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Liam O’Gallagher, 90, a Beat Avant-Gardist and Teacher, Dies

By RANDY KENNEDY
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Liam O’Gallagher, an avant-garde sound artist, painter and teacher whose San Francisco studio became an early gathering place for Beat writers and poets in the 1950s, died Dec. 4 at his home in Santa Barbara, Calif.



“Chinatown” (1960), a work by the artist Liam O’Gallagher.

He was 90. His death, which was not widely reported at the time, was announced by a friend and former student, William Gray Harris, a Los Angeles photographer.

Mr. O’Gallagher was a lifelong religious seeker who never seemed to pursue a career in the art world but found his natural home there, befriending free-spirited artists like Beatrice Wood and writers with mystical leanings like Aldous Huxley. He was an art teacher for many years at the Happy Valley School, now known as the Besant Hill School, in Ojai, Calif., founded by Huxley, Annie Besant,

Jiddu Krishnamurti and others who sought a more open, nurturing model for education.

Born William Gallagher in Oakland, Calif., on Oct. 2, 1917, Mr. Gallagher adopted the more traditional rendering of his first name after visiting relatives in Ireland. He moved to the Monterey Peninsula, long a hothouse of bohemianism, in 1945 and then a year later left briefly for New York to study painting with the Abstract Expressionist and teacher Hans Hofmann in Greenwich Village. He painted throughout his life, and at his death was working on a series that he described as expressing “the surreal aspects of space science.”

He was also active in the worlds of theater and dance, collaborating with the pioneering choreographer Anna Halprin on “Ceremony of Us,” an encounter staged in 1969 between African-American dancers from the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles and dancers from her San Francisco Dancers’ Workshop, who were primarily white.

Mr. O’Gallagher’s loft in San Francisco’s Chinatown, where he moved in 1954, became a hangout for writers like the poets Michael McClure, [Allen Ginsberg](#) and Anne Waldman. And Mr. O’Gallagher dabbled in the psychedelia of the age, trying a new experimental psychiatric drug, then legal, called LSD while in Mexico in 1959.

Mr. Gallagher is survived by his companion of 58 years, Robert S. Rheem, and a brother, Ted.

In some circles, he is probably best known for sound art that combined performance, chance and technology to create surreal, sometimes funny works like “Border Dissolve in Audiospace” from 1970, a fuzzy, echoing recording in which directory operators are called and asked to look up various numbers.

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“I wanted the phone number of the city zoo,” Mr. O’Gallagher asks dryly.

“The city jail?” the operator responds, in a high, officious voice.

“No, the city zoo, operator.”

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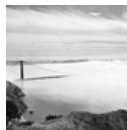
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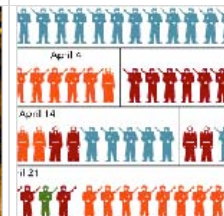
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