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Michael Goldberg, 83, Abstract Expressionist

By GRACE GLUECK

Michael Goldberg, an abstract painter of the New York School whose vibrant works are in major museums and private collections, died on Sunday in Manhattan. He was 83.

The apparent cause was a heart attack he suffered while working in his studio on the Bowery, said his wife, the artist Lynn Umlauf. It was the same studio he took over from Mark Rothko in the 1950s.

Mr. Goldberg was a painter of strong convictions who in his youth was influenced by the gestural Abstract Expressionist mode of older painters like Kline, Still and de Kooning, and never abandoned it. The improvisational nature of jazz, which he admired, was also important to his work.

Stuck like some of his peers with the label "second-generation Abstract Expressionist," Mr. Goldberg shrugged it off. "Labels come and go," he told Saul Ostrow, the conceptual artist who was a close friend, in a 2001 interview for the magazine *Bomb*. "It makes no difference to what you're trying to do."

He saw abstract painting, he told Mr. Ostrow, as "still the primary visual challenge of our time. It might get harder and harder to make an abstract im-

An artist who kept a legacy alive while breaking new ground.

age that's believable, but I think that just makes the challenge greater."

Mr. Goldberg and his wife both taught at the School of Visual Arts. Since 1980 he had spent five months of each year in Tuscany, Italy, on an estate outside Siena. Most of the works produced there last summer appeared in his show at Knoedler & Company in September. Done with oil sticks pressed directly against the canvas, a method Mr. Goldberg chose some years ago over brushing with paint, they are energetic productions based on what he called a "quasi grid," with patchy squares of color intersected at random by strong diagonals.

Born in the Bronx on Dec. 24, 1924, Michael Goldberg began classes at the Art Students League at 14. From 1940 to 1942 he attended the school run by the Abstract Expressionist painter and teacher Hans Hofmann. His studies were interrupted at 18 when he volunteered for Army



FOGG ART MUSEUM

Untitled, Michael Goldberg.

service in World War II. He became a master sergeant in North Africa and Burma with the commando unit known as Merrill's Marauders. Mr. Goldberg received a Purple Heart and the Bronze Star that was awarded to every member of the unit.

After further study at the League and the Hofmann school, he set up shop as a painter, eventually occupying Rothko's Bowery loft. Hanging out at the Cedar Street Tavern and with the Eighth Street Club, a discussion group founded by downtown art-

ists in 1949, he came under the influence of Abstract Expressionism.

In 1951 his work made its first public appearance in the Ninth Street Show, a groundbreaking exhibition of the new New York avant-garde organized by the club and the dealer Leo Castelli. In 1953 the Tibor de Nagy Gallery gave him his first solo show.

Besides Ms. Umlauf, whom he met in 1969 and married 10 years later, Mr. Goldberg is survived by a younger brother, Gerald Jay Goldberg, of Manhattan, and two stepchildren from an earlier marriage to the writer Patsy Southgate: Luke Matthiessen of Brooklyn and Sara Carey Matthiessen of Northport, L.I.

In his youth, he reminisced, he and his colleagues never expected to make money at painting and created art just for themselves. When buyers began to appear in the mid 1950s, he recalled, the collector Walter P. Chrysler Jr. came to his studio one day and bought \$10,000 worth of his work, to be paid in \$2,500 installments. Unemployed at the time, with no bank account, Mr. Goldberg received the first payment on a freezing midwinter day. His first act was to buy an electric blanket. He spent the weekend in bed under the blanket, the money tucked beneath his arm.