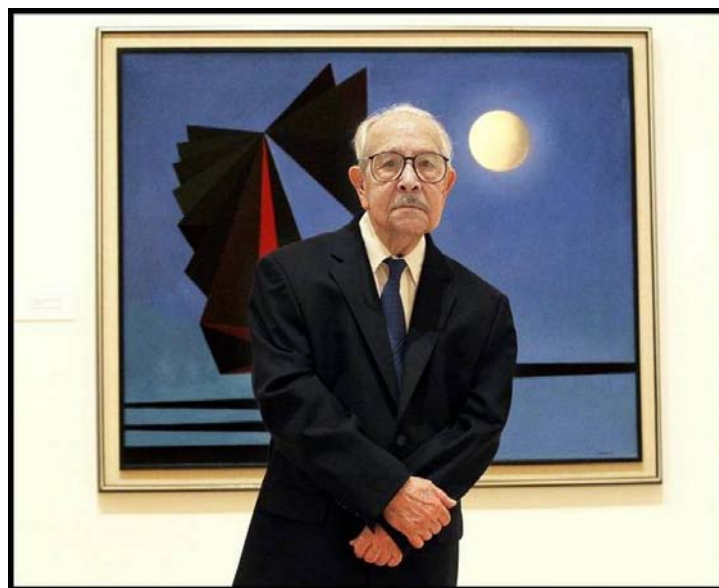


Miami Herald

Cuban painter Rafael Soriano dies in Miami at 94

BY JESÚS ROSADO - SPECIAL TO EL NUEVO HERALD

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Cuban master Rafael Soriano PEDRO PORTAL / EL NUEVO HERALD

Cuban painter Rafael Soriano — an abstract artist known for his deft handling of light, color and depth — died Thursday morning in his Miami home, surrounded by loved ones. He was 94.

Since his first steps into the realm of painting in the 1940s, Soriano immersed himself in abstractionism and soon became one of the primary practitioners of concrete art in Cuba and Latin America. Between 1958 and 1961 he was part of the renowned group of Ten Concrete Artists, which included Carmelo López, Wilfredo Arcay, Salvador Corratgé, Sandú Darié, Luis Martínez Pedro, Pedro de Oráa, Loló Soldevilla, José María Mijares and José Rosabal. Throughout the 1950s it was common to see his work at national exhibits of painting, sculpture and engraving in Havana.

Disappointed with the direction the Cuban revolution and ostracized by the government for devoting his work to a non-ideological art, he came to the United States with his wife, Milagros, and their daughter, Hortensia.

The early years of his exile were hard on his painting career. Soriano said at one point that sadness, his uprooting and the struggle to survive did not allow him to create as fluently as before.

Gradually, with the support of Milagros, he entered a new creative period. Between 1967 and 1970, he was a professor of design and composition at the University of Miami. At that point, his art would begin to gain new energy and he would take part in more than 50 personal shows and collective exhibits in U.S. and Latin American galleries and museums. He also had a strong presence in institutional and private collections.

Hortensia Soriano, the painter's daughter, shared with El Nuevo Herald the words his father used to repeat and which could be considered his credo as an artist: "I don't claim to transmit a message of reality. I am motivated by an eagerness to travel through the art of painting by the dimension of the spirit, where the intimate and the cosmic converge."

As a creator he lived totally devoted to his art and his family. He managed to consolidate his art outside any sort of commercialization. He never cared to create art by assignment.

"Soriano was an exemplary family man, a loving friend and a singular artist, gifted by profound sensitivity and imagination," said Jorge Moya, director of a documentary about Soriano's life and work, *The Depth of Silence*. (*La profundidad del silencio*, 2011).

In 2008, the Miami Dade College West Campus in Doral hosted an exhibit titled *Between the Mystic and the Spiritual*, in celebration of his 88th birthday, during which he was honored by the cities of Miami, Doral and Hialeah.

Rafael Soriano was born in Cidra, Matanzas, Cuba, on Nov. 23, 1920. He studied at the San Alejandro Art Academy in Havana, where he obtained a degree in painting and sculpture in 1943.

During those years, he met the critic José Gómez Sicre and painters Víctor Manuel and Fidelio Ponce, with whom he had a close friendship.

Back in Matanzas after his graduation, he founded the Provincial School of Fine Arts with Manuel Rodulfo Tardo, José Felipe Núñez, Juan Esnard and Roberto Diago. He was director of the center and

a professor there from 1943 until his departure to exile in 1962.

Soriano is survived by Milagros and Hortensia.

Funeral services will be held at Caballero Rivero Funeral Home at 3344 SW Eighth St., on Friday from 5 to 11 p.m. Burial will be at the Woodlawn Cemetery at 11 a.m. on Saturday.

Gustavo Orta and El Nuevo Herald reporter Sarah Moreno contributed to this report.