

2 women in artist Kinkade's life settle estate dispute

By Julia Prodis Sulek, San Jose Mercury News

Anyone expecting a dramatic courtroom showdown between Thomas Kinkade's estranged wife and his live-in girlfriend over the late artist's multimillion dollar Monte Sereno estate will be sorely disappointed.

After months of name-calling and finger-pointing, lawyers for Nanette Kinkade and Amy Pinto announced Wednesday they have reached a secret settlement. And despite Pinto's vow months ago to clear her name and explain how she was no gold-digger but rather Kinkade's soul mate, she has accepted a deal in return for her silence.

Lawyers would make no comment about the details of the settlement or the legitimacy of two tantalizing, barely legible handwritten wills that Pinto claimed Kinkade wrote to her, leaving her \$10 million and the keys to his hillside mansion.

Instead, they issued this brief yet strangely sentimental statement:

"Putting Mr. Kinkade's message of love, spirituality, and optimism at the forefront, the parties are pleased that they have honored Mr. Kinkade by resolving their differences amicably."

So who gets the 7,000 square-foot house on Ridgecrest Avenue, the studio next door, his warehouse of paintings, copies of which are said to hang in one of every 20 American homes? Nobody is saying. How much the estate is worth also hasn't been made public but adding millions of dollars in value are the licensing of his bucolic images on coffee cups and

calendars, china plates and tote bags, many of which will surely be

wrapped under Christmas trees next week.

It wasn't clear Wednesday whether Pinto, 48, was still living in the house she had shared with Kinkade, 54. After the artist's April 6 death of a lethal mix of alcohol and Valium, Pinto refused to leave the house. Estate lawyers posted a security guard within the gates of the estate to make sure Pinto didn't steal anything. In a recent court hearing, she had agreed to pay \$11,000 a month to continue living there, without the intrusive security guard.

But that was before the case was settled.

Kinkade's reputation as the "Painter of Light," with his popular images of candlelit country cottages and Christian symbolism, cratered in the aftermath of his death, both by the revelations that he was a regular fixture at local bars and that his marriage of 28 years had recently imploded.

Kinkade's brother, Patrick, had told the *Mercury News* that mean-spirited criticism of Kinkade's work and his estrangement from his wife and four daughters had taken its toll on the artist and factored into his alcoholism.

The story became more tawdry when Pinto, who began dating Kinkade six months after his separation, produced the two handwritten wills that were dated several months before Kinkade's death. Stating that Kinkade was "of sound mind and body," the wills left Pinto his house and \$10 million to establish a museum of his works in the studio next door. Pinto's lawyers interpreted those notes to mean they also included some \$66 million worth of Kinkade's paintings to put on display.

Lawyers for the Kinkade estate had said the squiggly notes "speak for themselves" and were confident they would be thrown

out of court. But Pinto's lawyers were equally convinced of their credibility, saying Kinkade's alcoholism had left him with a shaky hand, but the letters reflected his true desires.