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“Malcolm Morley, inaugural Turner Prize winner – obituary.” www.telegraph.co.uk (*The Telegraph*), 17 June 2018.

The Telegraph



Morley in 2012 in front of his painting *Icarus* CREDIT: NEW YORK TIMES / REDUX / EYEVINE

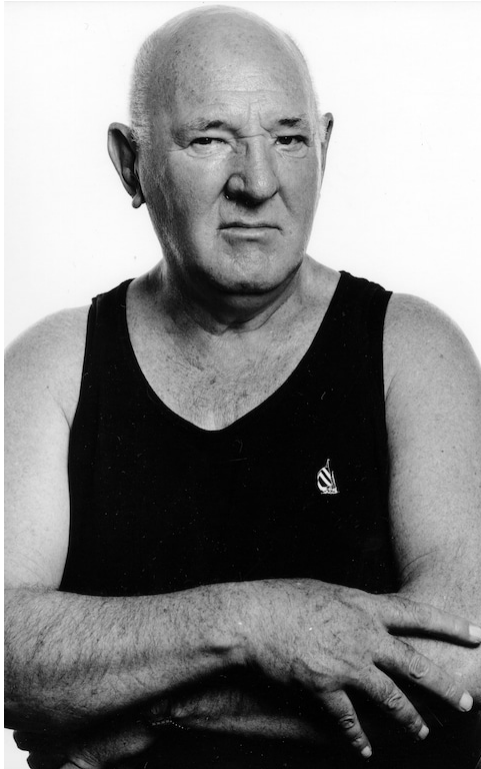
Malcolm Morley, who has died aged 86, was a British expat painter and former jail bird who won the first ever Turner Prize in 1984, after making his name in America.

It was while serving three years for breaking and entering in Wormwood Scrubs that Morley first began painting. After moving to the US in 1958, he emerged in the 1960s as a pioneer of “photorealism”, with paintings based on postcards and holiday brochures. In 1970, however, he executed an abrupt change of direction, symbolised by his painting a huge red “X” across “Race Track”, a painting of a horse race in apartheid South Africa.

He had not intended to deface the painting, he explained later, but he had just gone to see Costa-Gavras’s film *Z*, about the fascist military junta that overthrew the Greek government in 1967: “I came out of that movie wanting to kick a cop in the balls or something, and the only thing I had was this painting.”

Morley then embarked on what he called a “catastrophe” phase, with apocalyptic paintings of disaster and destruction that contained elements of abstraction and surrealism. The ocean liners which he had depicted in his photorealist phase sailing past the Statue of Liberty were now found beached on top of a New York

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Malcolm Morley in 2001 CREDIT: JACK MITCHELL/GETTY IMAGES

skyscraper. “You paint a photorealism of the consciousness, and I paint a photorealism of the unconscious,” Salvador Dali once told him.

Though there were recurrent themes in his work – ships were a constant – Morley continued to experiment, defying categorisation as he explored styles variously described as abstract expressionist, neo-expressionist, neo-romantic, post-pop – even, on occasions, performance art.

In 1983 the Whitechapel Gallery held a retrospective of his work, put on by the gallery’s director Nicholas Serota, and on the strength of this he won the Turner a year later. No doubt gratifyingly for the organisers of the award – granted in recognition of a major new contribution to British art – the announcement provoked a storm of rage from some critics unable to accept that candidates who practised their art in Britain – Richard Deacon, Richard Long, Howard Hodgkin, Gilbert and George – had been overlooked in favour of someone living in America.

Morley himself was somewhat queasy about accepting the award. “I think it’s disgusting,” he told a journalist. “The way they’ve conducted the giving of this prize: it’s like blood sport.” But, he admitted later, “I didn’t have the strength to turn it down.” And besides: “I saw it as a signal to go ahead and be

more myself. And, in a funny way, I felt Britain didn’t let me down.”

It was difficult to imagine Morley painting the way he did had he stayed in England, yet his work was full of references to the Britain of his youth – particularly in his later years, when model ships, soldiers, aircraft and toys became regular parts of his repertoire of imagery.

In an interview with The Guardian in 2001 Morley claimed that everything in his turbulent life – prison, multiple divorces, drugs, depression, psychoanalysis – was driven by one devastating childhood event – the night his home in London was destroyed by a V-1 flying bomb and with it a balsa wood model of a navy battleship which he had been working on.

“Years later, when I was in psychoanalysis, a memory of the bombing came up and I realised that all those ships I’d done had to be to do with me trying to paint that battleship I never finished ... It doesn’t matter how much I try to paint the perfect picture,” he said, “it never can be that ship that got lost.”

Malcolm Morley was born in Stoke Newington, London, on June 7 1931. He never knew his father, and when his mother married a Welshman he was brought up under the name Evans.

It was not a happy childhood. His stepfather was violent and he was sent to a naval boarding school aged six. “There were all these homes and things in between. I kept on running away from all these schools. When the doodlebug arrived, we were refugees in a sense, billeted in other people’s houses. And then I just wandered the streets from a very early age. I was a loner.” He took refuge in making model boats.

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In 1945, aged 14, Morley left to be a galley boy on an ocean-going tug, but was violently seasick and jumped ship in Antwerp, where he joined the ranks of hustlers struggling to keep their heads above water in postwar Europe, posing as an American sailor so that he could steal things to sell from an American military canteen.



Family Portrait, 1968, acrylic & oil on canvas, by Malcolm Morley
CREDIT: BRIDGEMAN

It was not long before he was caught by the military police and sent back to England where, on his 16th birthday, he was found guilty of housebreaking and ended up at a borstal near Birmingham. Back in trouble after his release, he ended up in Wormwood Scrubs. There, inspired by reading *Lust For Life*, Irving Stone's novel based on the life of Vincent van Gogh, he enrolled in a correspondence course in painting.

Released after two years, Morley spent some time as a hotel waiter in the artists' colony at St Ives, Cornwall, and while he was there his old parole officer arranged for some art schools to see the work he had produced in prison.

Morley was offered a place at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts in 1952. A year later he moved to the Royal College of Art where his fellow students included Peter Blake, Frank Auerbach, Joe Tilson and Richard Smith.

In 1957 he moved to New York after meeting "an American girl on the number 37 bus". He would not see his mother for another 26 years. He married the girl, but the marriage (the first of five) soon broke down. By the time it did Morley was finding his way in the US art world, hanging out with such figures as Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Roy Lichtenstein, Salvador Dali and Barnett Newman.

At first, he dabbled with abstract expressionism, but it was his dramatic move to photorealism that made his name. His initial efforts at painting ocean liners docked in New York were too big: "So I got a postcard and divided it into a grid, a technique we'd used in art school but I'd forgotten about when I was busy being an abstract expressionist. ... It was the total opposite of abstract."

Yet, behind the slick imagery, there was always an undercurrent of disquiet. In one picture, featuring an all-American family, tanned and jaunty, enjoying a day on the beach, the sea is turquoise, the sands are silver and there is no cloud in the sky. On closer inspection, however, the fixed smiles appear jarringly false, while the face of the blonde daughter is twisted into a grotesque leer.

Richard Dormant in *The Daily Telegraph* found these and other images to be "cruel pictures painted by a person emotionally cut off from the possibility of enjoying the ordinary pleasures portrayed in them". The uneasiness would become more explicit after Morley's move away from photorealism.

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In the early 1970s Morley taught art at Stony Brook University where, often high on cocaine and LSD, he would turn up to lectures dressed in bizarre assortments of women's clothes. By 1973 he was splitting from a third marriage.



Malcolm Morley in 2007 CREDIT: PATRICK MCMULLAN VIA GETTY IMAGES

Psychoanalysis and the grid technique seem to have led Morley's art in several new directions, ending with his rediscovery of his boyhood joy in model-making. He continued to paint seven days a week until his 80s and became an American citizen in 1991.

Morley's work is found in museum collections around the world, and he was the subject of several retrospectives including at the Hayward Gallery, London in 2001 and at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, in 2013.

After four marriages ended in divorce, he found happiness with his Dutch-born fifth wife, Lida Kruisheer, whom he married in 1989 and who survives him.

Malcolm Morley, born June 7 1931, died June 1 2018