



LANSDOWNE, James Fenwick (1955)

1937-2008

It is with great sadness that the Lansdowne family announces the sudden passing of J. Fenwick Lansdowne on July 26, 2008. He died in Victoria, British Columbia, with his wife Helen, son Tristram and daughter Emma by his side.

Internationally renowned bird artist and author, Fenwick was a member of the Royal Canadian Academy, the Order of Canada and the Order of British Columbia. Fenwick will be greatly missed by his family, extended family and his many friends. We wish to extend our gratitude to his

doctors and the nursing staff of the Royal Jubilee Hospital.

A memorial service will be held at 5:30 PM on Friday, August 8 at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. The family welcomes all who wish to celebrate the remarkable life of Fenwick Lansdowne and requests that colour rather than black be worn

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Noted city painter dies unexpectedly

Fenwick Lansdowne considered a giant in avian artistry

Tom McMillan, Times Colonist

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Fenwick Lansdowne's work was shown at venues including the Smithsonian Institution and Audubon House in New York.

Fenwick Lansdowne, a Victoria artist described as the world's foremost painter of birds, has died.

Lansdowne, whose paintings were exhibited around the world and whose work was presented to the Royal Family, was 71. He died of unknown causes yesterday.

Lansdowne was often described as the successor to John James Audubon, the 19th-century painter who was North America's best known wildlife artist. "[Lansdowne] is the premier illustrator of birds in the world today," said S. Dillon Ripley, secretary emeritus of the Smithsonian Institution, where Lansdowne's work was shown in 1977.

Born in Hong Kong in 1937, Lansdowne was left partially paralyzed after he had polio when he was 10 months old. He immigrated with his mother, Edith, to Victoria in 1940.

Edith was an artist who mainly specialized in painting ceramic birds, yet Lansdowne received no formal art training, a fact he later regretted. He had been advised that attending art school would spoil his natural talent.

"His mother gave him some supplies and he liked feeding birds outside his bedroom window," said Graeme Roberts, who knew "Fen" as a child. "That's how it all started."

Lansdowne debuted his first solo show at the Royal Ontario Museum in 1956. Critics marvelled at the fidelity of colour and detail in the 19-year-old's work.

"His potential was noticed almost immediately," said Robert Amos, a Victoria artist and the Times Colonist art writer. "His career took off."

Lansdowne's works were displayed at Audubon House in New York, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., the Royal Ontario Museum, the American Museum of Natural History in Chicago, the National Museum of Science in Ottawa and Beijing's Cultural Palace of Nationalities.

From 1975 to 1987, he had annual exhibits at the Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Wisconsin, the Holy Grail of bird art. He received an honorary doctorate from the University of Victoria and in 1995 was awarded the Order of Canada.

Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, wrote the foreword to Lansdowne's *Birds of the West Coast: Volume Two*.

"Fenwick Lansdowne has the exceptional ability to capture such moment with a seemingly effortless assurance, but which can only come from intimate knowledge, immense care and remarkable talent."

Despite the international renown, Lansdowne's studio was a small, sparsely furnished cottage in Oak Bay. There, he would use bird "skins," a few pencil sketches and memory to create his lifelike paintings.

One of his most ambitious projects was a 10-year commission for a 32-print collection of China's endangered birds in 1984 that became a book, *Rare Birds of China*.

"I always thought it fascinating that he painted this outstanding portfolio on endangered birds in China from his quiet studio on Victoria Avenue," Amos said.

Victoria artists remember Lansdowne as a private, humble man who disliked special attention. In 2004, he agreed to be honorary chairman for the Rocky Point Bird Observatory, a migration observation group near Nanaimo.

Lansdowne is survived by his wife, Helen, son, Tristram, and daughter, Emma.

"He was a superb artist and a superb man -- a kind soul that will definitely be remembered," said Kathryn Amisson, who worked with Lansdowne at an annual painting summit in Campbell River. "It is a loss for us all."