

ARTS

German artist work opening at Athenaeum

Original paintings on display for first time in North America

By Anne Roth

More than 40 rare original oil paintings by a leading German artist - the late Otto Duenkelsbuehler (1898-1977) - will be exhibited for the first time in North America at a reception from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. April 5 at The Athenaeum of Skaneateles. The event is presented by the Skaneateles Area Arts Council.

The opportunity to view the paintings came about through the friendship of the artist's son Peter, who has lived in the Skaneateles area since 1977, and Stephen Bowman, president of The Athenaeum.

"The odyssey of Otto Duenkelsbuehler and Peter Duenkelsbuehler is an amazing story, being half Jewish and living through Nazi Germany," Bowman said. "When the German government formed a cultural arm, they started to suppress Jewish art or what they called degenerative art. In 1933 it was outlawed in Germany to produce such art, so Otto had to leave the country to do his work. He traveled to France and Italy and Switzerland to continue to create his art. When the war started he couldn't travel outside Germany. He tried to do his art secretly in friends' homes but was discovered so he had to stop endangering his friends.

"He was a highly decorated veteran of World War I," Bowman continued, "so he was protected and sheltered by his Army friends in the Black Forest. Whenever he went out he wore his Iron Cross so he would not be stopped. After World War II, art by Germans and German culture was viewed as evil. People were no longer interested in it. So his

work was overlooked. We are honored to sponsor this rare collection."

Duenkelsbuehler lost a leg while serving in the German Army. After the war, he went on to a successful international career as a graphic designer. In 1929 he began to focus his interest on landscapes to avoid the strictures of realism. His paintings were done in light colors with the hope they would lift spirits of observers. His paintings were banned in Germany from 1933-1945. Dur-

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ing those dark times, the half-Jewish artist was persecuted by the Nazis and was under surveillance by the Gestapo.

"He didn't allow us children to talk about his experiences with the Nazis," Peter Duenkelsbuehler, 81, said. "He was very quiet about politics. He was angry when people talked about politics at an exhibition rather than talking about the paintings."

After the artist's death in 1977, many memorial exhibitions were held in Landshut, Munich, Dusseldorf, Gauting, Emden, Hamburg, Stuttgart, Weimer and Bonn, Germany. Two permanent collections of his work are in his hometown, Nagold, and Kisslegg Castle Museum for expressive realism. Other exhibitions were held in Longwy, France and

Brussels, Belgium.

"This name is not known in America. I want to publicize his work and his name," said Duenkelsbuehler. (Their surnames differ to eliminate the umlaut.) There are 70 paintings, mostly oil, and 500 drawings," Duenkelsbuehler continued. "We started to think of making the paintings more public. It is hard to do something with so many. Forty will be on exhibit. Most are landscapes from Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Germany. Most will be for sale at the April 5 reception."

Duenkelsbuehler said he is thinking of inviting some galleries from New York City to look at the paintings after the opening in Skaneateles.

The opening night reception is sponsored by The Athenaeum of Skaneateles and Cowley Associates. "The impressionist painter is going to make a huge impression on Skaneateles," said Paul Cowley of Cowley Associates. "This work is a fabulous discovery. It is often you find traditional old paintings but it is rare you see original impressionist paintings without going to a museum. To think it is here in Skaneateles is unbelievable."

Tickets for the opening night reception are \$35 and \$50 for patrons. They may be obtained by contacting Cheryl Silvestrini at The Athenaeum, 150 E. Genesee St. or by phone, 685-1400.

Proceeds will benefit the Skaneateles Area Art Council, which celebrates the visual and performing arts by creating an environment where cultural activity may thrive.