

Kenyon Cox

Wanting to be part of what he believed to be a second renaissance in art, Kenyon Cox moved to Paris in 1877. In 1882, Cox moved back to New York where he continued to paint and started a career teaching art. This is how he met his wife, Louise Howland King.

As one of Cox's students, Louise showed great promise as a painter. In fact, in 1887, he declared Louise to be his best student. It was in 1886 that Cox realized he was in love with Louise, but he did not express his feelings for some time. From 1886 through 1887, many long letters were exchanged between the two while Louise worked as a teacher in Toledo, Ohio.

In 1892, Cox wrote his mother, "Long before I felt the thrill of love, I knew that she would make the best wife in the world for me if I should love her. When love came to add to the friendship and confidence, I felt safe and so we mean to marry as soon as we can."

On June 30, 1892, Cox, 36, and King, 27, were married. They had three children. Leonard was born in 1894 and was a hero of World War I. He also had a career in city planning and architecture. Another son, Allyn, was born in 1896. He became an artist, particularly noted for his mural paintings, and an interior decorator. Daughter Caroline was born in 1898 and was also a talented artist.

In 1896-1897, Cox painted murals in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. He began to focus more on mural painting after the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Cox painted murals in the state capitol buildings of Des Moines, Iowa; St. Paul, Minnesota; and Madison, Wisconsin, as well as other courthouses, libraries, and college buildings. He also made numerous mosaics for places like the Wisconsin State Capitol building.

In 1910, Cox was awarded the Medal of Honor for mural painting by the Architectural League. He also served as president of the National Society of Mural Painters from 1915 to 1919.

In the Iowa State Capitol, Cox painted eight lunettes, or half-moon-shaped paintings, surrounding the rotunda. They are titled: Hunting, Herding, Agriculture, the Forge, Commerce, Education, Science, and Art. They are allegorical and indicate the progress of civilization.

Cox's art was very different from the other styles that emerged during his lifetime. He advocated careful drawing and modulated color, and he frequently used allegory and symbolism to present his ideas. He idealized nudes and traditional treatment of classical themes.

Cox continued to paint, teach, and write until his death in his New York home of pneumonia on March 17, 1919.