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Art: A memorial to a great gallerist

Marion Locks has been called an earth mother to Philadelphia's art community.

By Edward Sozanski
Contributing Art Critic

Art dealers - many now call themselves gallerists - rarely become legendary. A new biography of Leo Castelli by Annie Cohen-Solal reconstructs in loving detail the life and times of one who did.

Castelli not only created an international market for American contemporary art, he became as integral to the art history of the last half of the last century as the artists he championed, especially Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg.

The publication of *Leo and His Circle* intersects with a Philadelphia event honoring a beloved and respected local dealer who, in her own way, was largely responsible for instigating a fertile and exciting period in the local art community.

Marian Locks, who died Feb. 26 at age 95, is remembered by artists here and elsewhere, especially those involved in the feminist movement, as a tireless and enthusiastic advocate for art and, more important, as a friend. While she didn't achieve Castelli's level of celebrity and influence, she became a Philadelphia institution - if you will, a legend.

The event in her honor is a memorial gathering at Locks Gallery Monday afternoon. It's private (by invitation) - which, considering how many people knew and admired her, seems a pity. But then, space is limited.

As I began to read the Castelli biography, I was struck by several parallels between their lives. He didn't open his first gallery until he was 50. Locks took the plunge in 1968, in a narrow sliver of a space on Chestnut Street, when she was 54.

Both succeeded because their early lives prepared them for the moment. Both were involved in art as collectors, and, most important, both loved art and artists. This was noticeably true for Locks, who has been described as an earth mother to the city's art community, a generous nurturer both of artists and young collectors.



Art dealer Marian Locks, who died Feb. 26 at age 95, will be remembered in a private gathering at Locks Gallery.



In a departure from the norm when she started, Locks made her mark by supporting local talent. Over more than four decades, the gallery has built up an impressive roster, from Tom Palmore and John Formicola to Warren Rohrer, Murray Dessner, Thomas Chimes, Edna Andrade, James Havard, Elizabeth Osborne, and Diane Burko.

Locks' gallery blossomed after she moved to a larger space on the second floor of 1524 Walnut St. in 1971. During the 1970s, she staged cultural events there, such as poetry readings, that attracted participants from New York.

A supporter of the feminist agenda as it related to the arts, she was a key player in a 1974 event called Philadelphia Focuses on Women in the Visual Arts. Also during the '70s, she convinced local corporations that patronizing local artists was both a civic virtue and good for business.

Her solicitous regard for her artists revealed itself in another way, when she opened a satellite space on lower Arch Street where she could show work that was less commercially viable than the painting and sculpture usually featured on Walnut Street.

In 1990, the gallery moved for the last time, to an elegant building on the southeast corner of Washington Square formerly occupied by book publisher Lea & Febiger. Over the last two decades, under the direction of daughter-in-law Sueyun Locks, the gallery has shown more work by nationally known artists while retaining a solid connection to the city through artists such as Burko and Osborne.

The quality that endeared me to Locks was her professional reserve. She was always available for questions about her exhibitions, but she never tried to press her viewpoint on me.

As a committed lover of art for its own sake, she presumed that eventually what she was showing would speak to me. If it didn't, the loss was mine. Her role was that of friendly cicerone, not of aggressive deal-closer.

Locks' view of her calling was humanistic and people-oriented. Perhaps that's why her gallery persists, while many others have come and gone since she opened 42 years ago.

Regardless of how long it remains in business, its founder will be remembered for her enthusiasms, her refined aesthetic ideals, and especially for the sense of community that made her gallery more than just a place to look at pictures.