



Raúl Villarreal

July 20, 2019

Raúl Villarreal

July 16, 1964 - July 18, 2019

Gainesville, FL

Raúl Villarreal, 55, died unexpectedly on July 18, 2019, with his wife of 30 years by his side. Raúl was born in San Francisco de Paula, ten miles east of Havana, Cuba, to René and Elpidia Villarreal. Raúl and his family emigrated from Cuba to Madrid, Spain in 1972. Two years later, the Villarreals moved to Union City, New Jersey (once dubbed "Havana on the Hudson"), which lies directly across the Hudson River from Midtown Manhattan. He graduated from Jersey City State College with bachelor's and master's degrees in fine arts. He also studied at the Graduate School of Figurative Art and the Parsons School of Design, both in New York.

He is survived by his wife, Rita Villarreal, brother René Villarreal, Jr., sisters, Fanny Villarreal Ho, and Martha Villarreal Mauro. He is predeceased by his parents and his brother, Rodolfo Villarreal.

Raúl's father, René, was the longtime majordomo for Ernest Hemingway at the author's Cuban villa, the Finca Vigia, in San Francisco de Paula. In 2009, father and son co-authored "Hemingway's Cuban Son" (The Kent State University Press), an acclaimed account of René's close friendship with Hemingway from 1939 through the Cuban Revolution, including the subsequent impact on the Hemingway and Villarreal families. Raúl was working on a memoir at the time of his death. He contributed significantly to the international canon of Hemingway scholarship, and donated to Santa Fe College Foundation the Villarreal Family Collection of rare photographs of René's time at the Finca Vigia. In June 2019, he co-presented at the 17th International Colloquium-Ernest Hemingway in Havana with Santa Fe College's Michael Curry the original documentary, "Hemingway: Between Key West and Cuba"-- a work borne of the intensely and prolifically creative collaboration he had with Curry for the past four years. The film premiered at the International Hemingway Conference in Paris, France in July 2018, and was screened by invitation at the Key West Art and Historical Society on July 19, 2019, the day after he died.

Raúl was an accomplished artist with more than a dozen solo exhibits in the Manhattan area and in Florida. His paintings also were exhibited or are in private collections and galleries in Spain, China, Italy, New York, New England, Philadelphia, Colorado and California, to name just a few. He painted in the style of Duende, an aesthetic that confronts difficult spiritual concepts and derives from Federico Garcia-Lorca's essay, Play and the Theory of the Duende. Raúl would look at a subject but paint the spiritual and believed that memory and longing are tied to the spiritual. Some of his recent work featured Chandeliers-Lamparas de lagrimas (lamps of tears) suspended in landscapes. His body of work was inspired by personal memories, and experiences of growing up in Cuba, Spain and the United States, along with assimilation of other cultures, old family photographs and Afro-Cuban religious symbolism. He conveyed multiple realities, time references and existence in

his paintings and sculpture.

Raúl was the Coordinator of Cultural Programs at Santa Fe College until his death. He produced and curated the College's annual Spring Arts Festival, taught art and Spanish classes at local retirement communities, and frequently mentored artists in his free time. He curated, managed and expanded the Santa Fe College Foundation's art collection to more than 100 significant works.

[Raul Villarreal and his portrait of "Papa" Hemingway]

Prior to moving to Gainesville, Florida in 2014, Raúl spent his career in New York City and northern New Jersey as an art professor, director of a design studio and co-editor of a literary magazine. He was an Assistant Professor of Graphic Design and Fine Art for nine years at The College of Saint Elizabeth in Morristown, New Jersey, an Adjunct Professor of Fine Art and Graphic Design at New Jersey City University for nine years; Director of Chromatics Design, Inc., in New York City for 13 years, and Co-Editor of STET Literary Magazine in New York City for five years.

A lover of film, literature, champagne, Cuban rum and cigars, and more recently a convert to Sancerre wine, Raúl often could be found at home with Rita enjoying his studio, their pool, family and countless friends. He loved to salsa, and often lit up the dance floor in Havana and Gainesville.

He loved Rita mightily and spoke of her as the love of his life. In the opening acknowledgements to "Hemingway's Cuban Son," Raul said, "...I must thank my beautiful and adventurous wife, Rita, for her never-ending love and

support and for sharing the madness with me for all these wonderful years."

Raul frequently returned to his native Cuba, to share the island nation through his eyes with close friends, colleagues and supporters of Santa Fe College. Through his work, he was able to share an understanding of Cuba and Cuban art. He also visited his extended family whenever possible. In what would be his last visit to Cuba in June 2019, Raúl visited his elderly Aunt near the Finca Vigia, taking much-needed supplies to the family. He was entertained by prominent Cuban artist Osmeivy Ortega and visited with his friend, nationally decorated Cuban artist Eduardo Roco Salazar ("Choco"). Choco offered his condolences in tribute to Raúl, "Pain will touch us all, and we must do the work, whatever the work is, so that this life is lived well. I am with all of Raúl's family and friends (in spirit). - greetings from Choco."

A Celebration of Life will be held at the Santa Fe College Fine Arts Hall on Tuesday, July 23, 2019, from 3 until 5pm. Arrangements by Forest Meadows Funeral Home, 725 NW 23rd Avenue, Gainesville, Florida. The family requests that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to The Florida Hemingway Society, a project that was near and dear to Raul's heart. Donations can be made c/o Santa Fe College Foundation, 3000 NW 83rd Street, Bldg. F-207, Gainesville, Florida 32607, or at www.sfcollge.edu/foundation.

Tribute Wall

MB

“ I write with such deep sadness and disbelief, having just learned of Raul's passing in July of 2019. His untimely death leaves us all bereft - Raul's gentle soul, great kindness and warm smile infused his rare intellect and immense artistic talent with a unique humanitarian vision. My heartfelt condolences to his beloved wife Rita, who was his delightful soulmate & companion, and to all the family.

Love,
Maritza F. Bolano
New York City

Maritza Bolano - December 04, 2021 at 05:20 AM

CG

“ I own Man with the weight of the world, I first met Raul at an art show in Newark.
Later I met Rita at their home in North Bergen. That was over 20 years ago.
I am so sorry they were a very loving couple. Rita was a nurse and a beautiful woman. So very sorry.
Raul was a charming, warm gentleman with so much talent, and to die so young, it just broke my heart to discover it.
My husband was an artist as well, and we both admired Raul's work.

Carole Gannon
Trinity, Florida

Carole Gannon - January 10, 2021 at 01:45 AM

GG

“ It was with deep sadness and shock as I read about Raul's passing. Having worked with Raul at a department during our younger years, he always had a sunny disposition and a great interest in painting. With my deepest condolences to his wife Rita and all of his relatives.

George F. Garcia - July 25, 2019 at 03:49 AM

GB

“ Dear Rita, Fanny and Raul's family,

I can't even begin to express how deep my sorrow is at Raul's passing. He was my friend and colleague for more than 15 years, a relationship that I have cherished from the very beginning.

His warm personality, his rich metaphoric art, his love for helping students and colleagues, and his powerful commitment to building community and understanding among artists and people of different cultures were only some of his many wonderful qualities.

We are all so lucky that he shared his expansive ideas and artistic gifts with us. What an honor it is to have known him!

Ginny Butera

Ginny Butera - July 22, 2019 at 03:16 PM

RD

“ I can not even express the sadness in my heart over this great loss. May you rest in peace mi amigo...y nos veremos otra vez. Un abrazo fuerte a Rita y familia, una perdida bien grande para TODOS. Que Dios lo tenga en su Gloria.
-Rosario

Rosario D'Rivera - July 21, 2019 at 08:47 PM

JP

“ I 'met' Raul on Facebook only, as a fellow artist who shared the same home town of Union City. Even in that slight connection, it was easy to see what a great artist he was, but I could feel what a great person he was as well...very supportive and strong. My last connection with him was a red heart he sent as a thank you for wishing him a happy birthday.

Love and condolences to his family and many friends.

June Ponte

June Ponte - July 21, 2019 at 07:49 PM

EN

“ My deepest condolences to Rita, Fanny, Martha and their families. Even though we lost touch, Im going to miss you brother.

Ely Nakano

Ely Nakano - July 21, 2019 at 07:06 PM

MD

“ Raul was a creative force of nature! I have never met a man so full of life and love.

Condolences Rita and thoughts for you and your family. He will be so missed by so many.

A beautiful bright star burned out much too soon.

Mari D'Alessandro

Mari D'Alessandro - July 21, 2019 at 06:53 PM

MP

“ *Our Condolences Rita to you and Family
Sorry for your Loss .
Maria Paz and Family (Carlos Fermin)*

Maria Paz - July 21, 2019 at 04:04 PM

RK

“ *I no longer have words to say goodbye to a brother and friend. with
whom I was until a few days ago in Havana.*

*For many years we have collaborated to give life to our books: The
Last Lion and Hemingway's Cuban Son.*

*Both books perpetuate the memory of a great literature: Ernest
Hemingway.*

Today, Ernest, René and Raúl are together at Finca Vigía ...

*My condolences to his wife Rita, his brothers René, Fanny and
Martha.*

Ricardo koon

Ricardo Koon - July 21, 2019 at 12:05 PM

RK

“ Ya no tengo palabras para despedir a un hermano y amigo. con quien estuve hasta hace pocos días en La Habana.

Durante muchos años los dos hemos colaborado para darle vida a nuestros dos libros: El último león y El hijo cubano de Hemingway.

Ambos libros perpetúan la memoria de un grande de la literatura: Ernest Hemingway.

Hoy, Ernest, René y Raúl están juntos en Finca Vigía...

Mis condolencias para su esposa Rita, sus hermanos René, Fanny y Martha.

Ricardo Koon

Ricardo Koon - July 21, 2019 at 12:04 PM

MF

“ Our prayers are with Rita, Rene, Fanny, Martha, their families and all who loved Raul.

He touched me but also my Father, my wife and my children! He will be dearly missed! Rita you and him shared a love for one another that some seldomly experience!

If there is anything we could do please let me know! We will miss him dearly!

Mario Fanego - July 21, 2019 at 11:20 AM

JG

“ Our thoughts and prayers are with Rita, Rene, Fanny, Martha, their families and all who loved Raul. He touched many lives. May he rest in peace, and may those left behind feel comfort from the many who care.

Love and prayers,
Jackie & Paul Garfield,
Their parents and children.

Jackie and Paul Garfield - July 20, 2019 at 06:39 PM