

Magafan Sisters Biography Project

The WAAM and artist Jenne M. Currie are spearheading research about Jenne's mother **Ethel Magafan (1916-1993)** and her aunt **Jenne Magafan (1916-1952)** – identical twins who were an integral part of the Woodstock artists' community for decades. Jenne is working with Stan Cuba, Associate Curator of the Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art in Denver, Colorado, on a monograph documenting the twin sisters' fascinating and little-known story. This is a history which is sure to be of interest to art historians, collectors, and feminists as well as the general public. To learn more about the Magafan sisters, please see below.



Ethel and Jenne Magafan with their instructor Frank Mechau.

Please Help Support This Project

To help offset the costs of researching, writing and publishing the Magafans' biography, donations can be made online to the "Magafan Project" at the Woodstock Artists Association and Museum in Woodstock, NY, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. For online donations, [click here](#) and type "Magafan Project" in the designated field in the blue section. Donations can also be mailed to WAAM, Attn: Josephine Bloodgood, 28 Tinker Street, Woodstock, NY 12498. For further information about donations, please contact Ms. Bloodgood, WAAM Executive Director and Curator of the Permanent Collection at 845-679-2940 x103.

All donations are tax deductible as allowed by law.

THE ETHEL AND JENNE MAGAFAN BIOGRAPHY PROJECT

Woodstock artist Jenne M. Currie is spearheading research about her mother Ethel Magafan (1916-1993) and her aunt Jenne Magafan (1916-1952) – identical twins who were an integral part of the Woodstock artists' community for decades. Jenne is working with Stan Cuba, Associate Curator of the Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art in Denver, Colorado, on a monograph documenting the twin sisters' fascinating and little-known story. This is a history which is sure to be of interest to art historians, collectors, and feminists as well as the general public.

The children of poor immigrants who grew up in Colorado, the vivacious and independent-minded Magafan sisters managed in the depths of the Great Depression to blossom into remarkably driven and talented artists. Decades before the word "feminist" was coined, they refused to accept the conventional wisdom of their generation that a woman's place was in the home. From an early age, the two showed an outstanding dedication to developing their artistic skills. While attending Denver's East High School in the 1930s, their talent caught the eye of renowned Colorado muralist Frank Mechau who had recently returned from studying in Paris. He trained the sisters in the complex process of mural painting while they were studying at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. Mechau used their talents extensively on his own murals while teaching them the compositional techniques of the European Renaissance masters.

While still in their twenties, the sisters won numerous national mural competitions sponsored by the Federal Government's art programs during the Depression. The sisters were known to take off on trips to visit pending mural locations around the country. Driving their beat-up station wagon, dressed in jeans and cowboy boots with art supplies and dogs in tow, they cut an uncommon profile, to say the least. As a result of their talent and ambition, a total of 13 Magafan murals can still be seen in Washington, DC, and in US Post Offices throughout the United States.

During the Second World War they spent time in Los Angeles where they met fellow artists Arnold Blanch, Fletcher Martin, and Herman Cherry who became life-long friends. Blanch and his wife, Doris Lee, encouraged the sisters to move to Woodstock, New York after the war. Once on the East Coast, the twins wasted no time securing gallery representation on 57th street in Manhattan.

Newly married to artist Bruce Currie, Ethel won a Fulbright Scholarship to Greece in 1950. The same year Jenne's husband and fellow artist, Eduardo Chavez, won a Fulbright to Italy. As a result, the two couples spent a highly productive year painting and studying in the museums of Europe. Shortly after their return home, Jenne's career was tragically cut short when she died of a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of only 36. Ethel went on to have four more decades of artistic success and became distinguished for her modernist landscapes.

She continued to exhibit her work in New York City galleries and, at age 63, tackled a final, ambitious mural commission – a 12 by 20 foot Civil War canvas installed at the Fredericksburg National Military Park in Virginia.

Ethel's and Jenne's work can be found in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art and National Academy of Design (all New York City), Butler Institute of American Art (Youngstown, OH), Boca Raton Museum of Art (FL); Denver Art Museum (CO); Des Moines Art Center (IA); Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute (Utica, NY); National Museum of American Art and the United States Department of the Interior (both in Washington, D.C.) Oklahoma Museum of Art (Oklahoma City, OK); Provincetown Art Association and Museum (MA); Wichita Art Museum (KS); Woodstock Artists Association and Museum (NY) and the Kirkland Museum of Fine and Decorative Art, (Denver, CO).