DOCUMENTS AND MINUTES OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
LINDA SCHELE

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a Memorial Resolution for Linda Schele, Professor of Art and Art History, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
LINDA SCHELE

Linda Schele, a world-renowned scholar of Maya art and writing who taught in the Department of Art and Art History for eighteen years, died of pancreatic cancer on April 18, 1998. Linda was at the forefront of the decoding of Maya hieroglyphics, and her contributions to the evolution of that field in the last two decades were vitally important. At the time of her death, she was the John D. Murchison Regents Professor of Art in the Department of Art and Art History, where she had made the study of the Maya a focus for scores of undergraduate and graduate students. In addition, she was at the center of a community of scholars and lay persons outside the University who came together for annual Maya Meetings at Texas, a forum she had pioneered in 1977 as the Maya Hieroglyphic Workshops.

Born in 1942 in Nashville, Tennessee, Linda studied art and education at the University of Cincinnati (B.F.A. with honors, and B.S. in Education, both 1964; M.F.A. in Art, 1968). In 1968 she married David Schele, and that year began a teaching career at the University of South Alabama at Mobile. Between 1968 and 1980 she taught studio art, rising to the rank of Professor.

In 1970 Linda's career took a sudden turn in a new direction, when she and David made a trip to photograph the Maya ruins in Yucatan. As Linda later described it: "I once was a fair to middling painter who went on a Christmas trip to Mexico and came back an art historian and a Mayanist." That casual visit to the ruins of Palenque was a turning point: "I fell in love with the place," she wrote, "and found myself obsessed about learning who had built it, why, when, and how."

While touring Palenque, Linda met Merle Greene Robertson, an artist and photographer famed for her recording of Maya ruins, who became her mentor during the early stages of her career. In 1973 Robertson organized the first Mesa Redonda de Palenque, a small conference dedicated to Maya art and culture and, specifically, to deciphering the still mysterious Maya hieroglyphics. Participating in that conference, and working with Peter Mathews, Linda used her knowledge, vision, and a compilation of recent epigraphic breakthroughs to decipher a major section of the Palenque king list, providing the first detailed demonstration that the glyphs were historic in nature. This achievement was a stimulus that led to many
later discoveries by Linda and others. In 1975-76 she was a Fellow in Pre-Columbian Studies at Dumbarton Oaks, in Washington, D.C., where she worked in collaboration with other scholars to make rapid progress in the decipherment of the Maya inscriptions. Papers presented at various conferences quickly brought her to the attention of the Maya profession.

Linda earned her Ph.D. in Latin American Studies from the University of Texas at Austin in 1980, with a dissertation entitled "Maya Glyphs: The Verbs." Not only a ground-breaking examination of hieroglyphs, her study was also a pioneering example of digital manuscript preparation. When Maya Glyphs: The Verbs was published in 1982 by the University of Texas Press, it won the "Most Creative and Innovative Project in Professional and Scholarly Publication" award, given by the Professional and Scholarly Publishing Division of the Association of American Publishers. In 1981, Linda joined the faculty of the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Texas at Austin as an Associate Professor, teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in Mesoamerican art and hieroglyphics. She was promoted to full Professor in 1987.

In 1977, while still a graduate student, Linda organized the first Mayan Hieroglyphic Workshop at the University of Texas at Austin. As she would do annually for the next twenty-two years, Linda led her audience (averaging over 500 people) through the intricacies of Maya inscriptions with her characteristic energy and verve. These meetings, which epitomized Linda's belief in the importance of collaborative scholarship, have been a major source for many of the significant epigraphic and iconographic discoveries made in the fields of Mesoamerican art and writing over the last two decades.

In recent years, the original Hieroglyphic Workshop, held over spring break, expanded to become the Maya Meetings at Texas, which now also include a symposium of research papers by major scholars and the Forum on Hieroglyphic Writing, both held in the four days before the six-day Long Workshop begins. Scholars from Europe and the Americas—art historians, anthropologists, and linguists—attend and participate in these interdisciplinary programs, making the Maya Meetings one of the highest-profile annual scholarly gatherings held at the University of Texas at Austin. In addition to the Maya Meetings, Linda also organized the first and second D. J. Sibley Symposia in 1991 and 1993, which brought together specialists in a variety of fields for scholarly roundtables on the "Symbolism of Kingship: Comparative Strategies Around the World" and "Cosmology and Natural Modeling Among the Aboriginal Peoples of the Americas."

The most influential, as well as the most beautiful, of Linda's publications is the catalogue for the 1986 exhibition at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art. Organized in collaboration with Mary Miller of Yale University, the exhibit brought together a unique assortment of Maya art from public and private collections. The catalogue, which continues to serve as a major text for the field, contained exceptional photographs and an authoritative and exhaustive analysis of the whole field of Maya art and epigraphy. The Blood of Kings was awarded the Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Award of the College Art Association for the best exhibition catalogue of 1986 and established its authors as leaders in the field of Maya studies.

From her first papers published in the 1970s, Linda went on to produce over 25 singly authored essays in journals or books, over 15 co-authored journal articles or book contributions, and over 100 singly or co-authored notes and interim field reports in Copan Notes and the Texas Notes on Pre-Columbian Art, Writing, and Culture, which she edited at Texas. Her collaborators included Peter Mathews, Floyd Lounsbury, David Freidel, and Nikolai Grube, among others, along with the graduate students with whom she often co-authored papers. Linda believed deeply in the importance of sharing information and discoveries, as the creation of the Texas Notes series attests, and her substantial Workbooks for the Maya
Hieroglyphic Workshops became another important vehicle for promulgating the latest discoveries in the field.

Linda was also dedicated to making the fruits of scholarly research accessible to the general public. During the 1990s she published four major books on the Maya for the trade press: A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya, co-authored with David Freidel (1990); Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand Years on the Shaman’s Path, co-authored with Freidel and Joy Parker (1993); Hidden Faces of the Maya (Rostros Ocultos de los Mayas) (1997), with photographer Jorge Perez de Lara; and The Code of Kings: The Sacred Landscape of Seven Maya Temples and Tombs, co-authored with Peter Mathews (1998). These books demonstrate the multifaceted knowledge of Maya culture and history Linda had developed as well as the fertile results of her collaborative approach to scholarship. She wrote of that process: "I cannot describe to you the sheer joy of working with colleagues who follow different approaches... disagreeing about many things, combining ideas and data, debating, playing together until a new kind of understanding emerges from the collaboration that would never come from any one of us alone."

This quote also describes the approach Linda took with the many graduate students who flocked to the University of Texas at Austin in order to study with her. New students were quickly welcomed into the community of students around Linda and challenged to become contributing members of the group. In seminars in Austin during the academic year and during summer field work in Guatemala and Mexico, students learned to see and understand Maya art and culture from this unique scholar who combined the visual sensibilities of an artist with her supreme skill as a "glypher." Emphasizing the value of interdisciplinary study and her own model of collaborative work, she also consistently encouraged students to interact with colleagues in a variety of fields both on campus and beyond. During her teaching career Linda chaired over forty dissertation and thesis committees in the Department of Art and Art History and in the Institute for Latin American Studies. She trained many of the current generation of scholars of Maya and Mesoamerican art, and those students now teach at colleges and universities across the country. It is little wonder that the 1997 edition of Lingua Franca’s Real Guide to Graduate School named the University of Texas at Austin as the sole place to study Mesoamerican art. Determined to insure the continuation of what she had begun, before her death Linda and her husband generously established the financial groundwork for the Linda and David Schele Chair in Mesoamerican Art and Writing, for which fund raising now continues in the College of Fine Arts.

During the 1980s Linda’s scholarly interests had expanded to include the culture of the contemporary Maya. At the invitation of indigenous Maya academics in Guatemala, Linda, along with such colleagues as Nikolai Grube and Frederico Fashen, organized thirteen Hieroglyphic Writing workshops in Guatemala and Mexico between 1988 and 1997. The goal of these workshops was the re-introduction of hieroglyphic writing and the stimulation of interest in ancient Maya history among the modern Maya. Linda spoke passionately of this work in her 1995 College Art Association Convocation address, explaining her conviction that "through these workshops... we are giving the Maya access to the tools they need to take back their history and turn it to their own use." She always considered this endeavor a partnership with her Maya colleagues, in which she learned as much from them as they from her. On March 21, 1998, Linda was awarded Diplomas of Recognition in honor of her work in Guatemala from both the Exterior Relations Ministry of the Guatemalan government and the Museo Popúl Vuh and Universidad Francisco Marroquin. The deep affection and respect of the presenters for Linda was a moving testament to her importance for the people of Guatemala.

Linda gave a compelling account of this work in her invited lecture before the College Art Association in 1995. This invitation was but one of the hundreds she received, ranging from the most prestigious scholarly locales and entities to more popular audiences and even local elementary schools. She
also shared her love and knowledge of Maya culture in several television interviews, including, most notably, her profile on Bill Kurtis's New Explorers series on PBS. One month Linda might be testifying before a NASA Blue Ribbon Panel on the subject of "Exploration of Neighboring Planetary Systems," and another she would be tramping around Maya sites with a group of tourists on a tour she was guiding. As famous as she had become, Linda always remained Linda—completely accessible and down-to-earth, full of infectious enthusiasm and humor, and savoring every moment. She was also a computer whiz, always far ahead of her colleagues, and a nocturnal being, so that she and David were indeed among the "wizards who stay up late," as the pioneers of the Internet have been called.

Linda is survived by her husband David, her brother Tom Richmond, and the family of devoted students to whom she gave so generously during her career as a teacher. She fought a valiant battle with cancer, and, telling her students that their work was what was keeping her going, she managed to teach two seminars the very week in which she died. That triumph was a reflection of the strength of this remarkable woman, who taught all those around her crucial lessons about living and about dying. She was an inspiration to all those who knew her, and we, her colleagues, are particularly grateful to have been a part of her world.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a Special Committee consisting of Professors Linda Dalrymple Henderson (Chair), Terence Grieder, and John R. Clarke.

Distributed to the Dean of the College of Fine Arts, the Executive Vice President and Provost, and the President on May 12, 1999. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, FAC 22, P9500. This resolution will be posted under "Memorials" at: www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/