

Elsie & Louis Freund ~ Art Pioneers

Elsie and Louis Freund left their historic footprints on all of Arkansas with their artwork, teaching and work with historic preservation and the natural environment. The artists and patrons who founded the Eureka Springs School of the Arts in 1998 feel they are carrying the torch passed on to them by Elsie and Louis Freund.

~ Mary Springer,
co-founder ESSA
(Eureka Springs School
of the Arts)

Elsie Bates Freund (1912-2001), a jeweler, watercolorist, craftsperson, and educator, was born in southwestern Missouri. Her father was a gamekeeper and stonemason of Irish and Cherokee descent. Elsie, who grew up in this forest setting with a deep love and wonder for her natural surroundings, was caught by the quiet beauty found in things often overlooked or taken for granted. A pinch of clay, a broken piece of glass, became a jewel in her hands. From twisted and hammered sterling silver wire, she fashioned the fluid framework for her jewels.

Educated in a one-room schoolhouse before attending high school, Elsie's only formal art education was at the Kansas City Art Institute from 1930-1931 where she studied impressionist-style painting, illustration, design and drawing.

Elsie Bates and Louis Freund met and married in 1936. Louis Freund (1905-1999), a painter, illustrator, and educator, was a native of Missouri who traveled Arkansas through the Ozarks and

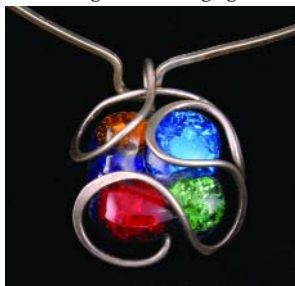
Ouachita Mountains during the 1930s. Commissioned by the WPA Project, a government-assisted art program, he painted scenes of American life and murals for public buildings in Pocahontas, Heber Springs, Fort Chaffee, Rogers and Eureka Springs.



Painting by Ken Addington

The Friends purchased Hatchet Hall, the last home of Carry Nation, in Eureka Springs, which served as the site of the Summer School of the Ozarks from 1940 to 1951. Here the Friends conducted art programs and pursued their own careers as artists.

In the early 1940s while Louis studied art history at Princeton, Elsie learned the rudiments of weaving. When he was drafted, she returned to teaching crafts and design. Along with Native American weaving she studied ceramics and by the end of the 1940s had begun to fashion jewelry by fusing glass on small ceramic forms. Louis suggested her jewelry be called "Elsaramics," but that was too long and Elsie shortened it to "Elsa." From that point on the name "Elsie" was used for her painting and "Elsa" was used for her crafts.



Photos of Elsie Freund jewelry
courtesy of Martin Roenigk
www.elsiefreund.com

In the early 1950s the Friends were artists in residence at Stetson College in Deland, Florida. By 1953

Elsie decided to "go public" with her pieces. In the same year she was accepted into the American Watercolor Society. Her work was sold in Florida, Branson, MO, and at America House, in New York.

When the Friends retired to Eureka Springs in 1967, they continued to work as artists, remaining active in the art commu-

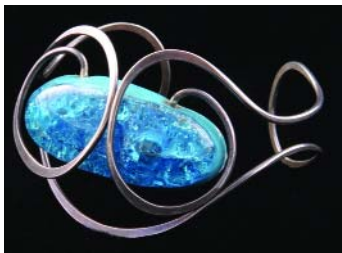
nity and working to preserve the historic character of Eureka Springs and to promote Arkansas art and artists. In 1995, the Freunds moved to Little Rock.

Louis Freund died on December 22, 1999, in Little Rock and is buried in Eureka Springs, Arkansas.

Louis Freund's work include portraiture, landscapes, murals, genre scenes, protest paintings, Latin American culture paintings, and religious paintings. Louis Freund is considered an American Regionalist. His early contemporaries included Grant Wood, John Steuart Curry and Thomas Hart Benton.

By the early 1999s, Elsie was recognized as a pioneer of the studio art jewelry movement. Her jewelry hangs as wall art in some of the world's most respected museums in New York, Boston, Tokyo, Paris and London.

Elsie Freund passed away June 24, 2001. Her memory lives on through her work and the influence she had on students, fellow artists, Eureka Springs and the State of Arkansas.



As I see it, there are two ways to approach jewelry making. One is to give a precious stone a proper setting.



Elsie Freund and Robert Ebendorf collaborated on this outstanding piece

The other is to give something of no particular value a worth by making it a thing of beauty. Of the two methods, I prefer the latter. ~ Elsie Freund

Elsie's creations are magnificently flawless both when they highlight the beauty of geometry and the love of nature. She is like an alchemist as she brings together glass, metal and clay to create her jewelry vision.

As a person, Elsie's life has been embraced by nature, people around her, mythologies and her loving husband, Louis. In her quiet way she has given much leadership to the arts and to the communities she has lived in over the years. She truly left "a mark in American Studio Jewelry history."

~ Robert Ebendorf, internationally known jeweler and long time friend and supporter of Elsie and her work.



Special thanks to Martin & Elise Roenigk, owners of the Crescent Hotel in Eureka Springs, for their ongoing support of the art community and their contribution to this historic feature article for our first issue of *Artists & Galleries of Eureka Springs*.