

John H. Risley



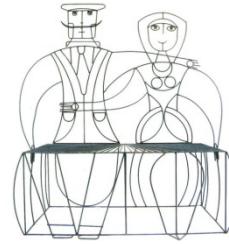
John Risley, who served on the Middletown Arts Commission in the 1990s and was as a professor of design and sculpture at Wesleyan from the mid-'50s to mid-'80s, died in 2002 at age 82. He and his wife Mary, also a Wesleyan teacher, pottery artist and among the founders of Wesleyan Potters, lived on Maple Shade Road in Middletown.

John H. Risley, professor of art emeritus, died Feb. 19 in Colchester, Conn. Born in 1919 in Waterville, Maine, Professor Risley modestly referred to himself as a Yankee tinker. He was, of course, much more: an artist who received national prizes and more than two dozen regional prizes for sculptural work that graced collections ranging from IBM's to those of private individuals. During his 33 years at Wesleyan, he participated in dozens of exhibitions throughout the United States. "Risley's art," wrote William Ward, professor of theater and design emeritus, "represents a continual seeking, exploring and analyzing of nature." He produced works of "humanity and humor, in which serious messages are revealed in the guise of comical men-at-arms, ingenious mechanical marvels, nonfunctional machines and wondrous boxes." Risley joined the faculty in 1954, having obtained degrees from Amherst College, the Rhode Island School of Design, and the Cranbrook Academy of Arts. Initially on the staff of Wesleyan's new Humanities Workshop, he devoted most of his teaching throughout his career to sculpture and the fundamentals of design. He and colleagues began discussions in 1959 that led to the creation of the Center for the Arts. He retired in 1987. Professor Risley was married to the late Mary Kring Risley, a noted ceramist and adjunct associate professor of art at Wesleyan. He is survived by two children, Jack and Kathryn, both artists.

A few pieces of John's Sculptures & Furniture



UCH collection piece



Women Figured Chairs Sold for \$2,000.00

Into each life a little whimsy must fall. At least that seemed to be the attitude of John Risley (1919-2002), a sculptor, artist and furniture designer born in Waterville, Maine. He attended Loomis Institute in Windsor, Connecticut, as well as Malvern College in England before graduating from Amherst College in 1942. He served in the U. S. Army Information and Education section from 1942-1946 and was stationed in Tokyo. He later trained as a sculptor, receiving his BFA in 1949 from the Rhode Island School of Design and his MFA in 1950 from the Cranbrook Academy. He taught at the Cranbrook Academy for a year after completing his studies. He was an art professor at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, from 1954-1987.

His sense of humor brought him international attention for his satirical line drawings of birds, animals and pompous, armor-clad Medieval warriors. His satires and cartoons were exhibited in Italy, Holland, Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, as well as in the United States. Risley then turned his talent for line drawing into furniture design, creating pieces in the shape of people and animals which are still quite collectible today.

In the 1950s, Risley led a U. S. government program for two years in Manila, where he and his wife Mary were design consultants. In 1960 they were in a similar program in Taiwan with Russel Wright Associates and in a Peace Corps project in Puerto Rico in 1964.

His sculpture is exhibited at Wesleyan University, as well as at IBM in New York and the Cleveland Garden Center. His design of the Risley woven rattan Duyan chair and Banca boat-shaped wooden bowls were notable successes that have continued into this century.

See: <http://mid2mod.blogspot.com/2012/06/john-risley.html>