

LAWRENCE HALPRIN, Landscape Architect (1916-2009)

Lawrence Halprin (July 1, 1916 - October 25, 2009) was an American landscape architect, designer and teacher. His point-of-view and practice are summarized in his definition of modernism: "To be properly understood, Modernism is not just a matter of cubist space but of a whole appreciation of environmental design as a holistic approach to the matter of making spaces for people to live.... Modernism, as I define it and practice it, includes and is based on the vital archetypal needs of human being as individuals as well as social groups." In his best work, he construed landscape architecture as narrative.

Halprin grew up in Brooklyn, New York; and as a schoolboy, he earned acclaim playing sandlot baseball. He also invested three of his teenage years in Palestine on a kibbutz near what is today the Israeli port city of Haifa. He earned a B.A. at Cornell University; and he was granted a M.A. at the University of Wisconsin. Then he earned a second bachelor's degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where his professors included architects Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer. His Harvard classmates included Philip Johnson and I.M. Pei. A visit to Taliesin East, Frank Lloyd Wright's studio in Wisconsin, had sparked Halprin's initial interest in being a designer; and his formal training began in classes with Christopher Tunnard.

In 1944, Halprin was commissioned in the United States Navy as a Lieutenant (junior grade). He was assigned to the destroyer USS Morris in the Pacific which was struck by a kamikaze attack. After surviving the destruction of the Morris, Halprin was sent to San Francisco on leave. It was there he would stay following his discharge. After discharge from military service, he joined the firm of San Francisco landscape architect Thomas Dolliver Church. The projects he worked on in this period included the Dewey Donnell Garden (El Novillero) in Sonoma County. Halprin opened his own office in 1949, becoming one of Church's professional heirs and competitors.

Halprin's wife, accomplished avant-garde dancer Anna Halprin, is a long-time collaborator, with whom he explored the common areas between choreography and the way users move through a public space. They are the parents of Daria Halprin, an American psychologist, author, dancer, and actress.

Halprin's work is marked by his attention to human scale, user experience, and the social impact of his designs, in the egalitarian tradition of Frederick Law Olmsted. Halprin was the creative force behind the interactive, 'playable' civic fountains most common in the 1970's, an amenity which continues to greatly contribute to the pedestrian social experience in Portland Oregon, where "Ira's Fountain" is loved and well-used,

