

# MARY BONKEMEYER: DECADES OF PAINT

*If I were to identify myself as an artist, it would be as a poet/painter or a painter/poet.*



***Mary Bonkemeyer thinks of her paintings “as traces or marks that weave together, quiver, alternate, and slowly the eye registers and reads an unrepeatable pattern. There are no objects, only places—places where small things come into being.***

I would like to introduce myself. I am Mary Bonkemeyer, and I was born in North Carolina. From there I went to the University of Iowa, where I studied under Phillip Guston and earned my M.A. degree. During those years I met some fine artists. I also studied with Richard Diebenkorn and Nancy Graves. For the last twenty years I have lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Today I spend my time between Santa Fe, New Mexico and Marfa, Texas.

I would like to think of myself as having intentions that arise from the heart, rather than the head. The unintended consequences of my process, I think, would be similar to a poet's in that I discover what I want to say through accidents, what I like to think of as gifts. The gift comes from the material, and when the intention of the heart works with the material, it is just great. Of course, if I am working from the heart, I am fueled by passion rather than a computerized, calculated, schematic process that my head guides me through—I hope that our politicians will begin to work from the heart as well.

According to an ancient sage, there is a fine line between genius and one who hasn't a clue. I like to stick with the one who doesn't have a clue (laughter) and stay open to these wonderful gifts and accidents that the material affords me. I like to get right in there with the material, with the unpredicted and the unpredictable, and begin my work.

I have just run across a photograph of the heart showing its frequencies or computerized patterns that operated within the body. I like to think of these frequencies as somehow being connected with the earth. Everyone's heart is regulated by these same frequencies. It's a lot to think about but it's all there and it is something I enjoy pondering.



I've been struggling all my life with the idea of trying to define what it means—the difference between the literal and the poetic. To what extent reality and the literal are opposites? This brings us to the definition of words. I have been thinking about power as a word. Taken literally power in my world is about governments exploiting people (I didn't mean to get political so fast, but here I am). The real definition of power is found in giving up power. To be able to give up power, I think, to embrace the other becomes the reality of power.

—Based upon an interview conducted by Patricia Goodrich in 2004