

# Donna Marxer memorial 3Jan2019c

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## [Secular Humanist Society of New York](#)

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Artist, poet, activist and humanist, Donna died November 27 at Mount Sinai Heart hospital after a long illness. Donna was born April 15, 1934, to Robert and Kathryn (Schmidt) Marxer in Miami, Florida, where she grew up until she became one of the first class of women undergraduates at the University of Florida, from which she graduated with a degree in Fine Arts in 1954. However, at age two Donna won a Major Bowes amateur talent contest (singing "I Don't Want to Play in Your Yard") and was signed to a Paramount Pictures contract by a talent scout in the audience. She and her parents lived in Hollywood for two years, during which time Donna appeared in a Bing Crosby musical, "The Star Maker". Her parents eventually disapproved of the life imposed on child actors in Hollywood, and moved the family back to Florida. (Donna would later say of her acting career, "I peaked at age four.") As a teenager she wrote a regular fashion column for the Miami News, but after college immediately moved to New York, earned a MF A from Columbia in 1958, and began her lifelong career as a professional artist. Her paintings have been exhibited in more than fifty solo and group shows in New York and around the U.S., as well as in Norway, France and Cuba, and have earned her honors and inclusion in government sponsored and other public collections in the U.S., Costa Rica, and Liechtenstein. A sampling of Donna's art (and of her late career poetry) can be viewed on her website: [donnamarxer.com](http://donnamarxer.com) Donna was concerned lifelong with the environment, especially the degradation of her South Florida childhood home. In 2001, she conceived of and founded Artists In Residence In Everglades (AIRIE), a program that enables artists to live and work in Everglades National Park. She then served for ten years as Chair of AIRIE, now one of the largest and most active programs in the national parks system. At her death she was working to develop another program at Shenandoah National Park in Virginia. An arts activist as well, Donna served as Executive Director of Artists Talk On Art in New York 1997-2003, and on the boards of New York Artists Equity and the Organization of Independent Artists. She was on the board, too, of the Rebecca Kelly Ballet Company, for which she created costume designs. A lifelong humanist, Donna was for many years Treasurer of the Secular Humanist Society of New York ("A secular humanist," she said, "is an atheist with good manners"), serving on the SHSNY board alongside her husband, the writer John Rafferty, whom she married in 1981. New to parenting, she nevertheless was a success in that role too, and became a loving and much-loved stepmother ("Boys are a piece of cake ... chocolate.") to John's sons David, Colin, Brendan and Brian, and to their eight children, all of whom survive her, mourn her and treasure the memory of so many joyous family gatherings in her spacious artist's loft in SoHo.