

Avigdor Arikha

Avigdor Arikha (b.1929, Bukovina, Romania) moved to Paris in 1950 where he was an integral part of the artistic and intellectual life of the city until his death on 29 April 2010. A painter, draughtsman, printmaker and art historian, he is known for working only in natural light and for producing each of his works in one day.

Born into a German-speaking Jewish family, Arikha was deported, in 1941, to a Transnistrian concentration camp, where his father died. He survived thanks to sketches he composed on scraps of paper, depicting the horrors of the holocaust. Those were shown to delegates of the Red Cross, who facilitated his and his sister's escape.

In 1944, at the age of fifteen Arikha moved to the British Mandate of Palestine. Schooled in Jerusalem mostly by Bauhaus teachers who had escaped Germany, Arikha adopted a modernist approach, mastering multiple skills and mediums in line with Bauhaus principles.

He moved to Paris to attend the École des Beaux-Arts, where he settled amongst a community of artists, writers and academics. Although described by Ann Wroe in *The Economist* as 'perhaps the best painter from life in the last decades of the 20th century' Arikha was an abstract painter until the mid-Sixties when, encouraged by his great friend Alberto Giacometti, he found renewed passion in representation. In 1956 he met Samuel Beckett, a close friendship which was to have a profound impact on his life (His first daughter, Alba, was named after one of Beckett's poems). One day in 1965, after viewing Caravaggio's *Raising of Lazarus* in the Louvre, Arikha felt 'a violent hunger in the eyes' and a desire to capture with immediacy, the truth of a person or object in that very moment. He subsequently focussed on solely figurative, black and white drawing for a period of eight years, prioritising the act of observation over memory or imagination.

In 1973, Arikha began working in colour again. Partly on the basis of fresco techniques he had been taught at the Beaux Arts, he created a medium that made paint dry under his hand, forcing him to complete each work within a single day. He worked only in natural light, painting urgently with no preparatory sketches.

Painting often from his top-floor home studio, his subject matter included still-lives, landscapes, interiors and portraits. The crowded views of Parisian rooftops allowed skilful examination of perspective and light; as with his still-lives and portraits that captured social life at the apartment and the character of his wife, two daughters and remarkable coterie of friends, including Samuel Beckett, Giacometti and Henri Cartier-Bresson, amongst others.

Throughout the eighties and nineties Arikha also rose to prominence as an art historian, lecturing around the world. He curated exhibitions internationally, including Ingres at the Frick Collection, New York and Poussin at the Louvre, Paris. In 1992 he was commissioned by The BBC to make a documentary about Velazquez.

Arikha's work is in public collections worldwide including: British Museum, London, UK; Denver Art Museum, Denver, US; Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, IT; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., US; Israel Museum, Jerusalem, ISR; The Jewish Museum, New York, US; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, US; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon, FR; Musée du Louvre, Paris, FR; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR; National Portrait Gallery, London, UK; Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh, UK; Tate, London, UK.

He has been awarded many prizes and honorary degrees, and named a Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur in 2005.

Arikha is survived by his wife, two daughters and four grandchildren. His wife, the writer Anne Atik, is one of his most painted subjects along with their two daughters, Alba and Noga, an author/musician, and a historian of ideas respectively.