



# Ed Moses, “Cool School” and LA Pioneer Painter, Dies at 91

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by Pat Rogers

Ed Moses, a noted California artist and “Cool School” pioneer, died on Wednesday, January 17, 2018 at his home in Venice, California, [reported the Los Angeles Times](#). He was 91 years old.

Considered one of Los Angeles’s most innovative painters and a central figure in the city’s art scene, Ed Moses often referred to himself as a “mutator,” driven less by the desire for self-expression than by an insatiable curiosity to explore and discover, according to the newspaper. Moses formed the “Cool School” of artists — who included Ed Ruscha, Robert Irwin, Larry Bell, Edward Kienholz, John Altoon, Ken Price and Billy Al Bengston — at L.A.’s influential Ferus Gallery in the 1950s and ’60s. The group fused the nascent local scene and also made the art world at large take notice, according to the [Los Angeles Times](#).



Ed Moses in his studio. Photo by Frank Thomas, courtesy of the artist’s studio and Albertz Benda..

In a career that spanned seven decades, [Ed Moses](#) received both national and international recognition for his art. Ed Moses’s work is included in the collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, The Hammer Museum, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, and The Museum of Modern Art in New York, among others.

Born on April 9, 1926 in Long Beach, California, Ed Moses did not initially choose the artistic path. After serving as a surgical technician during World War II, Moses intended to become a doctor. He enrolled in Long Beach City College’s pre-med program, but dropped out, citing his inability to memorize the curriculum. On a whim, he took a life-changing class with artist Pedro Miller, who recognized the spark of untapped talent, according to his gallerist Ferus Gallery. Moses changed course and enrolled in UCLA’s MFA program.

Moses had his first exhibition at Ferus Gallery in 1958 while still a graduate student at UCLA. It was at Ferus that Moses would become a member of the raucous group of artists known as the “Cool School”; a group who pushed the boundaries of Post-War art and shaped the LA art scene at a time when almost none existed. His decades long friendships in the art world include Frank Gehry, Tony

Berlant, Vija Celmins, Alexis Smith and James Hayward.

A Buddhist practitioner since 1978, Moses worked in the moment, embracing and responding to elements of chance and circumstance, according to Albertz Benda Gallery. Endlessly intrigued with the metaphysical power of painting, he created works that embraced temporality, process and presence, remarking that “the point is not to be in control, but to be in tune.”

Ed Moses obsessively mined the possibilities of abstract painting for over 60 years, leaving an indelible mark on the contemporary art world. He was extraordinarily productive and, even in his 90s, showed little signs of slowing down and painted daily outdoors in his Venice studio, located outside of L.A.

Moses’s art took off in 1972 with his work exhibited in a dozen venues and included solo shows in London, Minneapolis, Los Angeles and Documenta in Germany, according to the [Los Angeles Times](#). In 1976, LACMA presented a series of abstract red paintings that bucked the trend in “Ed Moses: New Paintings.” In 1976, he won a National Endowment for the Arts grant and a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1984. In 1991, Moses had two solo shows at Louver Gallery (New York and LA) and was selected to be part of the Whitney Museum of American Art’s Biennial.

In the last few years, his work was featured in a solo show at LACA in 2015; a survey in 2016 at William Turner Gallery in Santa Monica and a [retrospective at Albertz Benda Gallery](#) in New York. In 2017, his art was featured at the New Britain Museum of Art in Connecticut in “[California Dreaming: Ed Moses, Billy Al Bengston & Ed Ruscha](#).” In The Hamptons, Moses was interviewed as part of [The Artist Profile Archive](#) in 2014. In 2012, his work was honored as the Artist of the Year at Art Hamptons and was exhibited by [Mark Borghi Fine Art](#).



Gallerist Mark Borghi and artist Ed Moses at Art Hamptons 2012. Photo by Pat Rogers.

In March 2018, albertz benda will continue with its long-planned presentation of Moses’s 1970’s ‘Pulled Wedge’ pieces at the [Armory Show](#). A solo exhibition will take place at the New York gallery in May 2018, which will feature work from three decades.

Ed Moses is survived by his wife, Avilda, sons Cedd and Andy, their wives Pamela and Kelly, and grandchildren Maxwell and Violette. A memorial celebrating Ed Moses’s life is planned for the spring, according to Albertz Benda.