

WILLIAM WALLACE REID,

Born Lemay, (St. Louis County) Missouri, December 30, 1927

Died San Francisco, California, July 16, 2020

His early childhood in Missouri during the Great Depression was unstable. His father was an abusive alcoholic and his parents separated. He was shuffled from relative to relative. An aunt recognized his interest in drawing and introduced him to watercolors. An uncle gave him a dollar for every drawing he produced. By the age of six, he began to create watercolors that reflected life on the Mississippi River. Jazz as well as the burgeoning Rhythm and Blues movement inspired his early sketches and paintings.

At 17, Reid's artistic abilities earned him a scholarship to Washington University in St. Louis. He enlisted in the Air Force in February 1946. Following basic training, he designed and painted insignias on the planes. After hours he'd sketch officers and their wives.

In February 1947 Reid was discharged and qualified for the G.I. Bill. In 1948 he traveled with a friend to San Miguel de Allende in Mexico, where he studied art with the great Mexican Modernist painters, Jose Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros and Rufino Tamayo. When he returned to America in 1949, he completed his studies at Washington University where one of his instructors was the renowned German Expressionist Max Beckmann. In Reid's work one can see the influence of his famous teachers as well as Diego Rivera who he also met in Mexico. Modigliani, Max Ernst, and Paul Cezanne were also inspirational to his work at that time.

Reid graduated from Washington University in 1951, and subsequently gained attention in art competitions. His portrait of his philosophy teacher, Huston Smith, titled "Enigma", won first prize from the St. Louis Artist's Guild. His work was exhibited then in St. Louis, Denver, and Newport, Rhode Island.

In 1953 he moved to San Francisco. In 1955 he married Patricia Odend'hal, a Pan Am stewardess. With discounted fares he and his wife were able to travel the world. He was particularly struck by the Cubist, Surrealist and Abstract Expressionist paintings at the Peggy Guggenheim Museum in Venice. After a year of traveling, Reid took a job with the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency. He and his wife also started La Pavoni Espresso Bar, a cafe and coffee machine import business, which was located by City Lights Bookstore in North Beach in San Francisco, then home to the Beat Movement.

From 1957 on William Reid pursued his graphic design skills to support his family. He had one show with the Porpoise Bookshop and Gallery. He was never comfortable with self-promotion and did not have another gallery show until October 2014. His work has now become historical, and one can see how his mix of abstraction with figuration reflects his love of color and the influence of the jazz, as well as his great teachers including Orozco and Beckmann.