

[Jane Kaufman](#), a fierce Second Wave feminist, pioneer of the Pattern and Decoration movement, an arts activist, and a member of the Guerrilla Girls, died of lung cancer at her home in Andes, New York, on June 2. She had just celebrated her 83rd birthday.

Although she resided for the last 17 years in the Catskills, few of her many acquaintances in the area knew of her distinguished past. They remember her instead as a vivacious, funny, terrific gardener. As Jan Albert, a close friend, said over the phone with *ARTnews*, “I had no idea of her serious background whatsoever” until the two really got to know each other. Albert described in an email a final gathering of friends where Kaufman, “reclined on the sofa with red flowers in her hair,” while “dirty jokes were told and songs were sung.”

A native New Yorker, Kaufman earned a BA from NYU in 1960 and an MA from Hunter College in 1965. By the early 1970s, she was exhibiting her work widely. New York’s Whitney Museum of American Art hosted her solo show “Recent Paintings” in 1971, and she participated in the 1973 Whitney Biennial. She was also among the first women to teach in the art department at Bard College, where she spent the 1972–73 academic year. In 1974, she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Initially a painter, Kaufman soon began incorporating embroidery and textile elements of that she had learned from her grandmother. She became part of a group of artists who relished maximalist decorative beauty. Developed during the mid-1970s to 1980s as a deliberate contrast to Minimalism, the Pattern and Decoration movement is credited with focusing both on the contributions of women artists—though there were men in the group—and on what was traditionally, in Eurocentric contexts, considered mere “practical” endeavors, such as mending, quilt-making, and embellishment.

Joyce Kozloff, a well-known member of the Pattern and Decoration group, who knew Kaufman well during its heyday, said of Kaufman: “She was passionate about this subject, decoration, and she was fearless, too.”

In 1976, Kozloff was one of 10 artists Kaufman selected to show their work at the Alessandra Gallery in New York. The exhibition, “Ten Approaches to the Decorative,” was accompanied by a document with statements from the artists. In her entry, Kaufman explained her fascination with light as a subject in itself, writing that metallic thread and bugle beads, like those sometimes used on handbags and dresses, enabled her to “make purely abstract paintings about light; ‘real’ light—reflected, not absorbed, and at the same time explore the decorative element inherent in the materials.” The pieces Kaufman showed in the exhibition were riffs on Frank Stella’s black paintings, but smaller and beaded. As she wrote, “I want them to stud the walls—to stud in the ornamental sense.”

As the Pattern and Decoration movement went out of style, Kaufman used her textile skills to upholster friends’ sofas and redirected her decorative passion to gardening.

Kaufman was also active in feminist art circles, perhaps most famously the Guerrilla Girls. Eschewing an pseudonym, she was one of the few to reveal her identity. According to an email from fellow

member Frida Kahlo (an alias) Kaufman had “the ability to get right to the center of an issue and the courage and the principles to confront the powers that be.”

Later in life, Kaufman continued to march and protest, sometimes with Albert. As Albert got to know more about Kaufman’s illustrious past, she joined in the artist’s delight at seeing her work recognized again in the LA MoCA exhibition “Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972-1985” and on the cover of the accompanying catalogue. The show, curated by Anna Katz, opened in late October 2019, but closed several months early in mid-March 2020 due to the pandemic. The survey is currently on view at Bard’s Hessel Museum of Art in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, through November 28, 2021.

There, hung on one wall is the work Kaufman called her finest, *Embroidered, Beaded Crazy Quilt* (1983–85), its dimensions suitable for a queen-sized bed. The effect of myriad rectilinear shapes, in shades and patterns of mostly purple with some pink, combined with 16 stitched-and-beaded flowers in blue and red on black, is both oddly comforting and disturbing. There’s a sweetness to the flowers, and edginess to the cacophony of joined fabric.

According to Katz, Kaufman used more than 100 historical embroidery stitches, which she’d researched at the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C. She did all of the stitching and beading herself, by hand. When Katz first saw the quilt, it was hanging on the artist’s wall, where her cat was clawing it. The work is, said Katz in an interview at Bard with *ARTnews*, a true crazy quilt. “A crazy quilt is traditionally a quilt that’s made from scraps of leftovers. And that is a tenet, really, of women’s home economy. You use what is available. That’s also an underlying principle of decoration. You use the space that is given,” Katz explains. “And within that, you make it as beautiful, as colorful, as interesting, as compelling as you can make it.” And that sentiment could well describe Kaufman herself.

Source: [Jane Kaufman, Guerrilla Girl and Pioneer of the Pattern and Decoration Movement, Dies at 83](#)