



Barbara Beretich (3/25/1936 – 6/15/2018)

Barbara Beretich has been an integral part of the Claremont Art Scene for over 50 years. Considered by many to be the Grande Dame of Claremont's illustrious Art and Culture Community, Beretich was a force of nature, making a significant impact by helping to foster not only the appreciation of art but contributing substantially to what some currently refer to as the "Claremont School". Barbara was a noted artist in her own right, creating an extensive body of work in multiple media, always leaving her imprimatur on whatever she did. Beretich was also the consummate collector who supported the work of others, curating over 100 exhibitions of the dozens of artists she represented in her multi-decade career. Barbara passed away at home in her sleep, as she would have wanted it, surrounded by the art, objects and the animals she loved. She was 82 years old.

Barbara Beretich was born on March 25, 1936 in Chicago, Illinois. Her family moved often and Barbara spent parts of her childhood in Chicago, San Diego, and Ohio. Beretich attended the University of Illinois, majoring in art, and graduated in 1958. After moving back to California following her graduation, Barbara took a trip to Europe in 1960, where she was befriended by French artist Francoise Gilot, beginning a lifelong friendship between the two.

From 1962 to 1965, Beretich attended the Claremont Graduate School (now University), earning her M.F.A. in sculpture. While attending the CGS, Barbara met Millard Sheets, who would become a life-long mentor. In 1966, a grant enabled Barbara to live in Paris for a year, studying sculpture and painting independently. She was offered an atelier rent-free by an influential friend of her family. In Paris she had the once in a life-time experience of creating lithographs at the famous Mourlot Studios, an exclusive printing house frequented by Picasso, Leger, Matisse, Miro and other noted artists of the time. Returning to the States, Barbara began to make a name for herself, painting and sculpting commissions for portrait or architectural studies. Barbara also worked with the Millard Sheets Studio, designing sculptures for several of the architectural projects the studio was involved in at the time.

From 1973 to 1978, Barbara served as the director of the seminal Gallery 8 (organized by Millard Sheets and named for the eight partners who financed the project). Gallery 8 showcased numerous significant and emerging Claremont artists as well as important international artists that Beretich often debuted. Following the closing of Gallery 8 in 1978, Barbara transferred her creative output to her magnificent Claremont home and studio, expanding it from a 1,400-sf bungalow to a 3,500-sf creative space that became Galeria Beretich.

Under Barbara's direction, Galeria Beretich became an innovative space that personified Beretich's desire to share her love and passion of art with others, often hosting groundbreaking art openings and salons

that drew a broad cross-section of personalities comprised of not only the who's who of Claremont's burgeoning art scene, Claremont Colleges students (and their presidents), but the Hollywood elite as well. At these "happenings", Beretich would hold court and her cats Otis and Coco would often welcome and escort guests as they arrived.

Beretich was often called upon to populate important parties in Claremont with notables such as Jonas Salk, Sam and Bettye Jaffe, Dido Renoir and others. In fact, it was Barbara who brought Francoise Gilot, muse and lover of Picasso, mother of Paloma and Claude, to California. It was Beretich who introduced Gilot and Salk who eventually were married.

In 1984, Beretich once again traveled to Europe, this time undertaking independent study in Italy with a concentration on bronze casting. When she returned to the States, Beretich embarked on one of the most prolific periods in her career, her oeuvre multiplying at a dizzying rate. In the ensuing years Barbara was extraordinarily active, acting as curator of the Edward G. Robinson Collection, as well as serving as an independent appraiser and curator. Not necessarily one to promote her own work, Barbara focused her energies on creating groundbreaking exhibitions that drew art collectors from as far away as the East Coast and even Europe. Her own art was exhibited in several exhibitions and she created a number of sculptural commissions for institutional and civic entities.

Anyone who had the opportunity to experience Barbara Beretich has undoubtedly been endowed with an intrinsic knowing that only Barbara herself could bestow, a gift that transcends materiality and is immersed in beauty, passion and creativity. Barbara could make you feel as if she was sharing a secret that only you would be privy to. She was generous to a fault, regularly inviting strangers off the street to experience her collection and if the timing was right, partake in a freshly made salad or stew. Barbara could ruminate for hours with stories of her exploits around the world and visitors would leave in a state of incredulity that her experiences were not totally fabricated. Only from the plethora of photographs and letters that were posted everywhere from the fridge to the bathroom mirrors, could one confirm the validity of her musings. Not that she didn't have her moments, all humans do, and Barbara may have had more than an average person, but her ability to dispel an awkward moment, tell a joke or quote a saying, somehow endeared her to even those she offended. She had a huge heart for people and creatures alike and took delight in sharing herself with anyone who would spend the time. The pleasure of discovery and inherent values embodied in Beretich's work and life stand as a testament to the instinctual genius that affected almost everyone who met her.

Although she will be exceeding missed by many, Barbara Beretich has left us the gift of her legacy, and those who knew her, were privy to her desire to create a lasting institution that would focus on art history and education. A resource for artists young and old to learn and experience the many facets of beauty that art provides in our daily lives.

To quote Millard Sheets, Barbara's teacher and mentor: "I believe that art has always existed at the very core of life, as necessary and as nourishing as food, as natural as love."

A celebration of life will be planned in the future.