

James McClelland. *The Martinos: A Legacy of Art* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 2010). Pp. 181. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$59.95.

In the introduction to *The Martinos: A Legacy of Art*, the author writes, “Students of the art world can name families of artists such as the Peales, the Wyeths and the Calders, but there was another Philadelphia family of artists that does not readily come to mind. Yet the Martinos produced more artists than any of the aforementioned” (vii). The assertion of numbers is certainly true of the Calders, but is more questionable when applied to the Peales and the Wyeths. Coming to questions about national reputation and significance, this comparison becomes even dicier. However, we owe author McClelland a debt of thanks for compiling the first monograph devoted to what he called “this amazing family of artists [that] is very much underrated, under-appreciated, and relatively unknown” (vii).

Central to the story are the seven Martino brothers, all of whom were artists to one degree or another. Two, Antonio and Giovanni, had important regional careers; another brother, Edmund, was lesser known. All the brothers supported themselves working as commercial artists, for a long time in their own family business, Martino Studios, in Philadelphia. Edmund eventually went to work for the Franklin Mint. The Martino Studios, a commercial arts firm, opened in 1926 and was successful enough that business-manager brother Alberto, primarily a photographer, “could be seen driving around town in his Du[e]senberg automobile” (69).

The brothers, born between 1896 and 1915, were the children of an Italian immigrant couple, Carmine and Clementina, who were wed in Philadelphia in 1896. Two daughters were also in the family; one died at age two and the other committed suicide in her twenties. Carmine, a trained stonemason when he emigrated, worked on Bryn Athyn Cathedral and went on to become a foreman. He was prosperous enough to build a substantial three-story stone house for his family at 151 North Gross Street in Philadelphia.

Modestino Francesco Martino (1896–1941), “Frank,” was the eldest of the children and the first to study art, attending the Pennsylvania Museum School of the Industrial Arts (now the University of the Arts). He is also credited with encouraging his brothers to study art as well—warning them that their only alternative was to be stone masons! A successful illustrator, he even had a commission from the *Saturday Evening Post*

for a painting of a buccaneer, done very much in the style of N. C. Wyeth and used inside the magazine. In an article in the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* about Martino Studios, Frank (the shortest-lived of the brothers) called himself “the business head of the outfit” and remarked, “I also paint nudes” (135).

In addition to the brothers’ works, McClelland presents pieces by Giovanni’s wife, Eva, and their daughters, Babette (b. 1946) and Nina (b. 1942), as well as the paintings of Antonio’s daughter, Marie Martino Manos. Mention is also made of Antonio Martino Jr., who studied art but gave it up for a career in business, and Carmen Martino, the son of Ernesto, a professional photographer,

Antonio, Giovanni, and Edmund can all be classified as impressionist artists of the group today referred to as “The Pennsylvania Impressionists” or the “New Hope School.” While the brothers all painted in Bucks County, they also painted elsewhere, especially the Manayunk area of Philadelphia. Antonio, the most acclaimed of the artists, was the most prolific and hardest-working of the lot—and the one who did the most paintings of Bucks County scenery. Of the second-generation artists, Marie Martino Manos diverged from family tradition, being especially interested in portraiture and interiors.

From a technical point of view the way in which McClelland has inserted text between the various galleries of illustrations is awkward and occasionally confusing. Very little attempt is made to relate the major players to the national art scene. While we know who the Martinos studied with, other influences are not explored. For example, many of Edward Hopper’s themes are found in Giovanni’s works—and Hopper (1882–1967) taught in Philadelphia for a while and several of his best-known works were done in Philadelphia.

The Martinos: A Legacy of Art is a beautifully illustrated book presenting us with a sense of the talents and ranges of the artists. It would have been more valuable if more paintings in public collections had been included. As it is, most of the paintings illustrated belong to family members and several of the commercial galleries who helped support this publication. A brief genealogical chart of the artists would have been a useful aid for readers of this illuminating and needed book.

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