

Berrell Jensen - *Grad Dipl. (AA)* - 1933-2015



Berrell Jensen died on the 25th of July 2015 at Mercy University Hospital, Cork, Ireland. Berrell was a South African-born metal sculptor, social worker and teacher. She graduated from the Architectural Association in 1984 with a GradDipl(AA) in Planning.

Born in Potchefstroom in 1933, Berrell graduated from Natal University in Durban with a BSc in Social Science. She had a number of jobs including librarian, laboratory assistant in a paint factory and public relations officer for Lever Brothers. While her husband, Anton Jensen was completing his Masters, she began making metal mobiles for sale. Known for her practical aptitude, perhaps inspired from childhood days spent at her father's garage and repair shop, she studied welding and was soon creating large sculptures and panels created out of copper, bronze, silver and enamels. She organized her first exhibition in 1960 in Durban, Natal.

In the next eight years Berrell had nineteen exhibitions, seven of these as a solo artist. Her work was spotted by architects and she completed fourteen large-scale public commissions including fountains. Her mural in copper and bronze for the Jan Smuts International Airport V.I.P. lounge measured eighteen by four metres.

Berrell's inspirations included Henry Moore, Alexander Calder and Reg Butler. Of her creative technique she has written: *"I have chosen to work directly in metal, perhaps as much for practical as for personal reasons. Oxy-acetylene welding (the welding torch is my basic tool) has great flexibility and with it I have made a great range of things from delicate jewellery to large outdoor sculpture. The result is durable and no further process such as costly casting is necessary. In any event, having acquired this technique I have proceeded to explore it as fully as possible. The metals bronze and copper have tremendous versatility as regards both form and surface treatment and their possibilities as sculptural materials are inexhaustible so I have used them predominantly. Lately I have found myself including the colder metal – brass. The technique and the metal act as a guide and give the character*

imposed by the limitations they have and I express my ideas and feelings within these limitations. My own integrity is at stake if I try to show results not related to the real characteristics of the metal and techniques I use."

After the tragic death of her husband in a car accident in Greece in 1969, she lived in England, where she had six exhibitions and was interviewed for BBC and HTV television programs. In 1977, as part of an initiative to develop local industries, she was invited by Father McDyer to set up a craft centre in Glencolumbkille, Co. Donegal, Ireland. This was in effect the start of a new career. In Belfast she was appointed Assistant Director of the Open Centre, an adult education centre funded by charitable trusts. In London, while also studying at the Architectural Association for a Diploma in Planning, she set up the Highgate Newtown Community Centre. She then became Hampstead Community Centre's Centre Director, a post she held for nine years.

Berrell returned to Ireland in 1993, where she bought a 300-year-old Protestant church in Rochfortbridge, Co. Westmeath. She renovated the building, designating a large area as a metal studio. She began welding again, completing several commissions including for the Midland Health Board in Tullamore and the Tanyard Resource Centre in Offaly. The Dublin Corporation commissioned six metal screens, each 1.75 metres wide by 5.82 metres high for the entrance stairwells of the Marrowbone Lane Flats. This work she completed just prior to her first hip-replacement in 1996, at age 63.

She was a fervent environmentalist and in 2001 organised a County Westmeath environmental group objecting to a controversial planning application for a landfill site in the Killucan area. Her knowledge of local wild life, peat bog and wetlands helped prevent the dump proceeding.

Berrell settled in Co. Cork in 2003, where she put her boundless energy into gardening. She will be much missed for her humour, enthusiasm, determination, patience and loyalty. Berrell is survived by her daughter Sandra, a writer, her son Michael, an IT and communications consultant, and by her three grandchildren, Oliver, Hugh, and Lucia.

Obituary downloaded December, 2015, from

<http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/PUBLIC/NEWSNOTICES/obituaries.php>