

Jan Baum

1928–2017

JAN WAS BORN in Newark, New Jersey, a stone's throw from New York City on the Hudson tubes, which she utilized frequently as a teenager, to take her to the museums and galleries of the Big Apple. She learned two lessons early on that shaped her later life. When she was five, she and a group of older playmates decided to have a race, she on her tricycle and they on bikes. After coming in a humiliating last, she said to herself, "I will never come in last again, and I will do my best to come in first." She realized that goal by studying, reading, and observing, and at fifteen she graduated high school as class valedictorian and the winner of the science award.

The second lesson came when she was gallery-going in New York and found a small Paul Klee painting for \$950. It was more than she had, but with an after-school job as a cashier at her father's specialty store, she could have paid for the painting over time, although the gallery owner never mentioned that. When she eventually had her own gallery, she encouraged collectors, especially beginning ones, who loved a painting to pay over time, even if it took years.

At the University of Wisconsin, she took an art history class, and she knew where her future lay. She graduated magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa, and was named a "Badger Beauty." I met her there, and she had everything I could ask for—brains, brightness, beauty, and a desire to really do something with her life. She felt I was much too serious for her sixteen years and did everything she could to discourage me, even to the point of fixing me up with dates with other girls. After a "whirlwind romance" of five years, we were married in 1951.

Jan graduated from college in 1950, returning to her home in Newark and worked as a researcher. We moved to Los Angeles together in 1952 and there raised three children. When they no longer needed a parent at home, Jan

became a docent at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, specializing in contemporary art, but voraciously reading about and studying art of all periods. After a few years, she was asked to be on the selections committee of the museum's Art Rental Gallery, which involved visiting three or four artists' studios a week.

In 1977, her close friend Iris Silverman suggested the two open a gallery together. Iris, who collected African and Indonesian art, would handle tribal art and Jan, with her connections from the museum, would be in charge of contemporary art. She immediately knew which artists she wanted to show. These were to include Chris Burden, Betye Saar, Alison Saar, Darren Waterston, Jim Morphesis, Mel Rubin, and Peter Plagens.

While the gallery was being built out, the tribal art that was bought for the gallery was stored at our home. A pair of Yoruba house posts ended up in our bedroom, and the first morning we woke up and said, "Gosh, they're more interesting than I thought." Each morning the praise increased, and by the fourth day, we were hooked as collectors and Jan as a devoted dealer.

Unfortunately, Iris died when the gallery was only two years old, but by then Jan had immersed herself in tribal art by learning from Iris and by visiting museums, collections, and dealers, again along with voracious reading. She carried on with tribal art for the next twenty-eight years, and African and Indonesian art always had an equal place in her heart with contemporary art.

Up to her retirement at the end of 2007, she welcomed the person off the street as readily as she did a celebrity. She encouraged artists, even those who showed her work that didn't fit the gallery's program. She was a friend to all her artists and collectors and to so many other people.

In retirement, she continued with museum- and gallery-going, still read voraciously, still collected tribal art until cerebral edema set in and robbed her of her most precious asset—her wonderful mind. She passed away on Christmas Day 2017. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors adjourned their January 9 meeting in tribute and reverence to Jan's memory.

Richard Baum

