Growing up the son of Greek immigrants, studying art was the last thing on Perry Ragouzis’s mind. Doing art was another thing entirely, but it took a place with, say, his magic act, as something he pursued on his own time; he was a drawer, he says, who “fiddled with painting,” and with sleight-of-hand and pencil, he remembers, he “earned a lot of recognition as a youngster.”

But no matter the recognition, art was a hobby. His father had worked to support the family his entire life, and in his family there was an expectation, imported from the Old Country, that, as the oldest son, he would get a job and provide income when he was able. At the time, he says, “My motivation was to earn a living to give him a break.”

“My brothers and I were pretty aware of the background we came from,” he remembers. “Both parents were illiterate as far as English was concerned.” So as children, he and his brothers learned English. “One of the driving forces... was to be assimilated as Americans,” he says. He ended up in a technical high school, with the goal of becoming a machinist like his cousins. In 1943, World War II intervened, and at 17, Ragouzis enlisted in the Coast Guard, becoming a motor machinist's mate.

His circuitous route to CSU’s art department began when he worked for an electronics firm after the war. His supervisor there, a calculus professor who ran the firm on the side, liked Perry, but after a series of raises he told him he could go no farther. Ragouzis remembers their conversation after that final request vividly—“'Perry, I'm paying you more than I'm paying those college grads,'” he said. “'You're wasting your time here. You should go to university and major in physics.'”

From there Ragouzis ended up at Northern Illinois University, ostensibly to major in physics. But while taking a drawing course to fulfill his humanities requirement, he attracted the attention of another instructor, and his path changed again. His teacher suggested he major in art education, with a caveat—“you don't want to do it here,” he said. His instructor sent him to the University of Illinois, where he finally found his vocation.

Ragouzis taught around the country until 1966, when he was asked if he'd be interested in the art department chair position at CSU. After being interviewed concurrently at Arizona State University, which he found "hotter than blazes," he chose to go to Fort Collins—precisely because it would be more difficult. “I liked the situation,” he remembers. “It was a challenge. The art department was spread out all over the campus... in dilapidated buildings.”

It was a situation he’d encountered before. Teaching high school at the dawn of the Space Age, with Sputnik engendering a new urgency for school funding across America, he aided in the procurement of funds for, as well as the development of, several new facilities. He’d become an expert in engaging citizens on bond issues
and rediscovered a latent interest in architecture and development.

At CSU he saw the same opportunity, and, following the same blueprint, he spearheaded changes that left the art department unrecognizable by the time of his retirement in 1995. From a collection of spare rooms in older buildings—when he arrived drawing classes were held in the basement of Old Main—he worked to create a unified and nationally recognized art department, one whose curriculum was planned in concert with its new buildings.

Ragouzis's goal as a professor was always to pass along what he calls “the cultural significance of the arts.” To that end he remains active, having published an article on the beautiful and the sublime in the *International Journal of Education and the Arts* in 2009.

A career spanning five decades as an aesthetician and theorist is a long way to have come for a Greek immigrant who felt so intensely what he calls “the burden of the eldest son”—to provide financially and practically for a family that depended on him. But he’s always been driven. “I think the faculty at the time thought, ‘This guy is crazy’,” he remembers, “but that curriculum still stands.” So do the buildings.