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“Malcolm Morley (1931-2018).” [www.artforum.com](http://www.artforum.com) (*Artforum*), 2 June 2018.

# ARTFORUM



Malcolm Morley in front of his painting *Thor*, 2008. Photo: Xavier Hufkens and Sperone Westwater.

The London-born and New York-based artist Malcolm Morley, a self-described “super-realist” known for his paintings of ocean liners and airplanes modeled after paper-made kits, has died. The galleries that represented him, Xavier Hufkens in Brussels and Sperone Westwater in New York, confirmed his passing. The artist was eighty-six years old.

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“With a career spanning over six decades, Morley developed a highly individual and expressive style of painting,” Sperone Westwater said in a statement. “This placed him at the heart of the contemporary debates about painting, its authenticity and surface, and the validity of figuration versus abstraction. Morley defied stylistic characterization, moving through so-called abstract, hyperrealist, neo-romantic, and neo-expressionist painterly modes, while being attentive to his own biographical experiences.”

Born in London in 1931, Morley had a troubled childhood. When he was twelve his home was destroyed by a “Doodlebug,” or an early cruise missile called a V-1 bomb, during a Nazi blitz. The artist recalled lying in his bed before the explosion that destroyed the shoe store below his family’s apartment and caused the wall of his bedroom to collapse. During psychoanalysis therapy years later, Morley would come to realize that a model of a ship that he had been working on for months had been lost in the bombing. The unfinished vessel would drive the artist to create countless compositions featuring battleships, tankers, and other boats as well as other references to World War II.

Shortly after the loss of his childhood home, Morley would attend a Naval boarding school in Surrey. However, his plans for the future were derailed after he was arrested for petty theft and sentenced to three years in jail. While behind bars, the artist learned about Vincent van Gogh in Irving Stone’s novel *Lust for Life*, 1934. The book inspired him to make art.

Morley was released from prison at the age of twenty. His parole officer arranged for him to study at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts in 1952. He went on to take classes at the Royal College of Art, where he met artists Peter Blake, Frank Auerbach, Joe Tilson, and Richard Smith as well as his mentor Carel Weight, a year later.

Fueled by a Tate exhibition of American art, and a girl he met on the number 37 bus, Morley moved to America in 1957. He married the girl, but the union didn’t last, so he eventually made his way to New York, where he brushed shoulders with Willem de Kooning, Salvador Dalí, Barnett Newman, Andy Warhol, and Roy Lichtenstein, who would help him find teaching jobs. He would live in and around New York City for the rest of his life.

Considered at the forefront of photorealism in the 1960s, Morley preferred to be called a “super-realist,” which is derived from Russian avant-garde artist Kazimir Malevich’s notion of suprematism. Morley would paint images of horse races, beaches, and royal pageants by making use of the grid system, dividing his canvases into squares in order to ensure each area of the work received equal attention. By the 1970s, he tired of photorealism, claiming that it was being overdone, and he adopted a more abstract and expressionist painterly style. He pinpoints this transition to the work titled *Race Track*, 1970, a depiction of a South African horse race, which he painted a large “X” over.

In 1984, Morley became the recipient of the first Turner Prize. He was recognized for an exhibition staged at Whitechapel Gallery, which was organized by Nicholas Serota. He was also the winner of the 1992 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture’s Painting Award.

Morley’s work has been featured in a number of exhibitions in Europe and North America including the Guggenheim Museum’s landmark survey “The Photographic Image” (1966), Documenta 5 (1972) and Documenta 6 (1977), and the Royal Academy’s pivotal group show “A New Spirit in Painting” (1981). He has also had solo shows at various institutions including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1984); the Centre Pompidou, Paris (1993); the Fundación La Caixa, Madrid (1995); the Hayward Gallery, London (2001); and the Schloss Derneburg Museum, Derneburg (2017–2018).