

Danielle Rice, 68, a renowned museum administrator and educator

Danielle Rice worked in local museums, but her colleagues said she had influence on the national level.

By Bonnie L. Cook, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 20, 2019

Danielle Rice, 68, of Philadelphia, a renowned museum administrator and educator, died Thursday, Sept. 12, of ovarian cancer at her home.

For three decades, Dr. Rice held leadership positions in art museums located in Washington, Connecticut, Delaware, and Pennsylvania, but her influence was felt nationally, colleagues said.

Her most high-profile role came during the 19 years she spent with the Philadelphia Museum of Art. "She was an extraordinary colleague who contributed mightily to the museum and the field," said Gail M. Harrity, the museum's president and chief operating officer.

From 2013 until her retirement on Aug. 31, Dr. Rice directed the graduate program in museum leadership offered by Drexel University's Westphal College of Media Arts & Design.

"Her reputation as one of America's most significant museum educators was already established when I met her in 1991," said Derek Gillman, a professor in the program. "Her place in the museum field is stellar, and within the regional community, we have been honored that she worked among us for so many years."

"She headed up an entirely new and unique program at Drexel that is well on its way to making important contributions to the field of museums," said William R. Valerio, director and CEO of the Woodmere Art Museum in Chestnut Hill.

One of her strengths was connecting people, said her husband, Jeff Berger. "Danielle connected with people herself, and connected other people with one another," he said. "She had contacts throughout the country, that she used to get jobs for her students."

Dr. Rice served as executive director of the Delaware Art Museum in Wilmington, Del., from 2005 to 2013. She inherited an institution in financial distress.

“The role she played in guiding staff and trustees during her time there was critically important in addressing this problem, while keeping the museum’s programs strong and lively,” said Timothy Rub, director and CEO of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

She formed community partnerships, retooled the museum’s image, and hosted major exhibitions in a newly renovated building.

From 1986 to 2005, she worked at the Philadelphia Museum of Art as curator of education, senior curator of education, and associate director for programs.

“With Danielle’s death, we lost a good friend and an important figure in the field of museum education,” Rub said.

She had a knack for developing innovative programs such as interactive computer learning, distance learning through video-conferencing, and imaginative interpretations that appealed to students of all ages.

“She played a major role in building the museum into the educational powerhouse that it is today,” Valerio said.

Early in her career, she headed the education departments at the National Gallery of Art in Washington and at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Conn.

She lectured and published widely. She was recognized as the 1988 outstanding museum educator by the American Association of Museums and was named the 1996 museum educator of the year by the Pennsylvania Art Education Association.

Born in 1951 in Romania, Dr. Rice was the daughter of Holocaust survivors. She escaped to Paris with her mother, grandparents, and sister when she was 12.

They moved to the United States where her mother, Matilda, married Robert Rice, a clinical psychologist in New York. He adopted Danielle and her sister, Kristine.

Dr. Rice grew up on Long Island, where she graduated from Westbury High School. She received a bachelor’s degree from Wellesley College in 1973 and a doctorate in art history from Yale University in 1979.

In addition to her professional work, Dr. Rice served on the boards of the Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums, the Philadelphia Art Alliance, and the Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, where she was board chair.

She was a member of Kol Tzedek Synagogue in Philadelphia and volunteered with a counseling group. She enjoyed cycling with her husband and vacationing in Maine.

Her sister died earlier. In addition to her husband of 25 years, she is survived by a daughter, Marcelle Rice; stepdaughter, Nora Quinn; stepson, Alex Berger; and three grandchildren.

Funeral services were Monday, September 16, 2019.

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