



Marilyn Joy Oshman

September 29, 1939 - December 22, 2024

Visionary Marilyn Joy Oshman passed away peacefully in her home on Sunday, December 22, 2024, enveloped by her entire family, lovingly by her side. Surrounded in death as she was in life, with a roomful of people and music in the air. Every city's art community needs a patron saint, a person with both vision and means who truly understands and cares about artists and helps to make the impossible, possible. In Houston, Marilyn Oshman is one of those people. For over 50 years Marilyn dedicated her life to serving Houston's art community.

As the founding director of the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art; as a president of the Contemporary Art Museum Houston, as Chairman of the Collections Committee at The Menil Collection and board member for fourteen years, as a board member of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and as a private collector and patron, nobody has done more to advance and support cutting-edge contemporary art in Houston, always with an emphasis on the city's own artists and audiences.

Marilyn was born in Houston, Texas in 1939 to Jeannette Epstein Oshman and Jacob Samuel Oshman. Marilyn was proud of her family heritage and her Texas roots. She learned the importance of philanthropy from her family at an early age. Her family's business Oshman's Sporting Goods was the best outfitter in Houston, and she developed her love of the outdoors and business

in those early days, fishing and working in the store. Marilyn attended San Jacinto High School and graduated from Finch College in New York City. While in New York in 1960, she met and married her one and only husband, Alvin Lubetkin, a Harvard graduate and stockbroker. They relocated to Houston in 1961, where Alvin eventually grew the company from 6 stores to the largest chain in the United States.

Marilyn began her family almost immediately, but like many young women, she wanted more than just a family life and wanted to explore her interests. While in New York, she saw some of the most exciting new artwork of the early 60's including shows by Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns at the Castelli Gallery. That interest led her to volunteering at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston. There, she welcomed a group of hippies who turned out to be the members of a radical architecture collective called the Ant Farm. Within a couple of years, she had arranged two important solo shows of their work and hired them to build an improbable lake house that looked like the love child of the Yellow Submarine and an Eames chair, now known as the House of the Century. While at the CAMH, Marilyn went to see Jeff McKissack and The Orange Show Monument where she recognized a similar creative impulse that excited her.

She knew that the Orange Show was one of Houston's sacred unknown gems, and when it fell to her to save an important work of art, she formed a non-profit foundation to preserve the then fragile and deteriorating Orange Show Monument.

From the beginning, Marilyn was never interested in preserving the site as mere roadside kitsch, but instead built the foundation by bringing poets, musicians and visual artists together to create a powerful hub of creativity.

Over four decades, The Orange Show Foundation has continued to produce

inspiring visual and performing arts; purchased and preserved The Beer Can House; conceived and constructed the neighboring mosaic masterpiece, Smither Park; preserved and soon to be erected Smokesax on the bayou by Daddy o Wade. The Orange Show is best known for producing the world's largest art car parade, the largest free cultural event in Houston, drawing more than a quarter of a million Houstonians, and very recently announced that it will carry on the legacy of the now shuttered Art Car Museum on its growing nine acre campus. In 2003, the Orange Show Foundation changed its name to the Orange Show Center for Visionary Arts and adopted the tagline, "celebrating the artist in everyone," an expression that is truly the way that Marilyn saw beauty, arts and people.

Marilyn's art collection is as unique and interesting and whimsical as Marilyn herself and is a reflection of her many interests and discerning eye. Her collection includes local artists, contemporary work, Surrealism, Tibetan mandalas, outsider/visionary work, toys and dolls.

"What do I look for in art?" says Marilyn. "Probably the same thing I look for in people. It's really not that far apart. Something that's authentic. And authenticity has a vibration. You can't hear it, but you can feel it. That's the whole reason why I loved the Orange Show. Okay, here was a man living in this universe that he had built over a twenty-five-year period, not interested in selling it, just doing it because he had to. That was very attractive to me."

With Marilyn, it was all about the human spirit. Her friendships were abundant and deep. Driven by her lifelong commitment to intellectual curiosity and passion, her dinner parties were legendary. Young artists sitting next to world class geneticists, CEOs, famous musicians and occasional felons were lively and built bridges across cultures, fields of interest and led to travels across the globe, including 6 trips to India.

Her pioneering interests led her and her sister to found a lecture series in genetics at Baylor when the field was still in its infancy in 1989, at the same time that Human Genome Project was just beginning. She loved the outdoors and spent time fishing, playing golf and served on the board of Texas Parks and Wildlife for many years.

Marilyn joined the board of Oshman's in 1979 and ultimately became Chairman of the Board in 1993. She brought the same visionary spirit to the Sporting goods business as she brought to everything. With her soft tireless effort, great vision and contagious enthusiasm, she pushed sporting goods manufacturers from Nike to Wilson to Easton to develop products specifically for women, not just pink copies of men's equipment, spearheading Women in Sports initiatives and grants for girls and leading the way for giants like WNBA to see the potential in the numbers.

The family sold Oshman Sporting Goods in 2001, just as her family was expanding with 6 grandchildren. Marilyn and Alvin cherished spending time with the entire family, all 11 frequently traveling together, celebrating important occasions and enjoying their home in Hope, Idaho on the lake.

In several twists of fate Marilyn lived with the grandchildren and the grandchildren lived with her for over 8 years over the following decades, leading to a particularly close relationship with all of her grandchildren.

She is survived by her lifelong love Alvin, her daughter, Karen Oshman Lubetkin Desenberg, her son Andy Martin Lubetkin and his wife Cindy Coates Lubetkin; her grandchildren, Ryder Travis Desenberg, Alvin Shelton Oshman Lubetkin, Daily Megan Desenberg, Hope Marilyn Desenberg, Ava Elizabeth Lubetkin and Marilyn Anne Lubetkin. She is also survived by her sister Judy Deanna Margolis and her two sons, Gary and Jay Gerson. She was

predeceased by her brother Martin Lee Oshman. Marilyn's family is eternally grateful for the loving care she received from Sandra Arriola, Sharon Campbell, Sidiki Fofana, Dionne Barzey, Noe and Lupe Hernandez

A private graveside service was held at Emanu El Memorial Park, on Tuesday, December 24, 2024. A memorial service was held at Congregation Emanu El on Thursday, January 9, 2024, at 12:00 PM. In lieu of flowers donations can be sent to The Marilyn Oshman Orange Show Endowment, at The Orange Show Center for Visionary Art. <https://fundraise.givesmart.com/form/sOJnXg?vid=1h1x5b>

Previous Events

Memorial Service

JAN 9. 12:00 PM (CT)

Congregation Emanu El
1500 Sunset Blvd
Houston, TX 77005