

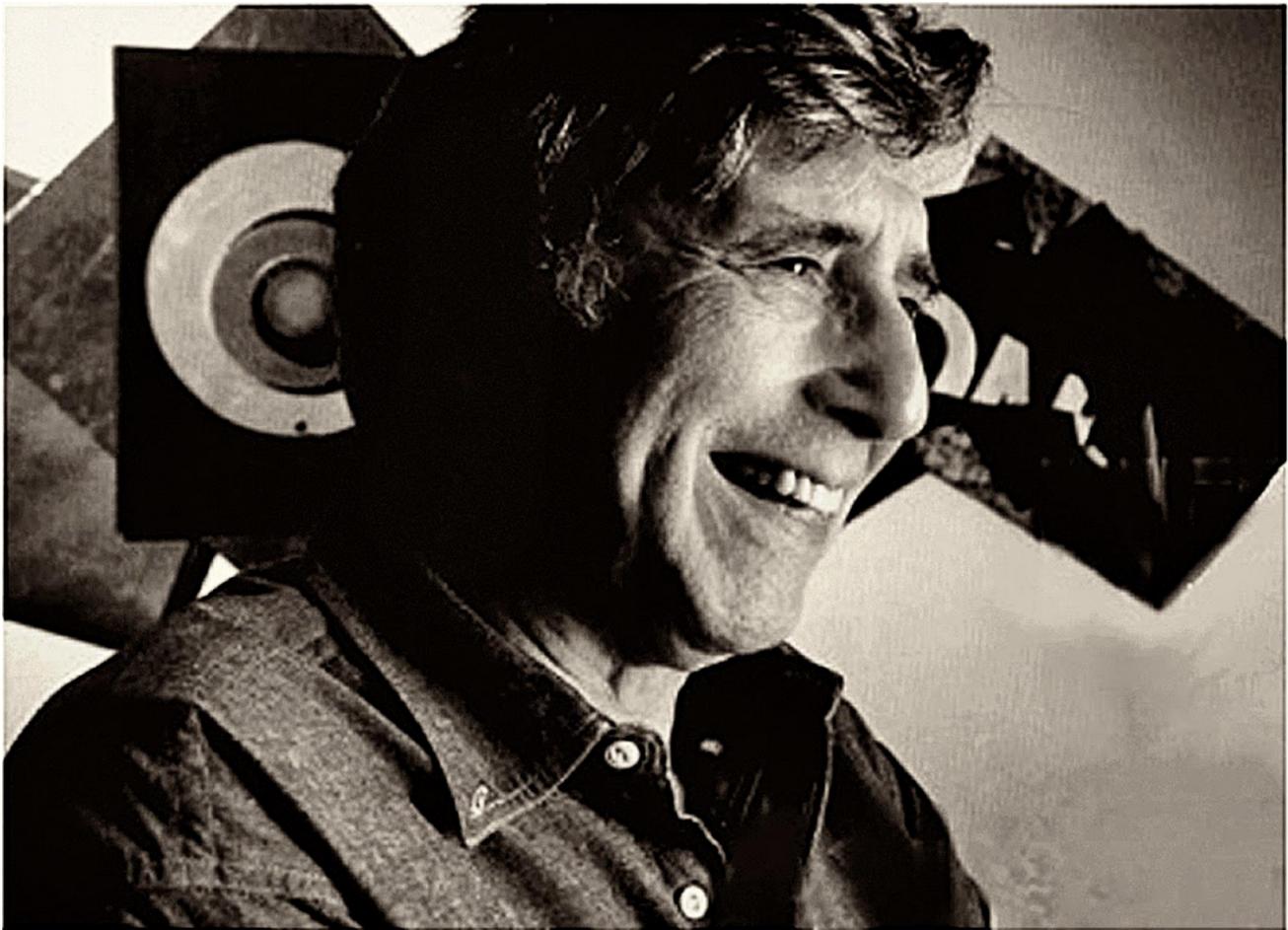
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Irwin Kremen, Duke Professor Who Found Mid-Career Acclaim for Abstract Collages, Has Died



BY [TESSA SOLOMON](#) 

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Artist Irwin Kremen.

COURTESY OF KLAUS VON NICHTSSGEND GALLERY, NEW YORK

[Irwin Kremen \(https://www.artnews.com/t/irwin-kremen/\)](https://www.artnews.com/t/irwin-kremen/), an esteemed professor of psychology at Duke University whose mid-career pivot to art brought international acclaim, died on February 5, according to a statement from Klaus Von Nichtssgend Gallery in New York. A self-taught sculptor, painter, and

collagist, Kremen was best known for abstract collages of painted fabric and found materials such as bits of steel, weathered paper, or wasps' nests.

Born in 1925 in Chicago, Kremen attended Northwestern University. After graduation, he served stints as a reporter and political activist, while writing and editing poetry and short fiction. He earned a B.A. from the New School for Social Research in New York and a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Harvard. In the early '40s, Kremen—or “Krem”, as he was known to friends—attended Black Mountain College, the highly influential experimental liberal arts college in North Carolina.

In 1951, Kremen moved to New York with his wife, Barbara, and reconnected with Black Mountain graduates, in particular poet MC Richards, composer John Cage, and dancer Merce Cunningham, whose influence guided Kremen's mid-career turn toward the visual arts.

Kremen taught psychology as an assistant professor at Michigan State University before joining Duke University in 1963. With the encouragement of Richards and the painter and collage artist Italo Valenti, he began experimenting with collage comprised of found papers and patterned cloth. Intensely private about his practice, he did not publicly show any works until a 1978 exhibition at the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in North Carolina.

“A life is a very complicated business,” he told *Duke Alumni Magazine* in 2000. “My life was very clouded at the beginning, but over the course of it, the overriding ambition was for its powers to mature, whatever those powers might be. They had to be discovered, and that took quite a while.”

By 1980, he had expanded into Minimalist painted panels and sculpture, later collaborating with sculptor and Duke colleague William Noland. Throughout the '90s, they created large-scale works, three of which were exhibited in Kremen's 2007 retrospective at Duke's Nasher Museum of Art.

Since then, his work has been acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Yale University Art Gallery, among others. Klaus Gallery was preparing a exhibition of work at the gallery in New York at the time of his death. The exhibition will, according to a statement from the gallery, “go on as he wished,” with an opening reception on May 15.

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