



December 20, 2010



Robert Berkshire at a gathering of Herron emeriti faculty in 2010.

Herron mourns the loss of Professor Emeritus Robert B. Berkshire (1932-2010)

Robert Berkshire, abstract expressionist painter and professor emeritus at Herron School of Art and Design, left us on December 17, 2010.

Berkshire was born in 1932. An Indianapolis native, he was a scholarship student at the John Herron Art Institute, graduating in 1954 with a diploma in fine arts. A Fulbright Fellowship funded his year-long studies in Italy. He earned a master's degree in fine arts from Florida State University in 1958 and returned to Indianapolis to teach at his undergraduate alma mater. He remained a beloved member of the Herron faculty until his retirement in 1996.

Berkshire painted with a verve that leapt from the canvas. In a 2002 article about an upcoming one-man show, he said "I'm interested in the space in a painting. As the images I'm working with in a painting become real to me, I like to be able to see what I'm doing by moving through the space that surrounds them. I don't want to see just what's facing me, but also what's all around and behind it."

He painted the way he lived: Large. He became one of Indianapolis' best-known painters, and he was content with that distinction.

He nurtured his students well and rigorously. "Students did not find him intimidating," said his colleague, Professor Emerita Peg Fierke. "He was easy, relaxed, approachable. He was a very charming guy, never openly competitive. He had other ways of getting where he wanted to be."

Steve Redman, B.F.A., 1967, recalls a summer he spent at the famous Provincetown art colony on a coveted Cooper Union scholarship. Berkshire was heading to Cape Cod too. "It was the best summer of my life," Redman said. "Bob had a flair. His style of living and being deeply influenced me."

Much later, Redman shared studio space with Berkshire and Herron alumna Sam Sartorius for a year. "After the Farris Building closed, we found this large garage at the Midland Antique Mall. We were the Three Musketeers for a time." Sam Sartorius, B.F.A., 2002, recalled being "immediately drawn to Robert Berkshire's passion for painting and reckless abandon attitude for the arts. As a mentor and friend he has impacted my life profoundly."

"Robert and I spent relentless hours talking about temperature of shadow, spatial aspects of painting compared to classical music or discussing the formal qualities of painting. Conversation would serpentine from deeply provocative to intellectual banter. He was always game for instigating a challenge too."



Robert B. Berkshire. From his *Symphony* series. Oil on canvas. 48" x 65".



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Professor Emeritus Robert Eagerton said “The arts community has lost one of its most colorful artists, who inspired hundreds of students at Herron. He lived life to the fullest and his paintings expressed that adventure. He will be greatly missed.”

Dean Valerie Eickmeier worked with Berkshire for 14 years and recalls his “zest for life, passion for art and music and his wit, as energetic as his brush strokes. His laughter could fill a room.”

Through his estate planning, Berkshire made one of the first gifts to the capital campaign that moved the school from 16th and Pennsylvania streets to its new home on the IUPUI campus in 2005. The Robert B. Berkshire gallery was named in his honor.

In a visit to campus last spring, Berkshire commented about how satisfying it was to see Herron in such beautiful and well-equipped facilities. His commitment to his students will live on: His generous gift will serve as a perpetual source of funding for painting scholarships and gallery support at Herron.

Funeral arrangements are being made through Flanner and Buchanan Funeral Centers.

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