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Brookie Maxwell, an Artist and Curator, Dies at 59

By **Sam Roberts**

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Brookie Maxwell, a painter, sculptor and curator who immersed herself in social causes and viewed art as a spiritual haven for homeless children, died on Wednesday at her home in Manhattan. She was 59.

The cause was ovarian cancer, her son, Ellis Dolin Maxwell, said.

A daughter of William Maxwell, the novelist and editor of literary luminaries at *The New Yorker*, Ms. Maxwell founded the Creative Arts Workshops in 1986 for children in New York's welfare hotels and homeless shelters.

In 1999, she opened Gallery 138, at 138 West 17th Street in Chelsea, which helped start the careers of artists. She created her own public art installations and produced group exhibitions on subjects such as Hurricane Katrina and the Rwandan genocide.

Ms. Maxwell also founded a visual and conversational art project with veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan to bridge the gap between soldiers and civilians. She was working on the project, titled "Coming Home: Journey, Community and Dialog," at her death.

"She believed that art was meant to heal and inspire and to bring people together and to express humanity," Mr. Maxwell said.

Emily Brooke Maxwell was born on Oct. 15, 1956, in Manhattan. Her father worked at *The New Yorker* for four decades. Her mother, the former Emily Noyes, was an artist, poet and teacher who also wrote for the magazine.

"Many American readers discovered Maxwell in the mid-1980s when Godine Press revived his work in elegant paperback editions graced by the cover art of his younger daughter, Brookie," Barbara Burkhardt wrote in 2005 in "William Maxwell: A Literary Life."

A graduate of the School of Visual Arts in New York City, she also studied at the Institute of African Studies at Columbia and at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard.



Ms. Maxwell, next to one of her art exhibits, in 2000.
Frances Roberts for The New York Times

In addition to her son, she is survived by her sister, Katharine Aulia Maxwell. Her marriage to Christopher Dolin ended in divorce.

Ms. Maxwell first worked as a magazine illustrator and designer and later designed murals and sculptures for Bellevue Hospital Center, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, while directing the Creative Arts Workshops.

She was inspired by volunteering on weekends at summer camp art workshops, her son recalled. Her involvement, he said, “had a huge impact on the kids because someone came along and was interested in what they had to say.”

Among the workshops’ early projects was a 125-foot mural called “Calle de Suenos” — street of dreams — on the side of the Triborough Post Office at East 124th Street, between Lexington and Third Avenues, in East Harlem. The mural was a collaboration — involving 75 people — of 5- to 15-year-olds and accomplished artists, including Christo and Jeanne-Claude, his wife.

Covering 5,000 square feet, the mural depicted a wishful cityscape of children being driven to school in a red limousine, police barricades that said “Go Right Ahead,” a cameo by the Wizard of Oz and an absence of security guards.

“I asked them to start drawing and writing about what would be on their dream street,” Ms. Maxwell said. “The only rules were ‘no guns, no killing, no drugs.’ ”

Her protégés also built a 25-foot-high statue on an adjacent city-owned vacant lot, a compilation of bed coils of curly hair, a shield of flags symbolizing peace and a solar-powered eye. But the work was demolished a year later by the city’s Department of Housing Preservation and Development in an apparent case of bureaucratic confusion.

Ms. Maxwell bought a loft on West 17th Street, near Seventh Avenue, and installed a gallery on the premises. There, for a show commemorating the Supreme Court’s decision desegregating public schools in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the artist Satch Hoyt created a life-size cast-sugar bust of Thurgood Marshall, who argued the case before the court and later became an associate justice.

During one week, Mr. Hoyt made several models and stored them in the refrigerator.

“Ellis’s friends would come over,” Ms. Maxwell recalled, “and ask, ‘Can I lick Thurgood Marshall’s face again?’ ”

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