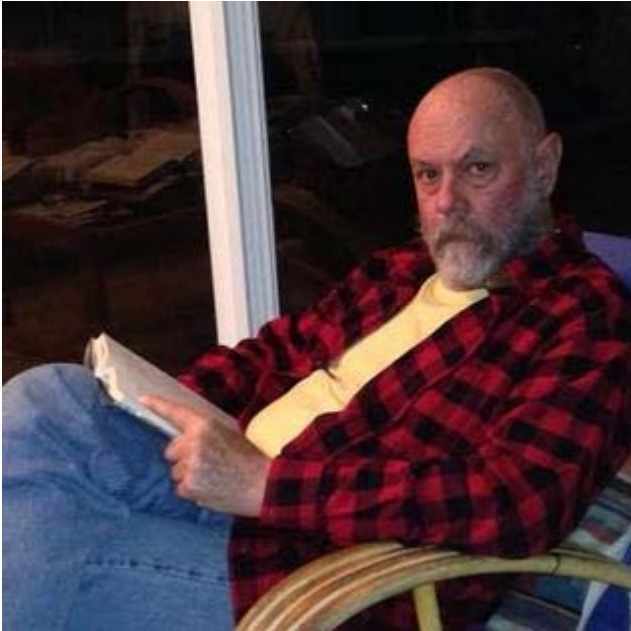


Former Miami Dade College art teacher, artist Bob Huff dies at 69

By Carli Teproff

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Family photo

Robert 'Bob' Huff, a former professor at Miami Dade College and an artist, died Friday at age 69.

Growing up in a family of builders, Robert "Bob," Huff used his knowledge of architecture and his passion for tools to create sculptures, three-dimensional canvases and other pieces of art.

"There isn't a tool around Bob didn't know how to use," said Barbara Young, his wife of 27 years. "He had a wonderful way of working with materials to create beautiful pieces of art."

Huff, who was a prominent figure on Miami's art scene for decades — for his work and his role as a former professor and chairman of the art department at Miami Dade College — died Friday after a long battle with cancer. He was 69.

His wife described her husband as a big man with a big heart, and said his art and his can-do spirit kept him fighting until the end.

"He took everything in stride," she said, adding that his favorite place was in his studio, fishing or enjoying nature.

Born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in 1945, he moved to Dunedin with his family when he was 11. He graduated from the University of South Florida in 1968 with a fine arts degree.

"He was thinking of going into engineering and then he saw a Monet painting and that was it," said his wife.

Soon after graduating, he started teaching sculpting and 3-D design at what was then Miami-Dade Community College South Campus. Over the years he taught scores of artists-in-the-making how to work with materials and tools.

Karen Rifas, who took classes with Huff during the 1970s, said Huff helped shape her career as an artist.

"He was so aware of everyone's needs and how to best help them," she said. Rifas was impressed with his bronze work and abstract paintings of water, bridges and architectural features and navigational instruments.

“He had his own style and encouraged us to do the same,” she said.

In 1979, he was named the chairman of the department. His wife said he loved all of his “kids.”

All the while he easily made a name for himself in the art world. Using everything including wood, aluminum and bronze, Huff created sometimes abstract, colorful pieces that often used the environment as the main influence.

“If you walked into a gallery, you would know it’s a Bob Huff piece,” said Ruth Shack, a collector, former president of the Dade Community foundation and former Miami-Dade County commissioner.

In the late 1960s, Shack bought her first Huff piece that had clouds, water, bridges and buildings and hung it in her formal dining room. Shack later donated the piece to Pérez Art Museum Miami.

In the book *Miami Contemporary Artists* by Paul Clemence and Julie Davidow, published in 2007, Huff described the basis for his work.

“Architectural form is often perceived as an imposition on the natural landscape,” he wrote. “My work has concentrated on the relationship between the man-made architectural form and the natural free flowing forms found in the environment, especially in the studio environment. The integration and disintegration of these relationships becomes the starting point for many of my pieces.”

In his description, Huff also shares his passion for Miami.

“The light is unparalleled, it is bright and clear with a definite influence on the way we see things,” he said. “Miami’s reputation as a mecca for the sun and sand was always a major contention, for it was difficult for outsiders to see the environmental influences on the work being produced, let alone take it seriously. I don’t believe that I could have prospered as an artist without these challenges.”

Former Miami Herald Art Critic and freelance art critic Elisa Turner credited Huff with teaching numerous students who went on to become professional artists.

“He had a rare generosity of spirit and utter devotion to his calling for making art, which surfaced so clearly in his many drawings, paintings, and sculpture,” she said. “His work reflected a longtime fascination and deep respect for the craft of construction and for the environmental beauty of South Florida.”

Over the years Huff’s work as appeared in public places including the Miami-Dade Metro-Rail Palmetto Extension Station, Miami International Airport, Concourse D and West Palm Beach International Airport. He has also been a part of dozens of exhibits at places including the Lowe Art Museum; Fort Lauderdale Museum of Art and the Bass Museum, Miami Beach.

His dealer Carol Jazzar said she held to shows at her Home-Gallery in El Portal and the openings were packed.

“He was very well respected,” she said. “He influenced a lot of people.”

Helen Kohen, a former art critic at the Miami Herald for many years and founder of the Miami-Dade Public Library System’s Vasari Project, archive of Miami Art History from 1945

onward, said Huff's influence was sweeping.

"He was high-principled and funny and fierce and he gave art a good name," she said, describing Huff as an "old-fashioned tinkerer."

"He has definitely left his footprint on Miami's art history," she said.

In addition to his wife, Huff is survived by his mother, Clarice Huff, and brother, Jerry Huff.

A retrospective of his work, previously planned, is scheduled to open at the Freedom Tower, Miami in fall 2016.

A memorial party is being planned for later in the fall.