



The Washington Post

Artist's Work Reflected Her Quest for Meaning

Advertisement » [Your Ad Here](#)

By Joe Holley
Washington Post Staff Writer
Friday, August 14, 2009

Karen Laub-Novak, 71, a painter, sculptor, printmaker and illustrator who explored questions of faith and meaning in a variety of media, died of cancer Aug. 12 at her home in the District.

Her work is represented in public and private collections around the world and has been exhibited at museums and galleries throughout the United States. It includes several series of lithographs on famous texts, including T.S. Eliot's "Ash Wednesday," Rainer Maria Rilke's "Duino Elegies" and the book of Genesis. Among her commissioned works are a 12-foot bronze sculpture of American agronomist Norman E. Borlaug, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970, and a bronze liturgical crucifix that was presented to Pope John Paul II.

Her illustrations appeared in such magazines as Washington Monthly, Motive, the New Republic and Crisis, as well as books and newspapers. She also illustrated children's books and designed book covers.

"You may look in vain for a figure in repose," a review of her paintings noted early in Ms. Novak's career. "Rather they stretch out in fitful sleep, struggle to rise, lie moribund, huddle against each other or strive to fly on broken or incomplete wings."

Ms. Laub-Novak was married to Michael Novak, a writer and resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. The Rev. Robert Sirico, president of the Acton Institute, a think tank, noted that the Novak dining table was "a veritable salon" of conservative figures and thinkers.

As Sirico recalled on the institute's Web site, "Here were the likes of Clare Boothe Luce holding formidable court against Bill Bennett, Irving Kristol and his wife Gertrude Himmelfarb," and Robert and Mary Ellen Bork would be conversing with Jack and Joanne Kemp or Charles and Robyn Krauthammer.

Survivors include her husband of 46 years, of the District; three children, Richard Novak of San Antonio, Tanya Holton of Boston and Jana Miller of Denver; two sisters and a brother; and four grandchildren.

Born Karen Ruth Laub in Minneapolis, she grew up in Cresco, Iowa, and received her undergraduate

degree in art from Carleton College in Northfield, Minn., in 1959 and her master's degree in fine arts from the University of Iowa in 1961. She studied painting with Austrian poet and painter Oskar Kokoschka, printmaking with Argentine artist Mauricio Lasansky and poetry writing at the Iowa Writers Workshop.

In the early 1980s, Ms. Laub-Novak worked at the National Endowment for Democracy and at the Institute on Religion and Democracy in the District. She also taught art and humanities at Carleton College, Stanford University, Syracuse University, Georgetown University and elsewhere.

She volunteered her time as an artist and counselor to family members at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Jack Fowler, writing on the National Review Web site, recalled how Ms. Laub-Novak and her extended family recently decided against canceling a long-planned Mediterranean cruise, even though her cancer had spread. Her major objective was to visit Ephesus, Turkey, site of the 6th-century Basilica of St. John, the evangelist who was a particular inspiration to her. The travelers, arriving at the church at the end of a long, grueling day, were struck by its beauty -- and by Ms. Novak's happiness.

Sponsored Links

[Jobless Mom Makes \\$81/Hr \(Online\)](#)

Unemployed Mom Makes \$8,643/Month Part-Time! Read this Special Report to See How.
News18.TV

[A Healthy Way Of Smoking?](#)

Smoke without all the bad effects. New cigarettes offer a way to do so
www.HealthReportsToday.com

[\\$87/Hr Job - 132 Openings](#)

No Scam. Realistic \$87 Per Hour. No Schedule. Nice Pay.
<http://www.USdreamJobs.com>

[Buy a link here](#)

© 2009 The Washington Post Company