

## Joseph Frieber (1908 - 2002)

**Birth date:** 1908

**Death date:** 2002

**Birth location:** Buffalo, New York

**Death location:** Milwaukee, Wisconsin

**Media:** [Graphic Art](#) , [Painting](#)

**Web site:** <http://www.josephfrieber.com>

**Comprehensive (file rating)** - Major Wisconsin artist file that includes comprehensive documentation on artist's life that can be researched on site at MWA.

### Biographical Brief

Wife: Wisconsin artist Betsy Ritz Frieber (1910-1963)

Daughter: Wisconsin-born artist Judith M. Frieber (born 1945)

Brother: Wisconsin self-taught artist Edward Frieber Jr. (1905-1998)

**Collections:**

The Museum of Wisconsin Art is the museum of record for Frieber's work. His art can be found as well at the Art Institute of Chicago, Mariana Kistler Beach Museum of Art at Kansas State University, Block Museum of Art at Northwestern University, Chazen Museum of Art at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Columbus Museum of Art, Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Davison Art Center at Wesleyan University, Detroit Institute of Arts, Flint Institute of Arts, Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center at Vassar College, Haggerty Museum at Marquette University, Indiana University Art Museum, J. B. Speed Museum, Joslyn Museum, Milwaukee Art Museum, Mint Museum, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Northern Michigan University, Peabody-Essex Museum, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Princeton University Art Museum, Racine Art Museum, Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Sheldon Museum of the University Nebraska, Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas, Smith College Museum of Art, University of Georgia Art Museum, University of Michigan Art Museum, UWM Emile H. Mathis Gallery, Wriston Art Center at Lawrence University, and numerous other public and university/college museums/galleries in Wisconsin.

**Selected Awards:**

1952: Frank Logan Award (1st prize), Artists of Chicago and Vicinity exhibition, Art Institute of Chicago

1952-53: Ford Foundation Fellowship at Columbia University

1990: Richard Florsheim Foundation grant

2009: Wisconsin Visual Art Lifetime Achievement Award

### Biography

## Joseph Frieber

Born 1908 in Buffalo, New York

Died 2002 in Milwaukee

Joseph Frieber grew up in Milwaukee in a Jewish working-class family. He was profoundly influenced by the Socialist ideas of his father, a tailor and a union organizer. Frieber's belief in social activism is reflected in his entire oeuvre, in figural compositions, landscapes, and urban views that express empathy and sorrow without anger. Social concerns—the human universals of loss; the brutality, vulnerability, and displacement of war; the stark realities of the Great Depression; and the political havoc of the Cold War give Frieber's art a narrative character even at its most abstract. The protagonists in his figural compositions often seem isolated one from the other. Sometimes foreboding, his landscapes can also be lyrical and joyous.

Frieber's career as an artist was unconventional. He earned a degree from Marquette University's pharmacy school and went on to become a registered pharmacist, working at the Oriental Pharmacy, among others. Because Frieber could support himself as a druggist, he was not eligible for the W.P.A. program during the Depression. But he loved to draw and joined the Businessman's Art Club, as well as an evening artists' life-drawing group, where he met the artist Betsy Ritz, whom he married in 1937. He began actively to paint and exhibit his work in 1935. Ritz and others encouraged Frieber to enroll at Milwaukee State Teachers College (MSTC; now the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), where his teachers included Robert von Neumann and Elsa Ulbricht. He also studied with Gerrit V. Sinclair at the Layton School of Art. After earning a degree in art education in 1945, Frieber taught briefly at Layton and in 1946 joined the MSTC art faculty. He earned his M.A. at UW-Madison in 1951 and became a full professor at UWM in 1957. Frieber continued to teach at UWM until his retirement in 1976. He taught painting but preferred to lead classes in life drawing, because he believed drawing to be the basis of all visual art. Frieber's interest in learning Old Master painting techniques resulted in his skill at underpainting, using a sonorous palette and layers of glazes to create luminosity and a sense of depth. He also executed lithographs and monotypes, often overlaid with pastels.

Frieber was represented by several Milwaukee galleries: the Dorothy Bradley Gallery in the 1970s and 1980s, the Conti Gallery in the early 1990s, and the Elaine Erickson Gallery until 2015. All gave him multiple one-person exhibitions and included his work in group exhibitions.

A website dedicated to Frieber will be operational by August 2018.

### Selected One-Person Exhibitions

- 1960 "Joseph Frieber Paintings," Milwaukee Art Center (brochure)
- 1969 "Four Decades of Painting of Joseph Frieber," UW-M School of Fine Arts Galleries (brochure)
- 1989 "Joseph Frieber: Selected Works," Milwaukee Art Museum (catalogue by Dean Sobel)
- 1998 "Joseph Frieber at Ninety," Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, Milwaukee (exhibition catalog by Curtis L. Carter)
- 2006-2007 "Joseph Frieber, Fred Berman, and the Milwaukee Scene, 1935–1965," exhibition at Corbett vs. Dempsey Gallery, Chicago (catalogue by John Corbett)
- 2008-2009 Exhibitions celebrating Frieber's centenary at the Museum of Wisconsin Art; INOVA gallery at UWM ("Drawing Influence: Joseph Frieber and His Students"; brochure); and Northwestern Mutual Art Gallery at Cardinal Stritch University, Milwaukee ("Joseph Frieber: Landscapes"; brochure)
- 2018 "Joseph Frieber: A Life in Art," Museum of Wisconsin Art, West Bend (catalogue by Susan Frieber Rossen)

### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1938-1950s Exhibition by Artists of Chicago and Vicinity, Art Institute of Chicago

1938, 1939	Great Lakes Exhibition, museums in Buffalo, Rochester, N.Y., Toronto, Toledo, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee
1938	American Paintings and Sculpture, Art Institute of Chicago (also 1954 and 1957)
1944	Layton Art Gallery, Milwaukee
1945	Milwaukee State Teacher's College (now University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee [UW-M])
1947	Annual Exhibition of American Painting, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia (also 1951, 1955, 1957, 1960)
1950	"American Painting Today," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, N.Y.
1951, 1954	Annual Exhibition of American Painting, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia
1956	28th Biennale: American Artists Paint the City, Venice, Italy
1957	Annual Exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art
1958	133rd Annual Exhibition, National Academy of Design, New York
1960	Milwaukee Art Center
1965	"Fifty Years Of Wisconsin Art," Milwaukee Art Center
1969	UW-M
1972-85	Bradley Galleries, Milwaukee
1977	UW-M. Two Retrospective Exhibitions: George Goundie Sculpture, Joseph Friebert Paintings. UW-M Fine Arts Galleries
1984	Charles Allis Art Museum, Milwaukee
1988	"100 Years Of Wisconsin Art," Milwaukee Art Museum
1993	"The Jewish contribution In Twentieth-Century Art," Milwaukee Art Museum (catalogue)
1993-97	Galleria del Conte, Milwaukee, WI.
1994	"Wisconsin Artists: A Celebration Of Jewish Presence," Haggerty Museum Of Art, Marquette University, Milwaukee (catalogue by Curtis L Carter and Johann J.K. Reusch)
1996-97	"Painters Of The Great Lakes Scene," Dennis Museum Center, Traverse City; Kalamazoo Institute of Arts; Flint Institute of Arts (catalogue by Michael Hall)
1996-97	"Self-Portraits: Wisconsin Artists," Charles Allis Art Museum, Milwaukee (catalogue by Fred Berman)
1997	"Monotypes by Joseph Friebert: Sculpture by Adolph Rosenblatt," Temple Emanu-El, Milwaukee
2006-07	"Joseph Friebert, Fred Berman, & the Milwaukee Scene, 1935-1965," Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago

## Bibliography

1989, Nov. 12	"Friebert Show Displays Vibrant Depth," by James Auer, <i>Milwaukee Journal Sentinel</i>
1991, Jan. 15 – March 15	"Seven Artists: A History," by John Gruenwald, <i>Art Muscle</i>
1992	"Joseph Friebert," the UWM Bookstore Calendar For 1992, featuring 16 reproductions of his work, by Joy Gross Berman
1995, Dec. 21	"Friebert Paints Life's Similies," by Nathan Guequierre, <i>Shepherd Express</i>
1998	"Joseph Friebert Talks With Xavier Baron," videotape by Xavier Baron

See also Selected One-Person Exhibitions for related publications

© 10/22/2007 Museum of Wisconsin Art, West Bend, Wisconsin 4/6/2010

## Wisconsin Affiliations

[Wisconsin Art Teachers \(WAT\)](#)

[WVALAA - Wisconsin Visual Arts Lifetime Achievement Award Winner](#)

## Wisconsin Art Organizations

[Milwaukee Artists Guild](#)

[Walrus Club](#)

[Wisconsin Painters & Sculptors - Wisconsin Artists in all Media \(WP&S\)](#)

