

With his Danish complexion, light eyes and reddish beard, he looked the way I imagined a tall and lean Van Gogh would look. He was smart, funny, encouraging, demanding, superbly peculiar and so elegantly and eloquently brilliant—very, very brilliant. Without exaggeration, I can say that my world was forever changed by encountering him in that first unlikely class. I soon enrolled in every class he instructed—figure drawing, watercolor and, ultimately, sculpture—where I found my place. He gave me the courage to become a full-fledged art student and declare a major in art, and after I graduated, he pushed and encouraged me to leave home to pursue graduate school. He believed in my potential as an artist, and he encouraged me to believe in myself. His teaching is what inspired me to become a teacher.

HE WAS CENTRAL TO THIS PLACE, WHO WE ARE AS A COMMUNITY...

Artist Joseph Beuys said, “To be a teacher is my greatest work of art.” Teaching was indeed a work of art in the hands of Bob. In the university art studios, he was not content with merely instructing students to acquire drawing, painting and/or sculpting skills. He insisted that we understood the bridge between making and thinking. He demanded that we apply ourselves, not only manually through labor, but creatively and intellectually, always at the highest level. He operated under the premise that critical thought is an essential aspect of the creative process. Nowhere was this more evident than in his critiques.

Every assignment from Bob was followed by an in-depth critical analysis of each individual piece. And his critiques were like no

others. They were a combination of project evaluation and art lecture.

I can’t remember a time when Bob lectured down to students; rather, he treated each of us with extreme seriousness and showed respect for what we had created. He generously delivered lectures about ourselves and about how our work fit into the bigger scheme of the art world and culture in general. He brilliantly wove together careful and hard-hitting scrutiny of our work with contemporary, historical, literary and philosophical references. His critiques were intellectually demanding and rigorous. No doubt much of this was over our heads at any given moment, and all of it could be wildly intimidating, but that did not deter him. Bob trusted we would eventually “get it.”

Countless people’s experiences mirror my own. Robert/Bob/Professor Morrison greatly affected our individual worlds. Truly we are better human beings and better artists for having known him, studied with him, worked with him—even briefly. Many of us wandered into his classes not knowing what to expect. He led by example, showing us how and why to believe in and care deeply about art and the mysterious, unpredictable and elegant ways it communicates ideas. He invited us and gave us permission to be artists, whether for a semester or for the duration of our lives. We carry his generosity of spirit and brilliance with us, forever changed by the things he said and did and the incredible art he made. It is a struggle to imagine the world without him here. Our collective hearts ache that we do not have more time to spend talking, listening, laughing, learning and making art with him. He is, and will always be, sorely missed. Bob’s influence will live on in all of us. □

Because of the incredible number of students’ lives Professor Morrison touched throughout his long career, a memorial scholarship is being established at the University of Nevada, Reno in his memory. The scholarship will benefit future art students at UNR. Online contributions can be made here: <https://bit.ly/2CImT5C>.



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