

# ARTnews

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## **National News**

### **A Master of the Modern Landscape**

Neil Welliver, known for large-scale landscape paintings of the Maine woods, has died of complications from pneumonia. He was 75.



**Neil Welliver painting along Maine's Allagash Wilderness Waterway in 1996.**

Welliver was born in Millville, Pennsylvania, in 1929. In 1987 he told *ARTnews* that as a child, he “drew and painted, painted and drew. In retrospect, I can’t imagine having done

anything else.” He earned his B.F.A. from the Philadelphia Museum College of Art in 1953, taught for four years at the Cooper Union in New York, and received his M.F.A. from the Yale University School of Art in 1955. At Yale he studied under Josef Albers and Jim Brooks, and was particularly influenced by Albers’s teachings about the optics of color.

Welliver kept a studio and 1,600 acres of land in Maine, where he painted *en plein air*. In the studio he translated these studies to charcoal drawings, which he used to create the monumental oil paintings for which he is best known. He would paint the large canvases—some of which were up to eight feet in length—top to bottom, starting in the top left corner and using the wet-on-wet technique. After a fire in 1975 destroyed his home and studio, and much of his work, Welliver had another farmhouse relocated to the same site.

Though he was a landscape painter who was often compared with Courbet, Welliver’s approach to painting was not so different from that of his Abstract Expressionist contemporaries such as Jackson Pollock or Willem de Kooning. “I think I relate to de Kooning,” he said, “because I look very hard, then I make it up as I go along.” He did not seek to reproduce nature or to imitate exactly the colors he saw. “I never copy the color I see,” he said in 1981. “Never.”

Welliver taught at Yale from 1955 to 1965 and chaired the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Fine Arts from 1966 until 1989. He is survived by his wife, Mimi, three children, three stepchildren, and two grandchildren.

—Rachel Somerstein