

Elizabeth Johns, History of Art

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Elizabeth Johns

Elizabeth Bennett Johns, a professor emerita of history of art in the School of Arts & Sciences, died peacefully on September 12.

Born in Dallas, Texas, Dr. Johns received her BA from Birmingham-Southern College, where she graduated Phi Beta Kappa. She then went on to earn an MA from the University of California at Berkeley and her PhD from Emory University. Before and during her PhD studies, she held positions in English and Humanities at Albany State College, Clayton Community College, and Savannah State College, all in Georgia. In 1975, she accepted an appointment in the department of art history at the University of Maryland, College Park. Twelve years later, she became the Andrew Mellon Professor of Fine Arts and History at the University of Pittsburgh and in 1989, she joined the Penn faculty as the Silfen Term Professor

of the History of Art. She remained in this position until 2001, when she retired from teaching and took emerita status; during the 1990s, she also served as the undergraduate chair of history of art.

Dr. Johns contributed a great deal to art scholarship. Her first book, *Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life* (1983), won the Mitchell Prize for the most promising first book in the history of art. Dr. John then wrote *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (1991), funded by fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Woodrow Wilson Center. *Winslow Homer: The Nature of Observation* (2002) was awarded the Charles Eldredge Prize from the Smithsonian American Art Museum. She also wrote catalogs for the exhibits *New Worlds from Old: 19th Century Australian and American Landscapes* and *Paths to Impressionism: French and American Landscape Paintings in the Worcester Art Museum*. In 1996, Dr. Johns received a Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching from Penn (*Almanac* April 23, 1996 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v42/n29/042396.html>)). The award citation noted that Dr. Johns not only “has a talent for asking questions that encourage students to find the answers themselves,” but also “frequently brings up pedagogical issues in her graduate seminars and regularly discusses teaching strategies with her TAs...the teaching experience becomes a learning experience.”

After retiring from Penn, Dr. Johns served for three years as the Lilly Vocation Fellow at the Center for Religion, Ethics and Culture at the College of the Holy Cross and as the museum scholar at the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts in Hagerstown, Maryland. She was an avid member of the Haven Lutheran Church of Hagerstown and served as chaplain at the Hospice of Washington County, Maryland.

Dr. Johns is survived by her brother, Sam Bennett; sister-in-law, Elizabeth Dreyer Bennett; children Alan Butsch (Melissa), Nancy Wersick, and Tatiana Johns (Branden Defriece); her late husband Don Evason’s children, David and Cathy Evason; and by her grandchildren, Morgan and Emily Butsch, Dallas and Korben Defriece, Adam and Ethan Caulk, and Madalyn Evason.

A celebration of life was held on October 30. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to the Michael J. Fox Foundation, or to a charity of the donor’s choice. Dr. John was a strong supporter of the Southern Poverty Law Center, Habitat for Humanity, MercyCorps, Doctors Without Borders, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America relief programs.