



Margot Joan Phillips Ariss

Mother, wife, artist, embodiment of poise and elegance. Born in Belleville, Ont., on Sept. 14, 1929; died in London, Ont., on Nov. 15, 2013, of Alzheimer's, aged 84.

Margot Ariss, an exceptional talent but little-known artist, was born in Belleville, Ont., in 1929 to Dorothy and Earl Phillips, the eldest of three daughters and one son. In 1940, the family moved to London, Ont., where she grew into a beautiful young woman blessed with an innate gift: She was a born artist.

Although Margot worked in clay, she was never a potter; she had a large kiln but never owned a wheel. She would work the clay like dough – roll it out onto a slab and then shape it into a piece of art. Her pieces were included in ceramic exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of Ontario, and visitors to the London courthouse still enjoy a large wall she created with letters cut from clay, describing the pioneer community at the Forks of the Thames. In 1989, the London Regional Art and Historical Museum celebrated her talent with a solo exhibition.

Margot's life changed dramatically when she left London Cen-

tral Collegiate after Grade 12 and enrolled in a special art program at H.B. Beal Technical School, where she joined Jack Chambers and other aspiring London artists. She knew she had found her home – the world of art and artists.

At Beal, she met painting instructor Herb Ariss, a war veteran 13 years her senior. It was love at first sight for both, but socializing between teachers and students was strictly forbidden. Herb and Margot had to be very careful as their relationship blossomed. Everyone was relieved when she was no longer a student, and they married in 1950. Their marriage lasted nearly 60 years, until Herb's death in 2009, producing sons Josh and Jeff, five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren who brought much joy to Margot's later life.

Early on, Margot realized that a marriage of two artists could be challenging, so she put aside her paints, pencils and charcoal and turned to clay, a medium she knew was of no interest to Herb.

For years, they shared studio space in their home and exhibited at a private gallery, where their works were much in demand. Herb became head of the art department at Beal, a position he held until his retirement in 1977, while Margot remained at home looking after their boys and making art.

Herb and Margot faithfully attended gallery openings and supported the activities of London's Western Art League. But they preferred being at home; every Saturday night they held an open house, drawing artists, writers, poets, physicians and philosophers. There were many lively discussions about politics, books, music and, of course, art, with Herb energetically declaiming on all subjects. Margot, frequently presenting a different viewpoint, firmly stood her ground.

Margot, who could knit and sew beautifully, was as stylish and elegant as her art. She often dressed simply in a black turtleneck sweater with matching tights, or

a flowing skirt, black in the daytime, white in the evening.

But her delicate appearance belied her physical prowess. She wielded the axe that brought down the walls enclosing their sitting room and created what would now be called a great room, with an ever-blooming conservatory attached. She built not only an original house, but also a beautiful garden surrounded by a wall embellished with her terracotta tiles. She could, and did, grow anything, including exotic tropical flowers.

Margot made her life a work of art.

Nancy Geddes Poole is Margot's friend of more than 70 years.

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