

Obituary

RICHANDA RHODEN

(1917 - 2016)

Some of us have known Mrs. Rhoden for more than half a century.

Our memories are keen—the earliest are of Richanda and her husband John returning to Brooklyn (by subway, of course) from a fine arts meeting in Manhattan. He, handsome, and she astonishingly chic in an outfit of her own design including a smart—usually tilted hat—that framed her calm expressive face.

Parties at their home, 23 Cranberry Street, welcomed numbers of artists and neighbors—people of many colors and all ages. There were always children—some very little ones galloping in place on John's glorious sculpted horses; there were adolescents and adults—all drank glug; some rode the motorized exercise bike machines. We stretched out on the furniture that John made, marveled at his glass and iron screens and, of course, the sculptures that called attention to our hosts' travels throughout the world. All loved Richanda's very beautiful paintings. Generations later, our grandchildren have had that same wonderful experience.

Where and how did the story begin? John was from Montgomery, Alabama and Richanda from Aberdeen in Washington State. Richanda's parents, one a Menominee and the other a Cherokee, met at Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle Pennsylvania. There, Richanda's father, James Phillips, attended Dickenson College of Law. In Aberdeen, Phillips was mayor; and he became the first Native American judge in the state. Still, Richanda grew up in a difficult time for Native Americans. She often spoke of being slighted for her ancestry. Young and bright, she would attend college in Seattle where she married a classmate who was killed in World War II.

Richanda came to New York soon afterwards. She modeled hats. Because she was so beautiful, she was cautioned not to speak to the husbands of prospective customers; they might bolt. She attended Columbia University intent on a Masters Degree in Asian Art. There she met John who was a student of sculpture. They began their life together living in Greenwich Village. Richanda taught painting in Stuyvesant High School's evening program for adults.

Their lives included several trips to Europe and Asia on John's grants and fellowships. In 1960, Richanda found their house, a garage converted from a livery stable on Cranberry Street. Together they converted the garage into a lovely home filled with their work: her paintings—impressionist flowers, portraits, naturescapes, abstract murals—and his sculpture which includes many enchanting figures of Richanda. And there was more—furniture and chandeliers John made, the two grand pianos Richanda played, one cat and the outdoor and indoor gardens where we all lived and laughed and loved life.

Mrs. Rhoden, a founder of the Cranberry Street Association, has been featured as New York 1 New Yorker of the Week. She died on December 23. Her memorial will be on April 4, her one hundredth birthday.

—By Beth Pacheco and neighbors

