

THREE YEARS BEFORE HIS SUICIDE, James Brewton portrayed himself.

Now That He's Dead

Has His Time Come?

There was an artist who was ahead of his time, who was brilliant, sensitive and nonviolent, who loved his art and just wanted to paint. And he committed suicide.

James Brewton pulled the trigger that ended his life on May 12, 1967, just four days before he was to have a show at a local gallery. You can only guess at why the 36-year-old artist wanted it that way.

You can look at his promising career and perhaps say that Brewton's act emphasizes the problem of a young, talented artist who must live through the let-down years after a promising career in art school on inadequate funds.

Dramatic Beginning

Born in Toledo, Ohio, in 1930, Brewton attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. His career was launched dramatically when he won the prestigious \$1,000 Scheidt prize at the academy for his painting, "The Suicide of Judas."

After this, he developed a modest but steady following. He had several one-man shows, and museum curators were beginning to exhibit interest in some of his graphics. Yet, there were months when, even with the odd jobs he held, he couldn't even meet the \$27.50 needed to pay his rent.

He was always positive about his work. It didn't matter if you didn't understand it, because he always felt that in time you would.

When Ernest Henningway committed suicide Brewton understood it. He said, "He must have not been able to write any more on the same level." Maybe Brewton took his own life because he too felt that he was blocked at that point in time.

Now that time has lessened the distance between us and his work, the Kenmore Galleries, 122 S. 18th st., will hold a memorial show featuring the last three years of Brewton's work.

(All proceeds from the show, which

runs from Friday to May 15, will go to a fund aiding needy graduates of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. The gallery will take no percentage of the sales and will absorb the expenses.)

Harry Kulkowitz, gallery director, feels that Brewton "almost singlehandedly changed the whole art scene in Philadelphia." He questioned "good taste" in art before it was fashionable to do so, because he felt that "good taste" wasn't always right.

Moving away from the agonized, expressionist manner of his academy years—as seen in the self portrait—Brewton was into conceptual art before the term was coined. He believed that everything, including graffiti, could be artified—used to make art—said Mrs. Ronald Weingrad, one of the prime movers behind the show.

In 1965, when Brewton's "Graffiti Pataphysic" were introduced at Kenmore Gallery he explained his ideas. He wrote:

"Graffiti—scribbled inscriptions or drawings—are found on walls and pavements the world over. I use graffiti in my work because they are anonymous and therefore for all mankind.

Imaginary Solutions

"Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions. . . . The pataphysician is concerned not through engagement in any attempt to create human values, but in the manner of a child looking through a kaleidoscope. Only the comic is serious. . . ."

"I think style in art is injurious to anyone who likes freedom of movement. . . . I would rather innovate than live in the comfort of a manner."

And innovate he did, with wit, with humor, with sophistication and good taste. Ironically, his graffiti paintings and lithographs hold more insight and value for us today than when he painted them.

But Brewton knew this would happen. He knew that some day he would make it.

—NESSA FORMAN

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