James Rosenquist

Made famous by his anti-Vietnam War work, the Pop artist never went out of fashion.

IN MEMORIAM

MAGDALENA ABABÁNKOVIČ, one of the country's most well-known artists, died in Prague, aged 86. She is most famous for her crowds of statues, bronze figures: A victim of which was installed in Chicago's Grant Park in 2006. Born in Tábor, near Prague, in 1929, she studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague (now Academy) and Prague, which was then under pressure to conform to the tastes of the Soviet Union. She was required to take tests, which saw a profound influence on her work. Ababánková attracted the attention of the international art world in the 1960s, with her huge, cinder-coated, life-size sculptures. In the 1990s, she began creating figurative sculptures made of plaster, which became her preferred medium in the 1980s. Her work is in major collections worldwide, including the Belgrade, which received her sculpture "Celebration" in 1975.

ANTHEA BROOK, the art historian of 17th-century French sculpture and author of The Courtauld Institute of Art, died on March 13, aged 71. She worked at the V&A between 1980 and 1995 before returning to her homeland to teach an independent scholar specialising in 17th-century French sculpture.

TERENCE COVENTRY, the British artist described by the novelist Jojo Moyes as a "natural born sculptor," died on April 20, aged 79. He was a leading exponent of the Scottish Colourist Movement and Art and at the Royal College of Art in London, but left after he was not allowed to paint from posing models. He joined the RAE and then enjoyed success in his lifetime. But having written and talked about his art for years, he was aware of his own success. He, too, knew the success he had achieved.

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toward the imagery and techniques he had mastered as a billboard painter. Rosenbergen and John reigned his interest in pictures with vernacular content. The works of Kelly and Youngmous offered examples of the proclamatory power of simple abstract forms. “I began to realise,” Rosenquist told an interviewer in 1966, “that my style of painting billboards had an accuracy and a grandeur. It might have been kitsch, but it had a strength to it.”

Rosenquist quickly evolved an enigmatic, high-impact manner of setting in collision fragmentary images of consumer goods and consumer goods, readily recognised but infrequently scrutinised by a wide public.

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THE ART NEWSPAPER Number 290, May 2017

James Rosenquist, a key figure in American Pop art, died in New York on March 31, aged 83. Born in North Dakota and raised in the American Midwest, Rosenquist received the Minneapolis Institute of Arts on a scholarship. Two more years of art studies followed at the University of Minnesota, but Rosenquist’s most important career preparation came from his work as a painter of commercial signs and billboards, between 1942 and 1960.

FROM BILLBOARDS TO NEW YORK

After setting up in New York, initially on a stipend to study at the Art Students League, and later on becoming an abstract painter, he moved to a lower Manhattan studio building where Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and Jack Youngerman were immediate neighbours. The trilingual Rosenquist was able to steer his studio work away from “tiny” abstractions, as he described them.

The artist in front of his painting “Elect President” (1960-61 / 1994)


Social critique was in the air, with disparate against the conformity-breeding effects of television, advertising, and consumer appetite. Movies such as John F. Kennedy’s The Manchurian Candidate (1962) and Stanley Kubrick’s Dr. Strangelove (1964) castigated the anxiety of life under an ideological and social nuclear-armed empires. Long before anyone dreamed of smartphones that could make movies pocketable, with his 1965 Rosenquist put the mass consciousness of fear and cultural contradiction in a room, outflanking all who entered it.

VIETNAM AND THE BOMB

I never met Rosenquist, but I encountered his work first at what today seems to have been a formative moment both in late 20th-century American art and in my own subsequent life as a critic. A university undergraduate in the mid-1960s, freshly committed to studying art history, I had been visiting Manhattan intermittently to see museums and gallery shows. Leo Castelli’s East 7th Street gallery (opened in 1960, after breather alterations, by Michael Werner) had been a point of pilgrimage since Castelli’s introduction of Johns there in 1959. In before anyone dreamed of smartphones that could make movies pocketable, with his 1965 Rosenquist put the mass consciousness of fear and cultural contradiction in a room, outflanking all who entered it.

ENDURING REPUTATION

Although his art never has its grandeur of scale and composition or its illustrator’s craft, it never again achieved the timeliness that gave Pop Art its touch of its power: Rosenquist’s influence resonated prominently in the work of David Salle in the 1980s, an artist coming from an angle of cultural critique very different from Rosenquist’s. Many gallery shows and surveys keep up Rosenquist’s market and reputation high. But his 2003 survey at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York revealed a striking paradox: amidst the cinematic, big paintings, the truly outstanding works were the mixed media collage studies that lay behind them, on a scale Rosenquist seemed to have abandoned nearly 40 years before.

Kenseth Bacon

71. James Rosenquist, born 20 November 1925, died 31 March 2017

BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS, the African-American artist known for his realist and semi-popular portraits of black men and women, died on April 18, aged 72. Born in Philadelphia, he studied art at Yale University, where he received his Bachelor’s degree. His love of Old Master portrait painting was confirmed during a trip to Europe in the 1960s, the same time as the Black Power movement was gaining ground in the US. This led to his decision to make a black presence in the style of the Old Masters. Although his influence can be seen in the work of several artists, including Wadsworth Atheneum and the New Museum in Chicago in 2008, that the art world stood up and took notice.

ANANTH REEVE, the long-serving picture restaurer at the National Gallery, London, died on December 3, aged 70. Reeve was the fourth generation of a family of picture restorers. After attending the Chalf School, Somerset, Reeve joined the National Gallery’s restoration department at the age of 16. He remained at the gallery until his retirement 41 years later. His special expertise was structural conservation, restoring large format pictures that were in danger of being damaged by movements, ensuring the works he restored were Rubens’ Peace and War. Perhaps his greatest legacy is the low-paint preparation tables, which permits relying without disturbing the paint and brushstrokes, is now used worldwide.

WILLIAM SIMPSON, professor emeritus of Egyptian art at the University of Virginia and Egyptologist and ancient Near Eastern art at the University of London, died on March 4, aged 70. He became a leading Egyptologist and Near Eastern languages and literatures in the 1970s, when he remained until his retirement in 1993. He was also for 20 years the curator of Egyptian and ancient Near Eastern art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and on 24 March 1978 he became a professor of Egyptology and Near Eastern languages and literatures at the University of Texas at Austin, where he remained until his retirement in 1993. He was also for 20 years the curator of Egyptian and ancient Near Eastern art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and substantially increased the collection of ancient art. He also led the Pennsylvania Yale expedition to Egypt to rescue the monuments threatened by the construction of the Aswan Dam (1960-78).