

Rafael Tufino, one of Puerto Rico's best known painters, dies at 85

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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico - Painter Rafael Tufino, who became a major Puerto Rican cultural figure with his depictions of traditional island life, has died at age 85, prompting two days of official mourning in the territory.

Tufino died last Thursday of lung cancer at a hospital in San Juan, said Carlos Ayala, a spokesman for the Puerto Rico Museum of Art.

Known as the "painter of the people," Tufino was lying in state Monday at the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture ahead of burial later this week at a cemetery in colonial Old San Juan.

"We have lost one of our most devoted artists," said Gov. Anibal Acevedo Vila, who declared two days of mourning in the U.S. Caribbean territory.

Tufino's works, including landscapes and portraits, are in the collections of institutions including the Library of Congress and New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. El Museo del Barrio, the leading Latino cultural institution in New York, hosted a major retrospective of his work in 2003.

Tufino was born in New York City, and moved back with his parents to their Puerto Rican home when he was 10. He attended art school in Mexico and frequently visited New York, where he studied on a Guggenheim fellowship that he won in 1956.

In Puerto Rico, he was part of "The Generation of the Fifties" that sought to develop a unique style of art for the island. He created many well-known posters during that time as part of government-sponsored literacy and hygiene campaigns.

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