



At left, Donald Sutphin. Above, his "Landscape in Tuscany," 1978, oil on canvas, 31½ x 39½ ins. (Photos by

# Donald Sutphin

Once-shouting colors sing together like morning stars

By John Hart

FLORENCE -- Donald Sutphin's paintings and graphics on exhibit at W.F. Mullaly Galleries in Birmingham, Michigan, March 4-31, will be, by uncanny coincidence, in the right place at precisely the right time to join their own kind. The coincidence, in a way, sums up his art: he did his own thing, and it emerged.

From other evidence on this page you will gather that Scandinavians are attracting a lot of stateside attention in very high art circles this season. And for that reason, among many others, so should Sutphin's art, even though he is a Nova-Anglo-Florentine -- that is, a New Englander who makes his home and produces his art in Florence.

"I'm a figurative-expressionist," he said recently during a tour of his studio, set in the middle of a rural olive grove punctuated with cypress and other full-grown trees of the Tuscan landscape, a brisk ten minutes' walk uphill from the Ponte Vecchio. By "expressionist" he means the somber Northern European school that followed close on the heels of Van Gogh and Gauguin. And among the Nordics Sutphin has a special affinity with the great Norwegian painter and graphic artist, Edvard Munch, as well as with the caustic German critic of social ills in his day, George Grosz.

Grosz was Sutphin's teacher at the Art Students League of New York, so his link with the Expressionists is direct, if latter day. He was born in Boston in 1926, and had his first formal art training at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. He moved to

Florence in 1956, after teaching in private New York and Connecticut schools, and still teaches woodcut and etching, operating his own press in his Florentine studio.

"Every artist is influenced," he says, and he's right. No one can be truly self-formed, either artistically or biologically. But painting under the influence can be almost as terminal a one way street as driving under the influence, as police reports phrase it.

Both practices give a feeling of accomplishment that, in part, makes up for a deeper-rooted frustration and lack of confidence. In the artist's case, it most often leads to a surrender, or resignation to an established style that has very little of his own creativity to recommend it. Much rarer is a case like Sutphin's, where dogged persistence and integrity finally

pay off with a merger of two forces; the influence and the artist's own self-expression combine like the vectors of wind and sail to set a new course of the artist's choosing. Then others follow him. Sutphin is a good sailor, too.

The Expressionists were on the whole an anguished lot, in and out of asylums, torturing themselves and their unhappy realitives with their hang-ups. Fortunately they could also work them out in gloomy but compelling art.

Gloom doesn't sit well on Donald Sutphin. He's a calm, cheerful and witty man who leads a life with no more apparent complications than one wife, two dogs and six cats. (Typically, he took pen in hand to amend this information in his biography printed for the show to read "six wives, two dogs and one cat.")

And in this show, more than in any previous one -- rare as they are -- the vectors merge.

"My colors are more subdued. They don't shout so much," he says. Right. But they are as vivid and surprising as ever, only now they're like the morning stars that sing together in the Book of Job. It took patience.

Sutphin has always been alert to Hamlet's currents that "turn awry and lose the name of action." He paints the invisible currents that swirl in and about objects in space, and if they go awry and the painting doesn't move, he abandons it.

Often a central figure emerges from the currents while he works, a mysterious, coincidental presence. About three years ago it became a Tuscan tree. Donald Sutphin has been steady on course, wind and current strong, ever since.

## DC National Gallery extends Munch show

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The U.S. National Gallery of Art announced that its loan exhibition of the works of Norwegian artist Edvard Munch has been extended for two weeks until Sunday, March 4.

A gallery spokeswoman said interest runs high in the exhibition, the largest ever seen outside Norway by that country's most prominent painter and graphic artist.

The show opened here on Nov. 11 and had been scheduled to close Sunday.

Munch, whose years were 1863 to 1944, is best known for his pictures of despair, pain, death and other subjects normally regarded as depressing.