

SAUGATUCK-DOUGLAS HISTORY CENTER

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INNOVATIVE ART OF JOHN POLKA HAILED AT AUG. 31 "TUESDAY TALK"

AUGUST 20, 2021 -- A reintroduction to the under-appreciated legacy of innovative Saugatuck artist John Polka (1930-2006) finishes this summer's series of Saugatuck-Douglas History Center Tuesday Talks on August 31 in the "Back-In-Time Garden" behind the Old School House, 130 Center Street in Douglas. The one-hour program begins when the school bell rings at 11 a.m. To assure comfortable outdoor seating, attendees are invited to bring their own camp chairs.

Presenter Ken Kutzel, SDHC's longtime volunteer Art Collection Manager, will guide a deep dive into the personality and life experiences underpinning Polka's unique post-impressionistic renderings of landscapes, animals and people, punctuated with images of paintings from SDHC's art collection and several private collections.

"With an understanding of Polka's techniques", Kutzel says, "one can pick out a Polka painting immediately. I personally believe his work is certain to become more well-known and collected as time passes".

Born in Melrose Park, IL, Polka grew up in Germany where his family owned hospitality businesses, becoming an art student in the midst of the turbulent war years. His family returned to America in 1948 and moved to Saugatuck in 1949, where John graduated from High School. He later worked as a bartender at the Coral Gables and planned to attend college as a student of hospitality, but instead veered to Sarasota to study art at the Ringling Art School. During that period, he went with artist friends to visit the art museums of Europe and spent some time at the Academie Julian in Paris before finishing the program at Ringling.

Returning to Saugatuck, he lived with his parents in a rented house on Lake Street and again worked as a bartender, but began to support himself as an artist, eventually opening his own gallery/school in Saugatuck. He also studied at Ox-Bow and later taught there. His background in hospitality and art, Kutzel says, "made him so charming and engaging that local artists planned their weekends around visits with him."

A summertime tradition since 1996, SDHC's weekly Tuesday Talks present entertaining and informative insights into local community life and history throughout July and August. This program is sponsored by SDHC members Bill Hess and Mike Mattern.

While admission is free for current SDHC members, non-member guests are encouraged to attend with a donation of five dollars, or to become new members at the Talk.

Saugatuck-Douglas History Center is supported in part by the Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA) and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more information about SDHC, its Museum in Saugatuck and Old School House in Douglas, and its activities planned for the months ahead, visit www.MySDHistory.org.

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PHOTO ATTACHED SEPARATELY (see jpeg "PavilionAtNight")

Caption : This 1965 oil-on-canvas "The Big Pavilion at Night", from the SDHC collection, exemplifies John Polka's style as discussed in SDHC's Aug. 31 Tuesday Talk.