

Art in America

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Ellen Lanyon, 1926-2013

by Sarah Cascone



Ellen Lanyon.

New York-based painter and printmaker Ellen Lanyon died after suffering cardiac arrest on Oct. 7, 2013, at age 86. Lanyon was returning from a two-week trip to Cambridge, UK, where she was working on a new series of prints. New York dealer Pavel Zoubok, who previously worked with the artist, confirmed her death. Her primary representative was Chicago's Valerie Carberry.

Born in Chicago in 1926, Lanyon received a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1948 and an MFA from the University of Iowa in 1950. Her work is characterized by a unique blend of realism and the surreal; she is known for still lifes featuring animals interacting with manmade objects in unexpected, fantastical ways.

"A Chicago critic was not handing out compliments when he called her 'your basic Corn Belt Surrealist,'" critic Lucy Lippard wrote in a May 1983 *A.i.A.* article, "but in fact the dry touch of regionalism is a unique and important

part of Lanyon's art. She is a rare and peculiarly American breed—an honest, accessible, visionary artist, not unaware of, but resolutely independent of the imposed mainstreams of fashion."

Over the course of her career, Lanyon has had over 75 solo exhibitions, including 11 museum exhibitions, three of which were major traveling retrospectives. "Ellen Lanyon, Strange Games: A Twenty-Five Year Retrospective" (1987-88) originated at the Chicago Cultural Center. Her work appears in the collections of institutions as the Art Institute of Chicago; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Brooklyn

Museum; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

Among Lanyon's many honors are a Purchase Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (2004), two awards from the National Endowment For the Arts (1997 and 1974) and a Fulbright Scholarship to Courtauld Institute, University of London, (1950-51). Lanyon was a professor of painting at several institutions including the Cooper Union and the School of Visual Arts, both in New York, and the Art Institute of Chicago.