

Biographical Information for Ilee Ann Kaplan

Ilee Ann Kaplan was a highly regarded Southern California artist whose work is in the permanent collections of the Long Beach Museum of Art, in Long Beach, California; the Huntington Library in Pasadena, California; and the Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum at California State University, Long Beach.

Kaplan was born July 12, 1953, in Los Angeles. She died in Long Beach, California on Jan. 24, 2019. She knew from the age of three that she wanted to be an artist. After graduating from UC Berkeley in 1975, she was drawn back to Southern California by her widowed father's failing health, and subsequently earned a master's degree in printmaking from California State University, Long Beach, in 1980.

She became a member of the foundational feminist art collective Double X, whose aim was to expand the visibility of art made by women. She began exhibiting her work in many dozens of galleries regionally and nationally, and internationally— many in Greater Los Angeles and Long Beach, Denver, Texas, Michigan, Barcelona, and Seoul. Gallery affiliations over the years included Studio 1617, Los Angeles; Carson Gallery, Denver; Gallery Stephanie, Chicago; Miriam Perlman, Chicago; Estiarte, Madrid, Spain.

"She had a unique artistic vision and produced a creative and singular body of work," says Sue Ann Robinson, curator emerita at Long Beach Museum of Art, of Kaplan's art legacy. Christina Alegria, curator of education at University Art Museum, CSULB, called her "a gifted artist who worked in multiple media." Over her career, Kaplan drew praise from art critics, including reviewers in Art Week ("works of exceptional achievement") and the Los Angeles Times ("striking multicolored woodcut portraits"; "intriguing portraits").

Among her many awards, Kaplan received: The National Endowment for the Arts' Visual Arts Fellowship in Printmaking; California Arts Council's Visual Arts Fellowship; Graphic Arts Council of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's Kay Nielsen Finalist Award; Distinguished Artist Award from the Arts Council for Long Beach; Distinguished Artist Award from the Public Corporation of the Arts.

Kaplan divided her life between practicing her own art and making her mark as a professional in the art museum world, notably as associate director and interim director and a curator at the recently renamed Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum (formerly UAM).

UAM's then-director, Brian Trimble, told the press at the time of her passing in 2018 that Kaplan had been instrumental in developing the museum into a major cultural institution in Long Beach and the only accredited art museum in the CSU system.

Highlights of her work as a curator include in 2011 co-curating "Peace Press Graphics 1967-1987: Art in the Pursuit of Social Change," part of the monumental Getty Pacific Standard Time initiative, an unprecedented collaboration of more than 50 cultural institutions that came together to tell the story of the birth of the L.A. art scene.

She completed the highly competitive executive program for museum leaders at the Getty Institute for Leadership, was a peer reviewer for the Alliance of American Museums, visiting and assessing museums that applied for accreditation. Highly active in the Southern California arts community, she served on panels for selecting public art.

At the same time, throughout her life, she continued to make and show her own art to acclaim.