

Marvin Bileck (1920-2005) | Obituary: May 2005
May 2, 2005
MARVIN BILECK (1920 – 2005)

With sadness we announce the death of Marvin Bileck on Friday evening April 29 in Torrington, Connecticut of complications from diabetes. He was 85 years old and is survived by his wife Emily Nelligan of Winsted, Connecticut.

Marvin Bileck, known by friends as “Buddy,” was born March 2, 1920 in Passaic, New Jersey. He was graduated in 1946 from Cooper Union School of Art and went on to further study at the London School of Architecture and Columbia University. He received a Fulbright Fellowship to France where he continued studies in the Cabinet des Dessins at the Louvre Museum while working in the printing ateliers of Lacouriere and Desjouibert.

Bileck’s prints and drawings are widely represented in galleries and museums including Landmark Gallery (New York City), Dartmouth College (New Hampshire), Maine Center for Contemporary Art (Rockport) and Islesford Artists Gallery (Maine). In addition, his work has been exhibited at museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Chicago Art Institute of Chicago, and Queens Museum. Alexandre Gallery (New York) is presenting Bileck’s and Nelligan’s work in a joint exhibition through June 17th (www.alexandregallery.com).

In addition to his work as an artist, Bileck enjoyed a distinguished career as a designer and illustrator of children’s books. His titles include Sugarplum, Penny, and A Walker in the City by Alfred Kazan. His exquisitely detailed drawings for Rain Makes Applesauce have made that book a children’s classic – it has been in print for 40 years - and is a Caldecott Honors book.

Writing in the New York Times William Zimmer said “Marvin Bileck is an etcher and his etch line is delicate. The paradox he shows us is that delicacy and ruggedness can coexist perfectly.” In a 2000 article, also in the Times, Deborah Weisgall wrote that his work is “meticulous and detailed, almost Netherlandish in feeling.”

He was a life-long educator who was much beloved by his students and colleagues. His career as a teacher began in 1960 at the Philadelphia College of Art (now University of the Arts). In 1967 he began teaching in New York at Queens College, from where he retired Professor Emeritus in 1992.

Bileck and Nelligan lived and worked together in Northwestern Connecticut and Cranberry Island, Maine.