

KU professor writing the book on art history



(Staff photo by Mike Yoder)

KU art history professor Marilyn Stokstad has just signed a contract to write a book on art history that she hopes will become a standard text.

By CAROLYN MCMASTER
J-W Arts Editor

Move over, Horst Janson. Soon Marilyn Stokstad may be taking your place in the annals of art history.

"A History of Art" by the late H.W. Janson has been regarded as *the* art history ever since it was published in 1962. Yet it often is used grudgingly in classrooms, simply because nothing better was available. Now in its third edition (produced by Janson's son), the standard volume has often come under fire for its sometimes erratic selections of art (Janson tended to ignore what he wanted) and for excluding some important women artists.

Stokstad, a Kansas University distinguished professor of art history, hopes to correct these problems with her own book, which will be published in about five years.

"**THERE ARE** all sorts of new interests — artists and kinds of art that have not been included," Stokstad said, such as crafts, ceramics, textiles and art as it is expressed in the context of society. "It's not just women artists who have been left out."

"I don't intend to write a standard history of art, although I hope it becomes a standard text."

Stokstad, the author of a survey of Medieval art history, was contacted by three publishing houses last spring, all wanting her to write a new art history survey.

She stalled for a year.

"I swore after 'Medieval Art' that I'd never again write another big book," Stokstad said. "I had to be talked into it."

But she gradually grew more interested and signed the contract with Prentice-Hall in the spring.

She's amused by the East Coast reaction.

"When it was all over, the editor said he couldn't get over that he'd signed the biggest contract in the last 10 years with someone from out there in that part of the country," she said with a laugh.

But she wasn't surprised at the offer.

"I DON'T know how to tell you without saying I'm a recognized art historian in the United States," Stokstad said. "It all sounds so egotistical!"

Stokstad has long been interested in the teaching of art history — making it palatable and understandable for all. It was a guiding principle for her Medieval survey, and she has delivered countless papers and lectures on the topic. She also is the editorial adviser on art and architecture for the World Book Encyclopedia.

"This is one reason why I'm so interested in writing a basic art history textbook," she said. "I wouldn't want it to be a standard, old-fashioned history of art. I'd like it to be more of a social history of art."

That publishers are looking for a new text on the world's history of art indicates that broad

changes are taking place in the field.

"**CLEARLY**, it's in the air," Stokstad said. "Everybody wants a new book for the 21st century."

She notes that she has seen many changing currents since graduating from Carleton College in 1950. She went on to the University of Michigan to receive her master's and doctoral degrees, landing at KU in 1958. Here, she was chairman of the department from 1961 to 1972, and director of the University Art Museum (now the Spencer Museum of Art), from 1961 to 1967.

"I find it hard to be doctrinaire about any of these things," she said. "I just love to see it happen."

Her only reservation about the book, at this stage, is time.

She has three years to complete a 2,000-page manuscript and select the roughly 1,000 works of art to illustrate the text.

BUT SHE won't get a chance to begin work on it until October, after she delivers a key conference paper on a Medieval Spanish church. Then, there is her teaching load, and she is committed to organizing an exhibit for the Spencer, as well as working on a computerized inventory of Spanish artworks in public collections in the United States.

But the energetic scholar seems unfazed by the task.

"Sometimes I wonder if I was out of my mind," she admitted. "But if you feel strongly about something, you've got to do something about it."