

Matt Phillips, 89, who came to Bard in 1964 to direct the nascent Procter Art Center and chaired the Bard College Art Department for nearly a quarter of a century, died on March 1, 2017. In his first years at the College, Phillips helped assemble a faculty in painting, sculpture, and art history that remains one of the finest in any liberal arts college. A longtime resident of Emeryville, California, he also had a summer home in Pray, Montana, where he made art and fly-fished on the Yellowstone River.

Phillips was born in New York City and raised primarily in Philadelphia. He began his formal art education at the Barnes Foundation and earned a master's degree in literature at the University of Chicago. After teaching stints at Penn State and the American College of Paris (now called American University of Paris), he joined the faculty at Bard. His first wife, Lois Shapiro was an active part of the Bard community, performing in several productions directed by drama professor Bill Driver. In 1968, Phillips and Shapiro divorced, and he married Sandra Sammataro '67. Phillips retired from Bard in 1987 and moved to San Francisco, where Sammataro had taken a job as curator of photography at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. They divorced in 1989. Phillips was also married for six years to paper conservator Susannah Hays, who collaborated with him on several limited-edition art books.



Matt Phillips. PHOTO Elizabeth Chapman

Phillips is credited with reviving and promoting the monotype—a drawing made on a plate, usually metal, that is then transferred to paper—as a viable artistic medium. In 1967, he organized a Maurice Prendergast exhibit at Procter that brought long—overdue attention to that artist's powerful body of work, and his 1971 Milton Avery works-on-paper show continued a friendship with the artist's widow, Sally Avery, that would lead, 10 years later, to the establishment of the Milton and Sally Avery Arts Center and the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts on the Bard campus.

Phillips was an able administrator, excellent curator, and a beloved teacher, but he is best known for his own artwork. In 1977, Hilton Kramer wrote in the *New York Times*, "Matt Phillips is an artist who has made the monotype his special forte, and he exercises a remarkable control and very often an exquisite sensitivity in his handling of the painterly nuances that can be drawn from this branch of printmaking."

Phillips was inspired by the French masters, particularly Pierre Bonnard. "I enjoy sensual subjects," he told the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 2002. "I don't come down on the side of suffering and tragedy."

In 1982, Phillips did the illustrations for Ashel B. Edelman Professor of English Robert Kelly's book *Mulberry Women: A Poem*, which was published in an edition of 20. Phillips' art is in the collections of the Whitney Museum of Art and Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, National Gallery of Art and Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., Art Institute of Chicago, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Baltimore Museum of Art, and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, among others. He showed at Meyerovich Gallery in San Francisco, where his most recent exhibition, "I Am Not Done with My Changes," works on paper made from 2009 to 2012, was mounted in celebration of his 85th birthday.

His sketchbooks, spanning 50 years, are in the Special Collections department at Stanford University Libraries. He was predeceased by Lois Shapiro and his daughter Elizabeth, a respected dealer in rare artists' books. Survivors include his partner, poet Elizabeth Chapman; daughters Kate '81 and Miriam; son Joshua; and a brother, Alan.