Marjorie Strider Dies at 83; Seminal First Generation Pop Artist; Showed with Warhol, Lichtenstein, Wesselman

By RANDY KENNEDYSEPT. 5, 2014

Photo

Marjorie Strider CreditFred W. McDarrah/Getty Images

Marjorie Strider, a Pop artist who slyly subverted her male counterparts' takes on consumerism and the female form, creating images of packages that oozed their contents and women whose curves jutted from the picture plane, died on Aug. 27 at her home in Saugerties, N.Y. She was 83.

Linda Rattner Celle, a niece, confirmed her death but did not specify the cause.

Ms. Strider was among the first wave of New York Pop artists and was included in "The First International Girlie Show" at the Pace Gallery in 1964, along with several soon-to-be stars of the movement, including Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Tom Wesselmann. She said she did not initially think of her works as Pop, but had grown bored in the 1950s making paintings that were perspectivally flat and began adding things like cardboard and wood to the surface to make them more sculptural.

She did this with paintings of plants and vegetables but also with bright triptychs of bikini-clad women, adding what she called "build-outs" to make the breasts and bottoms of the women emerge realistically out of the image, a challenge to the passive gaze.

She described her pinup paintings as "a satire of men's magazines," and they — along with "Girl With Radish," a 1963 work showing a woman's cartoonish face with her mouth suggestively open and a bright red radish clamped between her teeth — remain some of her best-known pieces. But Ms. Strider was stylistically and intellectually restless and quickly moved on to other kinds of work, which rarely received the attention of her early paintings.

Berta Walker, the owner of a gallery in Provincetown, Mass., who knew Ms. Strider for many years, said that she "refused to be a

factory of art when her gallery asked her — her downfall and her saving."

Marjorie Virginia Strider was born on Jan. 26, 1931, in Guthrie, Okla., the second of five children. Her father was a cement contractor and her mother was a secretary at an Air Force base near Oklahoma City and also led local campaigns to improve literacy.

Ms. Strider attended the Kansas City Art Institute in Missouri and Oklahoma State University and worked designing shoe-store window displays before moving to New York in 1957. "I never wanted to be anything but an artist," she said in a 2010 interview. "That's why I never had children. I knew I couldn't do both and do both well."

In 1960 she married the artist and writer Michael Kirby, who later became a professor of theater and performance at New York University. They were divorced in 1969. She is survived by a sister, Nancy Rattner; a brother, James D. Strider; and 11 nieces and nephews.

She supported herself for many years teaching at the School of Visual Arts, living in SoHo when that neighborhood was just emerging as an artists' neighborhood and later in TriBeCa. In 1969 she was one of the organizers of a group of artists and poets who staged an influential public performance over several months called "Street Works."

In them, Vito Acconci followed random strangers, being photographed as he did so. Adrian Piper recorded street noise and replayed it later, at double speed, walking in the same area where she had recorded it. For her own work, Ms. Strider hung more than 30 empty gilded picture frames in various places on the streets: on a fire hydrant, on a tree, against a painted wall. She then returned to the idea over several months, making it more conceptual as she went; in the area where she had hung the frames, she returned and draped a large felt banner with the words "Picture Frame" written on it.

For many years in the 1970s she worked with urethane foam, creating huge, sinuous installations that seemed to flow out of building windows or down staircases. Later paintings returned to the female form but often used it to play with abstraction: a close-up of a jawline, hair and mouth dissolving into hard line and bright color; a bikini bottom and legs as a five-triangle composition exercise. From 1982 to 1985, a retrospective of her work that began at the SculptureCenter in New York toured several cities in the United States.

At a time when women struggled mightily for visibility in the art world, Ms. Strider was often fearless and pointedly droll with her public image. In the winter 1971 issue of the art magazine Avalanche, she took out a full-page ad showing herself topless, riding a horse, in a slightly blurry, off-kilter picture that looks as if it could be the basis for a Gerhard Richter painting. Her perseverance, she said in an interview with Jonathan Gams, in the 2004 book "Marjorie Strider: Dramatic Gestures," was sometimes all that got her through.

"I believed those men who either outright said or alluded to the fact that women weren't good enough to compete in the real art world," she said. "But thank God it didn't stop me from working. I've always worked intensely."

A version of this article appears in print on September 7, 2014, on page A26 of the New York edition with the headline: Marjorie Strider, Sly Pop Artist, Is Dead at 83. Order Reprints| Today's Paper|Subscribe