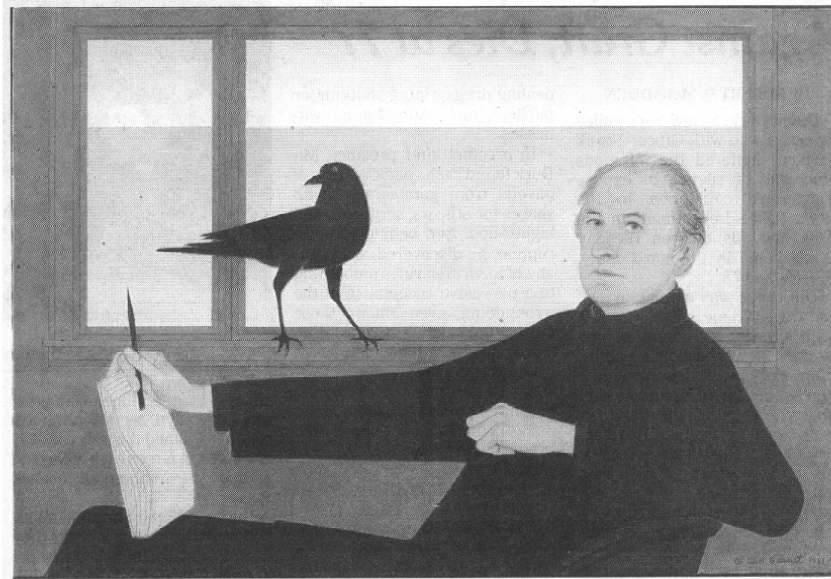


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"Self-Portrait" (1981), by Will Barnet; below, the artist in his New York studio home in 2011.

Will Barnet, Visionary Artist, Dies at 101

By KEN JOHNSON

Will Barnet, a printmaker and painter known for elegantly stylized portraits and classically composed visions of beautiful women and children, died on Tuesday at his home in Manhattan. He was 101.

His death was announced by Philippe Alexandre, whose gallery represented him. He had lived in the National Arts Club building on Gramercy Park since 1982.

In the prints and paintings that he produced from the mid-1960s on, Mr. Barnet ranged between a simplified form of realism and a poetic, visionary symbolism. A skilled draftsman, he created exactly linear, subtly colored portraits of family members and friends. In the enigmatic pictures he began making in the 1970s, he conjured images of women in dark woods or on the porches of seaside houses who appear to be waiting for loved ones like 19th-century sailors' wives.

A native of Beverly, Mass., Mr. Barnet attended the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and, on a scholarship, went to New York to study at the Art Students League, arriving in 1931, he once said, with \$10 and a portfolio of seascapes and portraits of the family cat. He worked briefly under Stuart Davis and became acquainted with the Surrealist artist Arshile Gorky.

Mr. Barnet started out as a Social Realist printmaker responding to the struggles of ordinary people during the Depression. He was "radicalized" at 19, he said, roaming the city and sketching the faces of the downtrodden while renting a room for \$1 a night.

Four years after joining the Art Students League he was appointed its official printer. He went on to work in graphic arts for the Depression-era Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project. He also made prints for the Mexican muralist José Clemente Orozco and the painter and political cartoonist William Gropper.

Mr. Barnet had his first solo exhibition at the Eighth Street Playhouse in Manhattan in 1935 and, three years later, his first gallery show at the Hudson Walker Gallery, also in Manhattan. That same year he married Mary Sinclair, a painter and fellow student, with whom he had three sons. In 1939 his work was included in "American Art Today" at the New York World's Fair.

Eventually his interest in Modernist formal innovations led to colorful, Picassoesque paintings depicting domestic family scenes, often featuring young children, and by the end of the 1940s his paintings had become entirely abstract. He soon fell in

with a group known as the Indian Space Painters, who created geometrically complex abstract paintings using forms derived from both Native American art and modern European painting.

But Mr. Barnet returned to traditionalist representational painting in the early 1960s. Under the influences of early Renaissance painting, Japanese printmaking and, perhaps obliquely, Pop Art, he made flattened, precisely contoured portraits of the architect Frederick Kiesler, the art critic Katherine Kuh and the art collector Roy Neuberger.

By then he was divorced and had married Elena Ciurlys in 1953. They had a daughter, Ona, and both she and her mother were subjects of his portraits as well. His later images of mysteri-

*A portraitist who
conjured images of
waiting women.*

ous waiting women showed the influences of Pre-Raphaelite narratives, Magritte's Surrealism and Edward Hopper's taciturn romanticism.

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In 2003 Mr. Barnet again changed course, returning to abstraction and resuming the engagement with bold shapes, vivid color and dynamic compositions that characterized his painting in the 1950s. He continued to work into his 90s, and in 2010 he was honored with an exhibition, "Will Barnet and the Art Students League," at the Phyllis Harriman Mason Gallery in Manhattan. He began teaching graphic arts and composition for the league in 1936, became an instructor of painting and continued to teach at the school until 1980.

"I didn't compromise, ever," he said in an interview with The New York Times on the occasion of the exhibition. "The old masters are still alive after 400 years, and that's what I want to be."

Mr. Barnet was born on May 25, 1911. His father, Noah, who had immigrated from Russia, was a machinist in a shoe factory. His mother, Sarahdina, came from Eastern Europe. Mr. Barnet became interested in art as a child and by age 12 had his own studio in his parents' basement.

He is survived by his wife, as well as his sons from his first marriage — Peter, a painter; Richard, a sculptor; and Todd, a lawyer — and the daughter from his second marriage, Ona, who owns and operates an inn in Maine; and seven grandchildren.

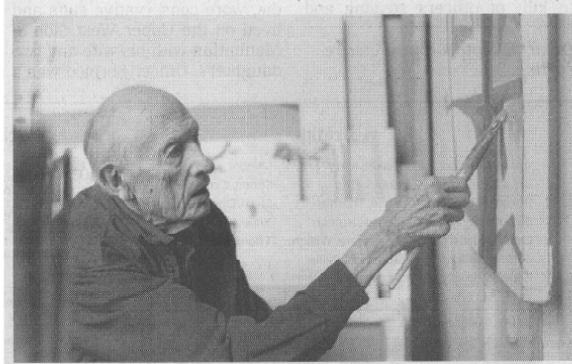
In addition to the Art Students League, Mr. Barnet taught at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art from 1945 to 1978 and, in shorter stints, at Yale, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and other schools. He was awarded a National Medal of Arts from 2011, which was presented by President Obama in a White House ceremony this year.

It was in 2011 when the Montclair Art Museum in New Jersey exhibited a selection of his canvases in honor of his centennial year. His work was also shown in many solo and group shows around the United States, including six appearances in the Whit-

ney Museum of American Art's annual exhibitions. He was the subject of several museum retrospectives. "Will Barnet at 100," presented at the National Academy Museum in 2011, was the last. It was also his first solo retrospective in New York.

Mr. Barnet's first encounters with art were the carvings of skeletal heads and other images on colonial tombstones in a local cemetery in Beverly.

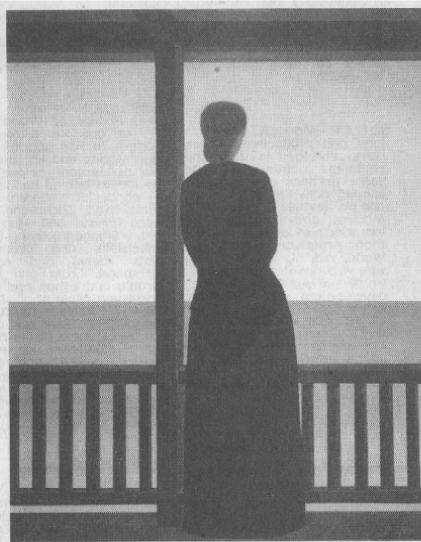
"These were mementos of what had taken place," he recalled. "At the age of 10 or 12, I discovered that being an artist would give me an ability to create something which would live on after death."



LUCAS JACKSON/REUTERS



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Above, "Woman and the Sea" (1972), and left, "Tom" (2003). In 2003 Mr. Barnet changed course, returning to abstraction, bold shapes and vivid color.

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