

EDUARDO CARRILLO

Leda and the Swan, 1996
oil on canvas, 51.5 x 56.5 in.



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Invisible Music: Eduardo Carrillo

Memories of
the Artist I Knew

Even now, almost twenty years after his death, it's difficult to separate the man from his work. Both burned brightly, bursting with energy. Now only the paintings remain.

I was drawn to Eduardo Carrillo even before I realized that he was an extraordinary painter. Warm and genuinely comfortable in his skin, Ed personified the laid-back spirit of this coastal stretch of California. Although his ancestral roots were in Baja, he was quite willing to pepper his unpretentious persona with plenty of Los Angeles hipness when the occasion required.

The Ed I knew for fifteen years seemed incapable of angst. Maybe he had simply made wise choices at some early point in his journey, but he never seemed to be involved in anything he didn't enjoy. It was almost as though he knew his time here was limited, so he didn't waste much of it. His stance of unruffled amusement was as alluring as it was convincing. Asking around about him, I found out that he taught painting at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He had grown up in Los Angeles and gone to school with a few rock stars who remained tight friends.

Always ready with a smile or a story, Ed knew how to play. His teaching style, famously, relied as much on singing and playing the guitar to his students as in demonstrating the aesthetic ceremonies of pushing cool and warm colors against each other for maximum visual tension. That tension of visual moods, the opposing forces of blue against yellow for example, gave his artwork the illusion of inner movement. The muscular dynamic of Ed's figures, indeed the very compositions themselves, appeared to shimmer and dance. The man and the work were of a single vibrant piece, as I soon found out.

Born on April 8, 1937, in Los Angeles, Eduardo Carrillo took his MFA degree at UCLA before spending a year in Spain studying and painting in the Prado. Soon one thing led to another and, on fire with an unmistakable sense of his destiny, he and his young family moved to Ed's ancestral home in Baja California, where he founded a regional school of traditional arts at the central Baja mission pueblo of San Ignacio. The mission pueblo of San Ignacio would play an essential role in his life. That was where his mother was born and where he had spent many boyhood summers. It was also where, in a desert studio, he developed the intimate approach to light and landscape that