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# Artist, teacher embraced 49 American Indian heritage

By **JOE SIMNACHER**  
Staff Writer

Mary Iron Eyes Israel was a former Dallas artist and longtime Richland College teacher who embraced her heritage as an American Indian.

Mrs. Iron Eyes Israel, 60, died June 27 of complications of pancreatic cancer at her home in Wichita, Kan., where she had lived since November 2001. Services are private.

Mrs. Iron Eyes Israel's artwork included all media, including paintings, sculptures and American Indian items.

She was also involved with many aspects of American Indian culture and its preservation, said her sister, Sally Ann Nelson Wheelis of Freeport, Texas.

Mrs. Iron Eyes Israel taught American Indian children how to throw pottery as their ancestors had, her sister said.

She was born Mary Frances Nelson in Houston, where she grew up. She was a self-taught artist who began studying her craft in her late teens, said her husband, R.C. Israel of Wichita.

"She felt she had magic hands," her husband said. "Her mother sort of wanted her to be a doctor ... but her magic hands were the basis of her career in painting and sculpture."

Mrs. Iron Eyes Israel moved to the Dallas area after graduating



from Spring Branch Memorial High School in 1961. She earned a bachelor's degree from North Texas State University, now the University of North Texas, and a master's degree and doctorate from Texas Woman's University.

During her early years in Dallas, Mrs. Iron Eyes Israel worked as a model, her sister said.

In September 1972, she was a founding professor of the art department at Richland College in Dallas. She also taught psychology and women's studies, friends said. She first taught as Dr. Hatzembuehler, the name she used during her first marriage.

Early in her career she signed her artwork "M. Hatz, a name she also used in the classroom.

"The first 15 years of her [art] career she used the name M. Hatz ... In the '60s, women weren't seen so much as doing sculpture at shows," her husband said.

She started using her mother's

family name, Iron Eyes, when her mother died about 15 years ago, her husband said.

Her mother "asked Mary to use her Indian family name," he said.

Mrs. Iron Eyes Israel was a descendant of the Osage and Eastern Band Cherokee people.

His wife "was like Wonder Woman," Mr. Israel said. "Mary was a really dynamic person. She never did anything halfway. Anybody who crossed paths with Mary did not forget her."

Her artwork is in galleries and collections nationwide.

During her career, she taught as an exchange professor in Guadalajara.

In August 2001, Mrs. Iron Eyes Israel received a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer.

She moved to Wichita in November 2001.

In addition to her husband and sister, Mrs. Iron Eyes Israel is survived by a son, Maxx Hatz of Boulder, Colo.; two daughters, Natasha Hatzembuehler of Allen and Asia Cirigliana of Dallas; a brother, Richard Earl Nelson of Freeport, Texas; a sister, Sally Ann Wheelis of Freeport; and one grandchild.

Memorials may be made to the Wichita Center for the Arts, 9112 E. Central Ave., Wichita, Kan. 67206.