

# Charlotte Gordon

## Biography

**Charlotte Gordon** was born in **1930** in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (USA). Her mother, Esther Gorchov (American) was a professional artist and her father, Leo Pessel (from Vienna, Austria) was a chemist and metallurgist. Though he would have been happy for her to study science, Charlotte, inspired by watching her mother draw, leaned the other way.

At 17 Charlotte entered the **Philadelphia Museum School of Art** majoring in Illustration and Design and attending the University of Pennsylvania, part time, to continue her academic studies. In **1952** she graduated from art school and received a BAA (Bachelor of Applied Arts) from U-Penn. While at art school, Charlotte also met her husband-to-be, a fellow design/illustration student, also from Philadelphia, Harry Gordon. Following graduation, at the tender age of 22, they were married. Harry had enlisted in the US Army for two years (this was during the Korean War) and the newlyweds relocated to the Southwestern town of Fort Smith, Arkansas where he was stationed. Eager to work, Charlotte sketched portraits of the officers and their wives at the Officers' Club, and established an Art Department at the Fort Smith Junior College. Here, by day, she instructed junior college students in the rudiments of teaching art in public schools. By night she taught adults from the town and the army camp (Camp Chafee) drawing and painting. This was Charlotte's first experience in teaching, something she continues to do to this day.

In **1954** the Gordons settled in New York City and immediately secured design positions. Charlotte's first job was with **Seventeen Magazine** as an Assistant-Assistant in the Art Department. From there she moved to **Columbia Records** to design record album covers. She was then called back to Seventeen to become the Assistant Art Director and, within a very short time, she became the Art Director herself. She was one of the first female Art Directors in the New York magazine business which was then very much dominated by men. At this time Charlotte also began to study clay sculpture with New York artist, Margaret Israel. She also worked as a photographer, shooting portraits and reports which were then published in magazines. Both photography and sculpture continue to be important parts of her creative process.



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In **1959** the Gordons travelled to Europe for the first time. After making their way through England, France, Holland, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, and Italy, they arrived in **Spain** and immediately fell in love with the country. They settled in a small fishing village, **Fuengirola**, near Malaga, in the Southern-most area of the province of Andalucia. Charlotte set about working with local potters, firing her work in their huge, Moorish, brush-fired kilns. She built a simple up-draught wood-burning kiln in the patio of her home and it was here that she made her first real break-throughs with large clay sculptures.

In **1961** the Gordons went back to New York with a definite purpose: to make enough money to return to Spain and build a house. Charlotte designed a quarterly magazine called **Mothers To Be and Infant Care**, and had enough time to continue her clay sculptures, firing in rented kilns. Her important, large, "Tall Flower" was made at this time.

By **1964** the couple were able to move back to Spain and build a house complete with two big studios and ample living space. She started to make intimate clay landscapes and "Paradises", expressive of what she was feeling in a new environment. After about a year, a lot of work, it was again time to move back to a big city, and make a living.

Late In **1965** the Gordons moved to London. It was a very fertile time, especially in this city. Harry invented and designed **Poster Dresses** and Charlotte handled their production, sales and distribution. Poster Dresses are now in the permanent design collections at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. In the meantime, always experimenting, Charlotte learned how to make **inflatable** sculptures. She worked in an inflatable factory to gain experience and then bought a used heat-welder machine to work at home. Her inflatable works were highly unique - it was not a medium being commonly used by fine artists at this time, or since.



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In **1968** the Gordons first son, **Jesse Sam Gordon**, was born and in **1970** a second son arrived, **Benjamin Lee Gordon**. In **1973** the family moved back to their home in Mijas, Spain - this time for good. In addition to continuing to create her own work Charlotte also immersed herself in her children's education. She and Harry started a small experimental school, and she taught art both there and in her studio. Meanwhile Charlotte returned to larger clay work, beginning with the tall clay "Arch", which stands outside her studio and makes a perfect frame for photographic portraits of her family and friends. She also made her first enormous clay "Relief 1".

In the **1980's** Charlotte began showing her sculptures in galleries, usually group shows. In **1985** she had a **large retrospective show** at the **Manuela Vilches Galeria** in Marbella. She considered this show to be a summation of all of her work up to this point and it was well received.

In **1985** and **1987** her sons left for college, both in the United States. In **1990** Charlotte enrolled in the etching workshop in nearby Fuengirola. The medium turned out to be a creative turning point for her and she and made etchings and collagraphs at a fantastic pace for 10 years, until the year 2000, when a serious pneumonia forced her to slow down. In the **1990's** Charlotte continued to participate in group shows now showing both etchings and sculptures. From **1995** to **2000**, she exhibited in ESTAMPA, an annual print fair in Madrid, and found an eager market for her etchings. Showing, in **1995**, in the **Premio Nacional de Grabado** at the **Real Academia de San Fernando** was the most prestigious exhibition she had in this decade. Starting in Madrid, the show toured all over Spain.



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In **2001** Charlotte participated, along with several other artists, in a large sculpture show called **Paraiso Encontrado** in Malaga (Diputación Provincial de Malaga). She showed six large clay sculptures, some standing, some hanging on the walls. In **2005** she exhibited 50 photographic prints in a show called **El Dia De San Anton 1959-2005**, at the Casa Museo de Cultura in Mijas. A full catalogue / book accompanied this show. Starting in **2007** Charlotte founded and organized **ARTEMIJAS**, a group of local artists who open their studios to the public---one weekend every year. In 2008 the Culture Department of Mijas came on board and ARTEMIJAS is now an established, official event which takes place every Spring in Mijas. It has proved an enormous success.

In **2007**, Harry Gordon, her husband of 55 years, passed away in his bed, Charlotte and Ben at his side. She continues to work. She now has 3 grandchildren, and she enjoys the contact she has with her sons and their children; Jesse in California, Ben in Barcelona. In November, **2010** she will have a large **retrospective show** at the Casa de Cultura, Las Lagunas, Mijas Costa, Malaga. In addition to older work, she will also exhibit a new line of multi-media collages and assemblages. The show is titled "Charlotte Gordon: Coleccionista".

