

Cresco native K. Laub-Novak, noted Iowa artist, dies at 71



By Submitted

Karen Laub-Novak's 13-foot statue of Norman Borlaug stands in Cresco's Beadle Park.

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By Staff reports

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Cresco, Iowa -

Karen Laub-Novak, a Cresco native and one of Iowa's greatest artists, died Aug. 12. A large and much noted funeral mass was held Aug. 17 at the Shrine of the Blessed Sacrament in Washington, D.C.

Notes of mourning came from as far away as her print studio in Cambridge, England, the Vatican, Poland, Slovakia and Italy. Her bronze statues, great bold paintings and powerful etchings and lithographs have been exhibited around the world and have evoked considerable awe at their depth and darkness of vision.

Iowans probably know best her magnificent 13-foot statue of Norman E. Borlaug, which stands in Cresco's Beadle Park. This statue has been featured more than once in large portraits by the Des Moines Register and other papers. One critic called it "one of the two most beautiful statues in North America," the other one being Gaudens's "Grief" at the Henry Adams memorial site in Rock Creek Cemetery. Karen Laub-Novak was laid to rest on the opposite hillock of the same cemetery.

Laub-Novak was born in Minneapolis on Aug. 25, 1937 to George and Mary Laub, and died just days short of her 72nd birthday. The cause of death was complications due to her four-year struggle against more than one form of cancer.

She was a cheerful, colorful and vivacious woman, who was much loved by many different circles in Washington. A distinguished group of these friends gathered for the funeral, including Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito and his wife Martha, and a large number of journalists, writers and artists. In her quiet way, her dramatic gestures and warm smiles lit up every party she attended – most remarkably so during the last four years, when her energy for things other than meeting her friends was much depleted.

Laub-Novak was born and raised in Cresco, got her bachelor's degree at Carleton College in Northfield, Minn., and her MSA at the University of Iowa, where she studied printmaking with Mauricio Lasansky. In 1963 Karen was married in Assumption Church in Cresco to Michael Novak of Johnstown, Penn. They had just passed their 46th anniversary at the time of her death on Aug. 12, 2009. Together, they have three children and four grandchildren. Karen is also survived by her sister Gretchen of Cresco and her three children and three grandnieces and grandnephews.

Laub-Novak is a painter, sculptor, print-maker and writer. Her extensive biography reflects worldwide representation in private collections as well as permanent collections. Previous one-person exhibits include the William Sawyer Gallery, San Francisco; Los Robles Gallery, Palo Alto, California; Botolph and Impressions galleries, Boston; Des Moines Art Museum; Rochester Museum, Minnesota; the Rockefeller Foundation, New York; Stanford; Harvard; Yale; Duke and others.

She has also done many commissioned works. In addition to her bronze sculpture of Nobel Peace Prize winner Norman E. Borlaug, other works include a bronze liturgical crucifix for a Grand Rapids, Michigan church, also presented to Pope John Paul II, a bronze medallion for the Becket Fund, and glass or bronze awards for other organizations. She has also created a corpus sculpture to be used in the Oratory.

The artist's illustrations have appeared in magazines (including Washington Monthly, The New Republic, Crisis and Motive), books, newspapers, and filmstrips. She has illustrated children's books, published 40 drawings in *A Book of Elements*, and designed many book covers.

Laub-Novak has given lectures and workshops at colleges, universities and institutes including Yale, Harvard, Stanford, Carleton, the Aspen Institute, and the Salzburg Seminar. She was keynote speaker for Wisconsin Women in the Arts, and the Earl Lecturer at the Pacific School of Religion.

Her work also includes several series of lithographs on famous texts: seventeen on *The Apocalypse*; six on T.S. Eliot's "Ash Wednesday"; six on *The Book of Genesis*; and to date, eight lithographs on Rainier Marie Rilke's "Duino Elegies." Her essays and reviews have appeared in educational, theological and general interest magazines. Her essay, "The Art of Deception," was written for the book *Art Creativity and the Sacred*. She was also a guest editor for *Momentum Magazine*, which published her essay "The Habits of Art."

Previous exhibits have included work inspired by poets including T.S. Eliot, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dante, and the author of the "Apocalypse."

Last year, her daughter Jana prepared a magnificent copy table of her work of all her artistic media in all its human dimensions. The collection, *The Habits of Art*, can be purchased on her Web site at www.laub-novakart.com. Many of the images from the collection are also on display on the site.

Lovely tributes to her work have appeared over the years in the Des Moines Register,

Washingtonian Magazine, Washington Post, Washington Times and National Review.

She began using the name "K.Laub-Novak" by accident. When she wrote to gallery owners and museum directors under the name Karen Laub-Novak, she usually received a standard form letter in reply. One day, writing to an important museum, she signed her letter K. Laub-Novak. This time she received a beautifully typed letter on wonderful paper from the museum director with a personal signature. From then on she signed her work K. Laub-Novak.

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