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OBITUARIES

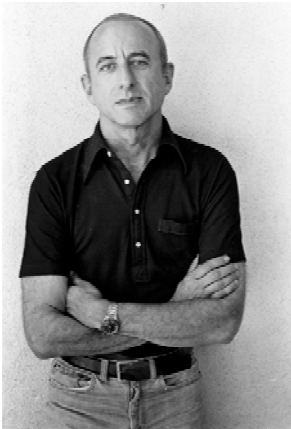
SUNDAY, MARCH 9, 2008

## William Brice, 86; artist, teacher known for grand scale abstracts

By Mary Rourke  
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William Brice, an artist best known for grand-scale abstract paintings that suggest fragments of ancient classical ruins, has died. He was 86.

Brice, who also was an influential art teacher at UCLA for decades, died Monday at UCLA Medical Center, according to Kimberly Davis, director of L.A. Louver Gallery, which represents him.



Davis said the exact cause of death was not known but that Brice had recently taken a fall, hit his head and never regained consciousness.

The son of comedian Fanny Brice and Jules "Nicky" Arnstein, Brice taught art at UCLA from the early 1950s and became an emeritus professor in 1991.

"Bill was beloved by artists," said Stephanie Barron, senior curator of modern art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. As a teacher and a dedicated artist himself, he inspired generations of younger talents. "For artists coming of age in the 1950s and '60s, Bill was a giant," Barron said.

Brice's privileged young years in the 1920s and '30s included tours of the great art museums of Europe with his family and a private art tutor from age 13. He admired the work of Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and others of their era, who were still active when Brice was young. At 14 he bought a work by Picasso, a gouache of a boy standing.

"Bill offered younger artists a window onto something bigger," Barron said. "He provided a connection to European Modernism."

At the start of his painting career in the late 1940s, Brice made figurative works, many of them still lifes, "that stress the geometrical aspects of common objects," according to a Times review of his solo exhibition at the Frank Perls Gallery in Beverly Hills in 1950.

He returned often to subjects in nature until he exhausted the possibilities they offered him. A series of flowers from the 1950s ended with paintings of nothing but petals bathed in atmospheric light.

In the mid-1950s, Brice moved to larger-scale works that "combined the exact delineation of forms" with a "diffusion of color and tone," according to a 1955 review in The Times.

His portraits, in particular, showed his great expertise as a draftsman. He often overlaid an ethereal quality to his paintings and drawings using broad, soft washes of color.

Although he moved slowly from realism to more abstract art, Brice never joined the progressive movements of the time. Abstract Expressionism and action painting were not for him.

"Bill developed a distinctly personal vision," said Ann Goldstein, a former art student of Brice who is now senior curator of art at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. "He drew inspiration from Picasso and Matisse, from his knowledge of art history and from the Los Angeles landscape and light."



*Untitled, 1983*

(continued)

A trip to Greece around 1970 had a strong influence on Brice's art. "Figures grew architectonic . . . subject matter was abandoned in favor of elemental themes," wrote William Wilson, then the Times' art critic, of Brice's later works, in a 1998 review. Paintings were filled with fragments of torsos, columns and ancient ruins that "read like an elegiac homage to a noble time gone past," Wilson wrote.

A 1986 retrospective exhibit of his work at the Museum of Contemporary Art solidified Brice's reputation for "a refined art . . . of tasteful classic modernism," Wilson wrote in a review.

At UCLA, Brice had a number of students who became prominent Los Angeles artists, among them Charles Garabedian and Ed Moses. He encouraged them to follow their own artistic vision, as he had.

"He was a great teacher, very involved in helping his students find out where and what they wanted to be," Garabedian said of Brice last week. "He instilled in us a love of art history. He had enthusiasm. He'd get us hepped up."

Born April 23, 1921, in New York City, Brice and his sister, Frances, were raised primarily by their mother in a household where playwright Clifford Odets, composers George and Ira Gershwin and other friends from the Broadway theater were guests. When he was 16, the family moved to Beverly Hills so his mother could pursue a career in radio.

He studied at the Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles and the Art Students League in New York City before he began exhibiting his paintings and drawings. He had his first solo show at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art in 1947.

His work was added to the permanent collections of major museums including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City.

For some years, Brice was a consultant to his sister and her husband, movie producer Ray Stark, while they collected large-scale sculptures by modern artists. Twenty-eight works from the Stark collection, including sculpture by Alberto Giacometti, Henry Moore and Alexander Calder, were donated to the J. Paul Getty Museum in 2005.

Brice married Shirley Bardeen in 1942. He is survived by his wife; his son John, who lives in London; and two grandsons. He is also survived by a niece, Wendy Stark Morrissey of Los Angeles, an art patron and the daughter of the late Frances and Ray Stark.