



Leslie Lerner came to Ringling School of Art and Design in 1990 from California.

Ringling faculty member Lerner dies

The nationally known artist's paintings are displayed in museums around the country.

By CHARLIE HUISKING

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SARASOTA — Leslie Lerner, 55, a nationally known artist and a beloved faculty member at Sarasota's Ringling School of Art and Design, died Saturday after a long illness.

"Leslie was an incredible teacher and mentor for the students he taught here for the past 15 years . . .," said Ringling President Larry Thompson. "Leslie challenged his students, nurtured them and provided professional support to guide them toward a successful future."

Lerner came to Ringling in 1990 from the California College of Arts & Crafts in Oakland, where he was a senior lecturer.

A graduate of the University of Wisconsin, Lerner earned a master's degree from the San Francisco Art Institute. His paintings are in many public and private collections around the country, including those of the Corcoran Museum of Art in Washington, D.C., the Oakland Museum and the Norton Gallery of Art in West Palm Beach.

He was awarded a grant from the prestigious Pollack-Krasner Foundation.

"His work was all his own, and he allowed it to be open to so many thoughts and philosophies," said Mark Anderson, head of Ringling's fine arts department. "He pulled it all together in this lush, romantic style. His work was full of beautiful, desirable objects, but it was also intellectually sound."

Anderson said Lerner "probably put his students ahead of his own career. They were like family to him, and they kept in contact for years and years after they graduated."

Lerner once compared the art field to a game. "I teach my students to make art, and then where to take it," he said. "I give them addresses and names, introduce them to crit-

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LERNER FROM 1B

ics and curators. They see the pace and sophistication of the game . . . When they leave Ringling, they know the score.

"They also know the failure rate, and how hard it is to succeed. But they also know the game, and hopefully love it."

Lerner's influence locally extended far beyond the Ringling campus. Bruce Rodgers, the executive director of the Hermitage artists' colony on Manasota Key, called him an inspiration.

"He was consummate artist, in the way he taught and in the way he viewed the world," Rodgers said.

"I liked being in his aura. He inspired me to think about things in ways I hadn't considered before."

Survivors include his wife, Jill, and a daughter, Natalie. The family requests that donations be made to the Leslie Lerner Fine Arts Scholarship Fund, Ringling School of Art



COURTESY PHOTO

Lerner's "My Life in France: The Lost Boy, Good Evening."

and Design, 2700 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, FL 34234.

A memorial service will be

held at 6:30 p.m. Oct. 2 in the amphitheater of Ringling's Bayou Studios.

LESLIE LERNER, beloved husband of Jill and father of Natalie, died at home on September 10, at age 55 after a ferocious battle with cancer, without fear and facing the next itinerant journey. Painter, sculptor, inspirational teacher, indefatigable spirit, champion of art and artists, creator of narratives, imaginary companion of Antoinc Wattcau. Prodigious reader, fast talker, lover of words, tropical skies, twilight and enchiladas. His friends and family will remember his fierce engagement with the world, his loyalty, his wordplay, his impatience, his kindness, his vision, his torrent of talk, his walk, his one-eyed squint, and his humor. Over his decades-long career, Leslie was a dedicated art teacher at San Francisco State, the San Francisco Art Institute, and California College of Arts and Crafts. At his last position as art instructor at the Ringling School of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida, he was a prime architect of the Fine Arts program and served as both Senior Thesis Coordinator and the Director of the Pre-College Perspective Summer Program, where he guided and mentored many students. His paintings are represented in collections in museums around the country, including the Corcoran Museum of Art, the Oakland Museum, and the Norton Gallery of Art. Leslie will echo in our footsteps in museum halls, galleries, classrooms, studios, and anywhere that art lives. He leaves behind those who loved him, and his body of work, which will never die. In lieu of flowers, contributions will be welcomed at the Leslie Lerner Fine Arts Scholarship Fund at the Ringling School of Art and Design, 2700 North Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, FL 34234. A memorial service will be held on October 2nd, 6:30 PM, on the Ringling School campus at the amphitheatre of Bayou Studios.