

McLENNON
PEN CO.

PRESS RELEASE

THOMAS KINKADE
WINTER WONDERLAND

DECEMBER 1, 2023 - JANUARY 6, 2024

OPENING RECEPTION ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1, from 6 – 9 PM

McLennon Pen Co. Gallery is pleased to announce the opening of *Thomas Kinkade Winter Wonderland*, an exhibition featuring three extremely rare original paintings by the artist and a plethora of editioned artworks and memorabilia. Set in a holiday-themed installation inspired by the late artist's legacy, the show is an examination of a misunderstood artist who is now being reevaluated in the years since his passing in 2012. The poignant new documentary, *Art For Everybody*, shines a new light on the self-proclaimed "Painter of Light" as significantly more multidimensional than his carefully crafted persona made him appear.¹ This exhibition is a survey of Kinkade's marketing brilliance and a celebration of holiday kitsch—there will be paintings of snowy streets and warm glowing houses, a Christmas tree room adorned with his studio's commercial products, a Kinkade electric train set with a mini village, and even fake snow outside of the gallery.

At the center of the exhibition are *Memories of Christmas*, *Seasons of Light II* (2001) and *Hometown Christmas*, *Hometown Christmas I* (2002), two original oil paintings on board that come directly from the Kinkade Family Foundation. Though many people may think they have seen original Kinkade paintings before, arguably, they have seen only reproductions. Kinkade actually stopped selling his original paintings and kept them in his foundation's archive once he became successful around 1990. Part of the artist's marketing brilliance was how he made buyers feel they were buying authentic and

¹ *Art For Everybody* does not yet have a release date but it is currently garnering attention and has been premiering on the festival circuit.

important artworks even when there were thousands of editions because each print was accompanied by elaborate certificates of authenticity. It is almost impossible to quote how many thousands of times each of these original paintings of brightly lit homes and snowy streets have been reproduced as limited edition lithographs on canvas, limited edition lithographs on paper, open edition lithographs on paper, and various licensed Christmas products.

You are still able to find online the greeting cards and calendars Kinkade made with Hallmark and dozens of tchotchkes featuring his art, such as clocks, plates, wreaths, and ornaments. There are countless collaborations still sold by Disney, made both during Kinkade's lifetime and posthumously. In the early 2000s, Walmart and Sam's Club gift cards, as well as Glade candles with holiday scents, were wrapped with his images. One of the most memorable products are the 1000-piece puzzles of Kinkade's paintings. There are more than a dozen Christmas books, published by Kinkade, featuring his artwork and three Christmas movies he helped write and produce based on his life that were direct-to-video and made for TV, including *Christmas Cottage*, *Christmas Lodge*, and *Christmas Miracle*.

The third original work on view in the exhibition, *Untitled, La-Z-Boy Christmas* (1976-1979), is a small watercolor on paper. It is a very sweet, sentimental painting and something made and enjoyed by the artist privately in his family home, and unlike the majority of his work it was never reproduced. The watercolor is accompanied by an actual La-Z-Boy chair that was a collaboration from the late 1990s between the American furniture brand and Kinkade. The classic La-Z-Boy chair was made for the working man who wanted to relax, kick up his feet, watch TV, drink a beer, and was willing to sacrifice style for comfort. This Kinkade version of the chair, which in the context of the exhibition might now be seen as a sculpture, is one of Kinkade's most mainstream, kitsch, and all-American collaborations, featuring a cloth tapestry with a section of one of his paintings repeated throughout.

Another distinctly American work on view is a limited edition lithograph on canvas of Kinkade's painting, *The Lights of Liberty* (2000), which features a view of the White House glowing warmly from within and the National Christmas Tree veiled in snow. Kinkade was commissioned by the White House during Bill Clinton's administration to come in person with his family to Washington, D.C., to create the original painting for the annual Pageant of Peace. This painting is a prime example of Kinkade's acceptance within mainstream culture.

A unique and often misunderstood artist, Kinkadee was not accepted by the art world, even at the peak of his prominence in the 1990s and 2000s. He pitted himself against the elite art establishment, saying that he preferred to make artwork for “real people.” While there is little mention of him in art history books, and his work has rarely been exhibited in internationally recognized galleries, or museums, the artist was said to have his work in 1 out of every 20 homes in America during his lifetime. Arguably the most financially successful artist in the early 2000s, Kinkadee had hundreds of stores selling just his artworks in malls and vacation towns across the country. His former art publishing company, Media Arts Group, Inc., made hundreds of thousands of reproductions of his artwork, at one point was making over 100 million USD a year, and was even publicly traded on the stock market. Monetary success aside, Kinkadee once said in an interview defending his career:

My art is relevant because it is relevant to 10 million people. That makes me the most relevant artist in current culture, not the least.