

Marlene Zimmerman
Jewish Artists Initiative Article

Marlene Sudmin Zimmerman, a member of the Jewish Artists Initiative, passed away January 15, 2023 just shy of her 90th birthday. Marlene, a prolific self-taught, Los Angeles-based artist who worked in multiple media, was driven by instinct, curiosity and joy to portray and document her environs and life experiences- an artist as cultural anthropologist.

A graduate of UCLA ('66), and member of the Beverly Hills High School Alumni Hall of Fame (class of '50), Marlene exhibited work across the world- from California to Texas and New York, to Zagreb, Croatia and Morges, Switzerland, showing work at the Jerusalem Biennale, the Los Angeles and Oakland Craft and Folk Art Museums, the Museum of Tolerance, The Museum of Women in the Arts, the Dallas Morton Meyerson Symphony Hall Jewish Arts Festival, and at a Wilshire Boulevard Temple Exhibit of her collection of ceramic synagogues from around the world. The Skirball Cultural Center has her work in their permanent collection, including ceramics, a painting, and a life size sukkot with 75 painted vignettes.

In 1976, in honor of the US Bicentennial, Marlene created a large painting celebrating people from American history, featuring portraits of 158 people who helped make this nation: pioneers, artists, politicians, writers, and entrepreneurs along the lines of John F. Kennedy, Lillian Russell, Frederick Douglas, and Levi Strauss, to name a few. *Their Presence was Felt* was displayed in the Beverly Hills Public Library for decades.

In 1980, after several years of exhibiting at the LA Street Scene Festival and watching "the world" walk by, Marlene designed and painted *Celebration of the Peoples of Los Angeles* to highlight the diversity of the city, creating 160 portraits depicting real people of over 80 ethnicities and nationalities. The work was celebrated by the city in a parade with Mayor Bradley, and published as a poster which was distributed to all city public libraries.

In 1999, she was asked to create a menorah for the Clinton White House and was invited to the Oval Office to celebrate Hannukah with the Clintons. The White House HGTV Christmas television special featured her at work in her studio that year. The Menorah which she created as a tribute to the historic Los Angeles Breed Street Shul is in the permanent collection of the Clinton Library, and a photo of the Clintons with the Menorah is shared each year to welcome in the holiday.

A large floral double reverse glass work with an etched key describing the provenance of each of its 60 Mediterranean vases and pitchers is a permanent installation at 350 North Canon Drive in Beverly Hills.

The National Women's Political Caucus published editions of two of her portrait paintings, *Women of Achievement*, which include over one hundred prominent women from history.

Her large watercolor scenes, playfully named *LA Seen*, memorialize iconic Los Angeles spots such as Fredericks of Hollywood and Rent-a-Wreck, before they were homogenized into strip malls.

Marlene was recognized with many awards over her career, winning first place out of 3000 entries in the Ladies Home Journal “New” Grandma Moses competition (1974), being honored at the Malibu Art Festival, the LA Street Scene, and the Santa Monica Art City Art Show, after starting off with her first award at age 13, a National Scholastic Award for her work depicting a Wilshire Boulevard Temple High Holiday overflow service in a church. She was a founding artist in the Beverly Hills Art Show (originally the Affaire in the Gardens) where her work was featured at every show, twice a year for 49 years, and won the “Mayor’s Purchase Award” many times.