

Barbara Romain

Painter · Performer · Educator · Philadelphia-born, Los Angeles-based · 1948–2024

AT A GLANCE

Name	Barbara Romain — always in this form. On first mention: <i>Philadelphia-born, Los Angeles-based painter Barbara Romain (1948–2024)</i> . Not “LA painter” or “Los Angeles painter” alone.
Life dates	1948–2024. Born and raised in West Philadelphia; moved to Los Angeles in 1972 and remained a Los Angeles artist for the rest of her life, living and working in Echo Park for decades. Died in Los Angeles, January 3, 2024.
Education	BFA, Painting, Philadelphia College of Art (now University of the Arts), on a Philadelphia Board of Education four-year art scholarship. MFA, Painting, Otis College of Art & Design, Los Angeles, 1991. Later study in piano, ceramics and printmaking at the Braille Institute.
Vision	Diagnosed with a retinal degenerative disease in 1984; legally blind thereafter. In her words: “I was a painter prior to my vision loss, and have had to reinvent my process of working since.” She described “swiss cheese” holes in her vision that changed “from moment to moment.” The Estate’s usage: <i>legally blind from 1984</i> — she was a painter first, and her own framing leads.
Disciplines	Painter (primary); muralist and public artist; printmaker; performer; educator — Professor, Columbia College Hollywood, 1992–2024 (thirty-two years); editor, Heat Press; collaborator with poets and jazz musicians.

THE WORK

Visual music — large text-woven acrylic paintings made “as a performance of gestures in the process of listening” to particular songs (James Brown, The Doors, Bob Dylan, Laura Nyro; the jazz of her brother, the Philadelphia musician and poet Elliott Levin). **The Color Haikus** — her own haikus in her own hand.

Incantations (from 2012) — “a manifestation of a unique vision expressed from the inside out.” **The Dialogue paintings** (*Dialogue: Peace, Dialogue: Star*) — touring since 2008 with *Speaking Volumes: Transforming Hate*.

The Elements (*Air: Breathe, Earth: Burrow, Water: Bathe, Fire: Burn*; 72 × 72 in.). **Public works**: *Las Angelinas* (Woman’s Building, 1990); *ABC* (MacArthur Park; on screen in *Falling Down*); *Echo Love* (Echo Park, 2002, permanent); *Into the Light* (Blind Service Association, Chicago, 2013, with client texts in Braille); *Signs of Life* (La Casa, 1999); *What’s in a Name?* (Workmen’s Circle, 2007).

CAREER MILESTONES

1986–89	Associate Director of Education, Los Angeles Theatre Center.
1990	<i>Las Angelinas</i> wins the “Gilding the Building” competition (NEA / City of Los Angeles), former Woman’s Building.
1991	MFA, Otis College of Art & Design. Presentation in the Grand Lobby, Los Angeles Theatre Center.
1992	Begins thirty-two years as professor, Columbia College Hollywood. Co-founds Art Options, an arts-based education program for inner-city Los Angeles teenagers, with Mira-Lani Bernard.
1992–93	Her MacArthur Park mural <i>ABC</i> appears in <i>Falling Down</i> (Warner Bros.). Earlier screen placement: <i>thirtysomething</i> , ABC-TV, 1988.
1993	<i>Whose Myth Are Youse With?</i> , installation and performance, Watts Towers Arts Center Gallery, with Elliott Levin; City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department grant. Previewed in the <i>Los Angeles Times</i> .
1994	<i>Words and Symbols</i> , Artspace Gallery, Woodland Hills — reviewed in the <i>Los Angeles Times</i> .
2001	“I’ve begun exploring the use of Braille texts as a language element in my work” — her own statement. The Braille work begins here, not with the 2013 mural.
2004	Philadelphia Museum of Art (<i>Art Beyond Sight</i> , National Exhibits by Blind Artists); VSA International Arts Festival, Washington, D.C.
2005	Solo exhibition: <i>Bad Eye on the Good Foot</i> , Art Around Gallery, Philadelphia — her only solo exhibition in a commercial gallery.

- 2006-07** VSA arts Teaching Artist Fellowship — one of the inaugural Fellows nationwide (VSA arts, affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center). Third place, *New Beginnings*, Satsuma Gallery, for *Royal Flush*; the prize was the two-artist show *Destruction of the State: Writing on the Wall*, August 2007.
- 2008** *Dialogue: Peace and Dialogue: Star* open with *Speaking Volumes: Transforming Hate*, Holter Museum of Art, Helena, Montana — still touring in 2026. *Hard Rain* in *Derivative Composition*, Kennedy Center Terrace Gallery, Washington, D.C.
- 2012** Outstanding Artist (Judi Jasek Award), *Passionate Focus*, Chicago, for *Geometry*.
- 2013** *Art Blind*, Cologne — the sole United States artist among sixteen from nine countries; symposium talk “Believing is Seeing,” KHM Cologne. *Into the Light* mural installed, Chicago.
- 2014** *Can You See Me?*, a documentary by Linda Janakos, premieres at Beyond Baroque, Venice, January 24, 2014.
- 2016** *Incantations*, exhibition and concert with Elliott Levin, Silverlake Independent Jewish Community Center. Featured Artist, National Arts and Disability Center, UCLA.
- 2017-22** *Vulvacular* (Ceres Gallery, New York); *REMEMBER: An AIDS Memorial Retrospective* (OCCCA, 2018); Neutra Gallery and Los Angeles Art Association exhibitions; final recorded exhibition *I Am the Light and the Darkness*, MorYork Gallery, March 2022.

RECURRING FACTS — THE ESTATE’S WORDING

Identity — Philadelphia-born, Los Angeles-based; both cities in every first mention. · **Speaking Volumes: Transforming Hate** — “two paintings, thirty-two showings across thirty-one venues, 2008–2026, eighteen years and continuing, curated by Katie Knight.” · **Art Blind, Cologne, 2013** — sixteen artists from nine countries; Barbara the sole U.S. artist; the sculptor Tony Cragg was the exhibition’s patron. · **Braille** — explored as a language element from 2001; *Into the Light* (2013) is its culmination at public scale, not its origin. · **Awards** — the Estate claims no fellowship or award beyond what its records confirm. · **Songs** — the songs and artists behind the visual-music paintings are named; lyrics are never reproduced.

SELECTED PRESS

Los Angeles Times — “Don’t Myth It!” (1993), “Mixing Media” (1994), “A Classic Culmination” (1995) · Rachael Steele, “Barbara Romain — Depth Perception,” *Newsletter on the Arts* (2003) · *Studio City Sun* (2006) · *New Haven Register* (2006) · Scott Kassel, “The Power of Positive Painting,” *Scene*, Braille Institute (2007) · Bill Mohr, “The Resilient Visions of Barbara Romain” (2014) · *A&U Magazine*, *Voice of OC*, *Los Angeles Times* (2018) · *A BOOK OF*, Irvin Rivera (2019) · *In The Space*, Pasadena Media (2021). Exhibition press by venue: barbararomain.com/press-by-exhibition.

THE ESTATE

The Estate of Barbara Romain is managed by her custodians, Meghan Romain and Justin Romain, her son. It preserves and catalogues an archive of more than 400 documented works with high-resolution scans and negatives; researches provenance and exhibition history against the artist’s own papers; manages intellectual property; presents the work at www.barbararomain.com; and facilitates scholarship, exhibition loans and authorized editions.

Press contact · Art@BarbaraRomain.com · www.BarbaraRomain.com

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