

Distinguished Alumni

Distinguished Alumnus Award - 1992

James Sloss Ackerman '37

A scholar and educator of the highest order, you are of the world's leading authorities of the history of art and architecture.

At Cate, you served as editor of *El Batidor* and president of the Debating Club, and were active in the Dramatic Club and Glee Club. When your classmates chose you as the commencement speaker in 1937, you gave a preview of your career to come by delivering a powerful analysis of modern art. From Cate, you went on to a distinguished undergraduate career at Yale University, where you majored in art history. Your education was interrupted by World War II, and you served in the U.S. army as a member of the Signal Intelligence Service. Following the war, you returned to New York University where you received your M.A. and PhD degree and were awarded a Fulbright Scholarship.

Your academic career began with teaching and research positions at Yale, the American Academy of Rome, and the University of California. In 1961, you were named professor of fine arts at Harvard University. A position you would hold for thirty years. Two years later, you were named chairman of the Department of Fine Arts, a post which you would hold several times during your tenure. You have also held visiting professorships and fellowships at Princeton, Cambridge, and Columbia Universities, and were a Mellon Lecturer at the National Gallery of Arts.

You are a pioneer in the creation of modern, pluralist art history. You challenged the idealist notions of stylistic development that dominated art history since its inception and insisted on the importance of individual invention and the specificity of cultural situations. At Harvard, where you were admired as much for the challenges you set in the humanistic disciplines as for the high quality of your scholarship, your greatest pleasure was, and remains, your students. Your dedication to education is documented in the lives and work of more than fifty dissertation students, and countless friends and admirers among graduates of the college.

Like any true academician, you have published numerous scholarly works. Your best-known work was perhaps your 1961 publication of *The Architecture of Michelangelo*, which won two of your profession's greatest honors and remains the leading authoritative work on the subject. Other major books include *Palladio*, published in 1966, and *The Villa. Form and Ideology of the Country House*, published in 1990. You have also been a contributor to publications as diverse as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Architectural Review*. Your writing has been lauded for its scholarly integrity as well as for its readability for a broad and varied spectrum of readers.

You have received nearly every major award for your work, and have been recognized by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Library of Congress, the National Gallery of

Art, and the University of California. You have received honorary doctorate degrees from Kenyon College, the University of Maryland, Massachusetts College of Art, and the University of Venice. The Republic of Italy decorated you as a grand officer of The Order of Merit, and you were named a fellow in both the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Royal Academy of Arts and Sciences. You served as a trustee of the American Academy of Rome, and of the Artists Foundation. In 1991, the College Art Association of America presented you with its award for distinguished teaching.

In honor of your distinguished academic career, and in recognition of your achievements as an art historian, the Cate School Alumni Association honors you, James Sloss Ackerman '37, as its Distinguished Alumnus for 1992.