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Malcolm Morley, Dynamic Painter of the Real and Surreal, Is Dead at 86

By NEIL GENZLINGER

Malcolm Morley, an artist who helped foster Photorealism in the 1960s, then did the same in the late '70s for the more sensuous style of painting known as Neo-Expressionism, died on June 1 in Bellport, N.Y. He was 86.

His death was announced by the Sperone Westwater gallery in New York, which represented him. No cause was given.

Mr. Morley was a skilled and prolific painter with an exploratory spirit, moving through an assortment of styles and techniques after discovering art in an unusual place: prison, where he landed as a teenager on burglary convictions.

By the mid-1960s he was established in New York arts circles, working in a Photorealist style (he preferred the term "super-realist"), often making his paintings from images on postcards of cruise ships. Another work, "Queen of Opera" (1971), was sim-

An art class in prison touched off a lifelong career for a prolific chameleon of genre.

ply a 48-by-60-inch oil painting of a Time magazine cover featuring Beverly Sills.

He would later call such paintings the "heights of repression," and as the 1970s progressed he veered away from realistic reproductions into fanciful imagery.

"Where a ship would once have had complete sway, a cow or two may now share the ocean," *The New York Times* wrote of his transformation on the occasion of a retrospective of his work in 1984.

A 1984 work, for instance, "French Legionnaires Being Eaten by a Lion," depicts soldiers in shades of blue as half the canvas is being invaded by a giant yellow lion. In a mid-1980s series on the Barcelona Cathedral in Spain, the building is barely recognizable in shimmering outline and gaudy colors.

By 1989, his explorations prompted Kay Larson of *The New Yorker* to write of a show at Pace Gallery in Manhattan, "Some pictures are so out of control that it is almost embarrassing to admit that one or two are quite good."

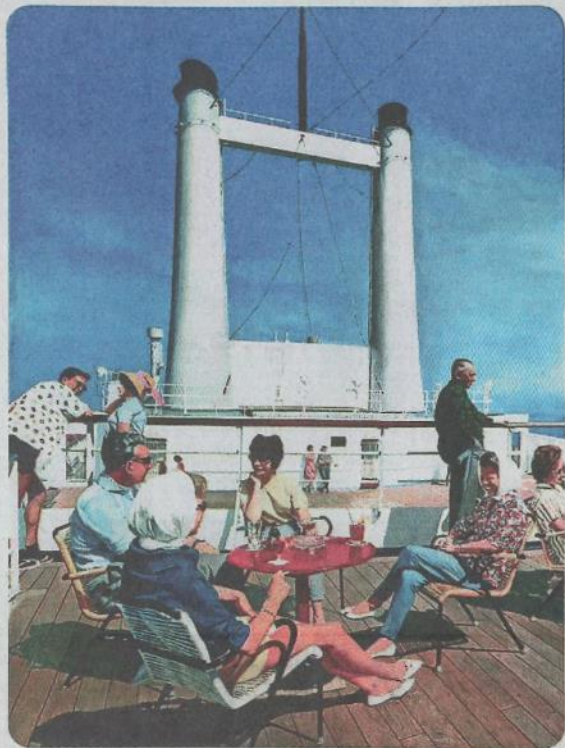
In 1993, Michael Kimmelman of *The Times*, reviewing another retrospective, at the Pompidou Center in Paris, explained why Mr. Morley was "a painter painters admire."

"Partly it is his restless, renegade spirit," Mr. Kimmelman wrote. "You can never be sure what he's going to do next. Partly it is the fact that he brings to his work a combination of ambition and wit and technical derring-do that makes his art compelling



JASON SCHMIDT

Above, Malcolm Morley in his studio in 2009. His early works in Photorealism, like "On Deck," below left, consisted of painstakingly accurate recreations of postcards. Later in his career he veered into more fantastical creations, like "Flight of Icarus," below right.



THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, VIA SPERONE WESTWATER, NEW YORK



KIRSTEN LUCE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

even when it is not altogether convincing."

Malcolm John Austin Morley was born on June 7, 1931, in London to Dorothy Morley; he never knew his father. As a boy he enjoyed building models, and he often told of having just completed but not yet painted one of a battle-

ship when his family had to flee during the bombing of London in World War II; when the family returned after the smoke had cleared, he found that the model, left on a windowsill, had been destroyed.

"Maybe if I had gotten to paint that ship I would have been satis-

fied and never become an artist," he told *The Times* in 1984. "I am fond of saying this to German collectors."

By 14 he was living on his own, pursuing a career in burglary, something he apparently wasn't very good at: He landed in jail several times. During one stay he took a prison art course. After he was released at 20, a parole officer who recognized his talent arranged for art schools to see his prison works.

He was offered a spot at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts in London in 1952. In 1953 he advanced to the Royal College of Art in London, graduating in 1957. He arrived in New York the next year. (He would become an American citizen in 1991.)

Mr. Morley supported himself there as a waiter, and one night a customer asked him what a young Englishman was doing waiting tables in New York. When he replied that he was a painter, the man rose and embraced him. It was the artist Barnett Newman, who became both a mentor and an influence.

Mr. Morley began by setting up his canvas at the Manhattan docks and trying to paint the ships, but found them too big to take in — "one end is over there, the other end is over there, a 360-degree impossibility," as he once put it. So he started working from postcards, using a grid system he had learned in art school, painstakingly reproducing the image one square at a time.

He had his first solo show, at the Kornblee Gallery in New York, in 1964. Scores of solo shows followed, most recently last year at the Hall Art Foundation in Derneburg, Germany. He would be part of countless group shows as well.

Mr. Morley's works are in numerous museum collections in the United States and Europe. In 1984 he became the first winner of the Turner Prize, a prestigious British art award. (The decision generated some complaints, since at that point he had long lived in the United States.)

Mr. Morley, who lived in Bellport, married Lida Kruisheer, his fifth wife, in 1989. She survives him.

They would often go on trips, with Mr. Morley painting along the way. That, he said in 1993, was a result of an epiphany, which led to yet another change in his artistic direction.

"Go be an adventure painter," he said, describing this revelation. "Forget about aesthetics. Get out of SoHo, get out of your navel, be a 19th-century Victorian explorer-painter."

As for his personal journey from young housebreaker to acclaimed artist, he reflected that he used art "as a form of aggression, retreat and medicine."

"For me," he said, "art was truly redemption. I met a new way of life. Art as redemption is a great idea, don't you think?"