup>, from 5:30 to 7:30 pm. Please join us to celebrate this artist's delightful work!

— *Sylvie Pederson*