The northwoods of Minnesota are home to one of the nation’s most enduring craftsmen and a true state treasure. Over the course of 65 years, Joe Seliga of Ely, Minnesota, has handcrafted over 650 absolutely sublime canvas-covered wooden canoes in his humble backyard shop. Among canoe and wooden-boat aficionados, the canoes built by this unassuming and self-taught 94-year-old are highly prized and deemed the best of the best. With specially commissioned color photography by outdoor photographer Deb Sussex and captions by Joe’s fellow master canoe builder Jerry Stelmok, this celebration of Joe’s lifework details the creation of a Seliga masterpiece, from choosing the wood stock to the first launch. These unique and candid views of Joe at work inside his shop bear witness to the unique methods and handtools that he has developed since 1936, many of which are revealed here for the first time. Accompanying this inspiring record of Joe’s craft are the stories of his childhood as the son of an immigrant miner in the prewar northern wilderness, how he unexpectedly embarked on his storied career, and the role that his beloved wife Nora, who passed away in 1999, continues to play in his life. Stelmok also includes testimonials he has gathered from noteworthy Ely denizens like arctic explorer Paul Schurke and photographer Paul Brandenberg, as well as enthusiasts fortunate enough to own a Seliga canoe. Finally, Stelmok explains how; when Joe retires, his legacy will be carried on in a specially dedicated shop at YMCA Camp Widjiwagan in Ely, which owns and cherishes more than 40 Seliga canoes, some dating back to 1948.

Postscript: We are sorry to say that Joe has now passed on in 2005, but his spirit will live on through his canoes and the pages of this book.

My Personal Review: I stopped by Joe’s house in Ely to have him autograph my copy. We had never met before but he greeted me warmly, offered me cookies and a drink, showed me his shop, and added me to his list of people who want a
canoe. This man is a national treasure and his canoes will be timeless heirlooms.

This book goes into great detail on how he crafts each of his beautiful, rustic, canvas-covered wooden canoes by hand and has given me a bold appreciation for how much work goes into just one canoe. I have no idea how he ever made a living charging only a couple thousand per canoe.

The author Jerry Stelmok did a fine job of breaking a complicated process down into simple text that anyone can enjoy. And National Geographic photographer Deborah Sussex filled the book with enticing photos.

The book sits on my office wall along with other non-fictional works about the woods of Northern Minnesota, and this one by far gets the most attention. It's a wonderful addition to anyone's library.

Enjoy!

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The Art of the Canoe with Joe Seliga by Jerry Stelmok - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!