

Welcome to Arc Studios News! This newsletter features events and activities of artists, nonprofit professionals and micro business owners that are part of the creative community at Arc Studios & Gallery 1246 Folsom Street San Francisco.



Arc Studios News March 2020

Conversation with Bonnie Levinson By Sherri Cornett

Bonnie Levinson's first encounter with a "real artist" - a remarkable conversation and interview with Mark Rothko - galvanized her childhood interest in the arts into a career of arts investigation, arts education, curatorial work, museum administration, and, eventually, an art practice. Even more astonishing is how this interview came to be. After a life-changing experience in front of Rothko's work at MOMA, and in response to a twelfth-grade assignment to interview the person she admired most in the arts, Bonnie simply found his name in the NYC phone book, picked up the phone, called him and was invited to his studio. Rothko's words about the power of art as a personal experience continued to resonate deeply within her throughout her career, culminating in a decision to start her own art practice with mixed media, photography, painting and performance. That early interview is described in her audio performance, [Sun on Your Back](#), and became the centerpiece of her one-woman show, [You Complete the Picture](#).

SC: I can relate to the power of Rothko's work in a less dramatic way - the Rothko Chapel in Houston was a place of solace for me in the '80s and was the first time I was transfixed by abstract expressionism. What else inspires your art?

BL: When I first began working in paint and mixed media, my work was inspired by a place and the specificity and universality of that encounter. The colors, smells, textures and spirit of place still continually inspire me, whether it is in the ruins in Agrigento, the design and aesthetic of Japan, the vibrancy and confusion of India, the natural beauty of Alaska, the tension of the Middle East, the over-stimulation of Cuba, or the light in Botswana.

SC: That is a lot of worldly inspiration! Does living in California influence your work?

BL: Yes! I feel the irony of living in a place so beautiful and yet so vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Nature definitely replenishes me, yet I am affected as we all are, by the air quality caused by fires decimating our homes and nature. All across the planet this is happening . . . tsunamis, fires, hurricanes, floods, more prevalent than ever before. I struggle to creatively digest my emotional response to these daily issues with aesthetic interpretations.

SC: Which of your works highlight these emotional responses?

BL: Two examples are paintings that I did in 2019. *Flotsam and Jetson* depicts the polluting of the oceans and *After the Fires in Paradise* about the Camp fires in northern California.

SC: How do you connect your intersections of mediums, performance and presentation? Would you tell me a bit more about your process?

BL: My mixed media work is a spontaneous expression and I am flexible and experimental with materials. I react first to the medium - to color, form, texture, mark making. As it evolves, I begin to respond to the surprises and questions that the work poses. Sometimes I react to the colors, light, smells and textures of a particular place, other times to the imaginary and the spirit of the unknowable. My photographs have a painterly quality often playing with perception of reality. I like working to help people see things in new ways. Sometimes I use photography as a sketch tool and artifact in the collage process.

My one-woman show, *You Complete the Picture* is a living memoir - a conceptual art piece involving an interdisciplinary collaboration, an integration of a performance-based work with music and an object-based interactive exhibition. It blurs the lines between the artist and the audience, reality, memory and nostalgia. I care about the viewer, but I believe each person has their own unique perspective. As an educator, I begin with where people are, with their perceptions, prejudices and points of view. I listen and question as they decode and gain some insight so they can "complete the picture".

SC: You are multi-faceted in your art as well as in the art world. I see that you continue to work as an art consultant [BLAM! Bonnie Levinson Art Management]. You are also very connected to other creative communities such as ArtTable, Northern California Women's Caucus for Art, and The American Alliance of Museums and currently serve as a Trustee Emeritus for the San Francisco Art Institute.

BL: Yes! I enjoy my curatorial consultancy and arts education work because of my interaction with contemporary artists. It keeps me a part of the larger art world. For the Making Waves Academy in Richmond, California, I have co-curated and developed an arts education and artist residency program, which focuses on working with students and creating permanent sculptures for the expanded charter school campus with such artists. My work as a cultural consultant for Federal Hall in NYC focuses on curating large scale contemporary artists who care about the importance of history and how debate defends democracy.

On top of all of that, I enjoy being part of the Arc community and love coming to my studio. I think about it as my tree house on the second floor.

Website: <http://bonnielevinson.com/>

Upcoming exhibition: *The Poetry of the Ordinary*, Photoplace Gallery, Middlebury, VT March 5-28, 2020.
<https://photoplacegallery.com/online-juried-shows/the-poetry-of-the-ordinary/>

Sherri Cornett is an artist curator and writer living in Billings, MT www.sherricornett.com



