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## Creative Matrix

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## **Creative Matrix**

Documentation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Interdisciplinary Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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May, 2007

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## **Artist Statement**

### ***Creative Matrix***

My personal life experiences are reflected in my art. I use symbolic and expressive marks in developing my abstract imagery, which acts as a visual language. The combining of my past and current art work, fused together, has become what I call a *creative matrix*. I see my images as choreographed compositions using a mixed media approach. The open-ended interpretations of my art have expanded the never ending possibilities of creation.

## ***Creative Matrix***

### **Introduction**

In January of 2002, I took my first Master of Interdisciplinary Studies (MIS) art course in monotype printmaking. I had not studied printmaking since college. The amount of knowledge I acquired from my professor, Warren H. Corrado, was astounding and it renewed my interest in this media. The following fall semester, my love for painting was nurtured when I was fortunate to participate in Don Crow's graduate painting course. The opportunity to network with other artists and art educators provided a supportive environment, which encourage me to apply to Virginia Commonwealth University's MIS program. I feel the program has allowed me to expand my talents and explore new areas in my artistic endeavors.

### **Media**

Working in multiple media and in mixed media for me is a natural approach to creating. The combining of different media allows me to express my ideas in a variety of ways. The media I work with include oil paint, monotype printmaking, and computer technology.

Painting with oil is the media I use most. First, I sketch my thoughts and feelings about a current moment in time. Then, from these sketches, I select one drawing that I want to develop. I feel that the media and materials contribute creatively to the finished outcome. So, I do not try to control the paint application and allow the paint's qualities to be part of my work.

The ability to apply transparent layers of oil paint is a feature of the media that I find sensuous. Layered pigments create a translucent glaze and depth to the canvas surface. I often combine textured brush strokes and marks, scratched into the surface of these layered colors, to contrast the smooth, glazed areas. My intention when painting is to use the qualities of the media to express my meaning. As an artist, I try to honor the characteristics of oil paints.

Printmaking is another media that I use. My interest for making prints began as a high school art student cutting my first linocut. In college, I studied the print techniques of silkscreen and lithography. Now, I have found the monotype print process to be an endless discovery into the creative process. Monotype is a unique process using a combination of painting and printmaking techniques. This allows me freedom for expressive painting and drawing. I have found the monotype process allows for mixed media elements to be included.

In this age of technology, the computer has become a tool for me. Using the computer, I can use iron-on transfers, also referred to as Computer Iron-on Transfer (CIT) monotype. Using this technique, I select a computer image of my art then edit, color, and size the image, preparing it for the iron-on transfer paper. Then, I cut the prepared transfer paper into shapes that I iron onto a monotype surface.

By using all of these media separately or together, I reach the desired artistic conclusion to a work of art. I have used the disciplines of drawing, printing, and painting throughout my creative life. Now, I often mix these media instead of using them separately.

### **Artist Influences - Looking Back and Now**

Art for me has always been an inspirational part of my life. Even in elementary school, I always sought to extend my drawings with colorful images and personal interpretations beyond what was expected from most children. Entering upper grades, I began to explore the history of art and found the Post-Impressionist art movement of great interest. Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890), Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), and Henri Matisse (1869- 1954) captured my admiration as a young artist. I emulated their artwork by choosing landscape and the human figure as the subject for my own canvas and paper. I loved the influence on the direction of my art. The ability of these artists to express their personalities moved my understanding of art to a new level. I began to realize my artistic goal, which for me is to express my feelings honestly.

Van Gogh is the artist I identify with the most because his subjects were autobiographical, tracing every moment and emotion in his life. *Self Portrait with Mutilated Ear* (1889) reveals an emotional period in his life. Recently, I related to this theme with my self-portrait *Elementary Art Teacher* (Appendix, 1) where I captured my image with an emotional reflection on Valentine's Day. Using symbols of hearts, in an expressive style, the self-portrait reflects my tendency to romanticize. In *Prisoners' Round* (1890), Van Gogh portrays his experience in a mental hospital. Here, he portrays his highlighted face in a symbolic dark atmosphere. Inspired by these occurrences relating to Van Gogh's mental trials, I expressed an out-of-body experience when I created monotype *Spirit*, (Appendix, 2). In this print, the contours of my figure enclosed the colorful marks, which are symbolic of my soul.

I want to have a childlike quality, distorted form, and symbolic color in my art. These are also common elements in Gauguin's *Self-Portrait with a Halo* (1889). This work sparked my interest in the use of symbols and stylized abstraction. In this painting, Gauguin's face is depicted between bright planes of primary color. His face is touching a pair of apples. His head eclipses a halo, while one hand holds a snake among a vine. His eyes glance away from the symbolic ideal of good and evil suggested by the imagery. My self-portrait *Gemini Me* (Appendix, 3) reflects my roles as an artist and as a woman through the use of words, symbols, and opposing painting styles. Gauguin's painting was painted on the back of his kitchen cupboard, while my paintings are on two frayed palette paper sheets. His choice of symbols read as religious and spiritual, while my abstractly placed dialog of words becomes symbols of my being.

Matisse is another artist whose work I have looked at closely. Alan Bowness, author of *Matisse And The Nude*, quotes the artist from the *Notes of a Painter* in 1908:

What interests me the most is neither still life nor landscape but the human figure. It is through it that I best succeed in expressing the nearly religious feeling that I have towards life. (Bowness, 5)

The ability of Matisse to capture the essence of the human figure while applying graceful simplicity of combined color and minimal line makes his work masterful. As a young artist, I honed my skills by painting still life and landscapes. But like Matisse, the placement or abstract representation of the human figure became the core subject in my art. *La Danse (study)* (1909) is a Matisse painting I viewed in person in my mid-twenties. This work left a memorable impression on me, with its five open armed figures joined in a circle. I have used this open armed position of the figure in my artwork *Spirit*



(Appendix, 2).

Matisse also was a printmaker, which further inspired my interest in this media. Julie Ayres in *Monotype Mediums and Methods for Painterly Printmaker* includes an example of his monotype technique, *Nude Study* (1917). Ayres says that by drawing into a dark inked field, Matisse achieved maximum expression with a minimum of lines. Like Matisse, I strive to express more with less. In *Category II* (Appendix, 4) I abstract the open armed figure by utilizing a childlike drawing style.

The latter art works of Matisse became a major influence for my interest in combining medias. *Zulma* (1950) is a gouache and crayon on cut-and-pasted paper. It is an example of a mixed media abstraction of the figure. Viewing such art works by Matisse made me realize that media could be combined. For example, my piece *Art in Heaven* (Appendix, 5) contains many small paper palettes and contour figures cut and pasted upon painted canvas. The figures are also adhered to the painted canvas by the monotype CIT method, which makes the cut-outs transparent, and leads to the apparitional feel of my figures.

Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) is another influential artist. Pollock's connection to Abstract Expressionism lies in his energetic technique known as Action Painting, which allows for freedom of expression. In *The American Scene - Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Emily Wasserman describes Pollock's *Mural* (1943) as

an elegant, masterful “drip” painting of the mid-forties. Increased painterliness, dense, rough texturing, and an unfussy approach to techniques and to forms, which progressively dissolved the notion of referential content, became the mark of a distinctly American style of painting for the next decade. (Wasserman, 15)

After studying the art style of Jackson Pollock, I began to allow the paint

application to be a symbolic component of my art. In two of my oil paintings, *Isabel Cometh* (Appendix, 6) and *Category II* (Appendix, 4), the expressive style of paint application was meant to be the dominant element.

The Abstract Expressionist movement of the 1950s is a major influence on my approach. It inspired me to apply the paint in a free, uninhibited manner. Every color choice, brush stroke, line, mark, and scratch are expressions that become a part of the art work. In addition, I incorporate symbols within this expressively painted ground. Even though I use personally developed symbols, I want the viewer to interpret the art freely. The oil painting on canvas board, *Isabel Cometh* (Appendix, 6), is an example of these characteristics. It was created intuitively to capture my fear of an arriving recent hurricane, which I endured and weathered alone. I wanted to reveal nervous energy, anxiety, and worry through the overly expressive manner in which the paint is applied. I selected ground colors which are dark and earthy. These colors are in contrast to the symbolic deep red used in the open armed figure, representing the fears of what is forth coming.

Currently, I feel the character of German Expressionism also partially defines the artwork I have created as a graduate student. The temperament of the German Expressionism has always turned towards the mystical and emotional. It has always seemed to have a serious creative urge, an enquiring spirituality, and a sense of human destiny. As a maturing adult, I have begun to realize my artistic goal, which for me is to be personally expressive.

## **My Subject Matter**

My personal life experiences are reflected in my subject matter. I document moments in time. The stylized and expressive manner in which I portray myself reflects my state of mind. The open armed position of the figure, which began as an outline of my body, has become a symbolic image. Through visual language, I interpret my feelings by placing this stylized, abstracted figure within a current event. For example, the monotype titled *Spirit* (Appendix, 2) is my interpretation of an out-of-body experience I had during an illness. The two figures in the oil painting *Category II* (Appendix, 4) dates to the arrival of the recent hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In both of these images, I used the open armed figure to represent the human experience within an event.

Also expressed in my art are symbolic images of love and the essence of being an artist. Two simple symbols that are prevalent to communicate these themes are the shape of a heart and the artist's palette. In my self-portrait titled *Elementary Art Teacher* (Appendix, 1), created on Valentine's Day, I exploit the heart symbol by repeating drawn rows of small red hearts for the apparel worn by the figure. A large silver heart pendant around the neck focuses the viewer's eye toward the understanding and loving gaze of the art teacher's eyes. Loosely drawn with crayons, this stylized self-interpretation captures the depth of soul required to teach the creative discipline of art.

Two palette sheets from long past college days are the paper used for a painterly self-portrait of me as the artist in the work titled *Gemini Me* (Appendix, 3). I used the palette paper to form the head and positioned the thumbhole of the palette for the mouth,

using bold, painterly strokes of oil to create the eyes, nose, mouth, and hair. The word *YOU*, extending from the mouth, is created by collaging cut-out words mother, daughter, teacher, sister, friend, and artist. These words all describe my roles in life. On the second palette sheet, a simple stylized face is drawn using black, white, and silver acrylic paint. The word *ART*, extending from this mouth, are made from collaged words such as, symbolic, expressive, abstract, and mix media. All these words describe my art. The single finger and the silver nail placed after this word is an exclamation point, which emphasizes the self-reflection of this piece.

The spiral line is another recurring image. Whether applied as a brushstroke, scratched into the surface, or drawn on the surface, this form has become a symbolic mark of my art. The title of the pastel and acrylic drawing, *HI HII* (Appendix, 7), is an abbreviation for hurricane one (*H I*), Katrina, and hurricane two (*H II*), Rita. The two spirals become an abstraction of the hurricanes, which are surrounded by multiple open armed figures. Some of the haphazard figures are painted while others are scratched around the two spiral forms. These figures refer to the displaced humans in these tragic events.

*Category II* (Appendix, 4) is an oil painting, which was a counterpart to drawing *HI HII* (Appendix, 7). Here I strive for spiritual hope and reveal my feelings about the hurricane's effect on the relationship of two people. The two large open armed abstracted figures are the subject, while the spectrum of colors and the influx of white light represent the joy of having lived through this experience.

Equally as important as the imagery is my choice of colors and brushstrokes. The

colors must reflect and relate to each piece, which also affects the selection of applied stroke or mark. For example, in *HI HII* (Appendix, 7), the colors are dark and the marks deeply scratched within the texture of the acrylic and pastel medium. I wanted to capture the oppressive anxiety of an approaching disaster. Colors used in *Category II* (Appendix 4) are pastel colored. I chose these soft, subtle colors to signify hope within the storm of life.

The techniques and process I use in my work can vary according to the subject and media. The titles of each artwork can influence the artistic choices necessary to express the meaning. For example, in the painting *Art in Heaven* (Appendix, 5), elements of past and current art works are fused together, expanding the depth in which I can create and express my art. Two paint covered palettes are connected to a shredded rectangular canvas painted in blue tones. The palette on top represents heaven, and earth is the bottom palette. Several small circular canvases with frayed edges are adhered to this surface and painted with spiral strokes, in tints of blue, to resemble the clouds. White paper cut-out figures, remaining from the transfer sheets used to make *Spirit* (Appendix, 2) run across the painting's surface. Other open armed figures are directly transferred onto the canvas. This entire mixed media painting is layered onto a canvas with frayed edges. The frayed edges symbolize my idea that heaven has no boundaries and cannot be framed. I have applied vertical drips of gesso and clear spirals of acrylic medium to reinforce the upward momentum of the white, ghostly figurative souls. The many processes, techniques, and construction used to create this work reflect the combining of past and current artwork fused together by using mixed media applications.

Within the creative process, I apply any process or technique necessary to express my desired meaning.

## **Conclusion**

Visual communication has been an important aspect throughout my life, and I have documented this interest in my art. I use personal life experiences as the subject for work in many different media. The art I create is layered with repeated symbols, images, and parts of past works, reflecting the emotions and feelings encountered within my life's journey. Using the human figure as a self-portrait shows the different stages and insight into my developing style as an artist. The art I now create is a passion of love, more than a skill, hobby, or source of income.

Positive encouragement and participating in the Master of Interdisciplinary Studies program started a journey into my quest to understand, practice, and gain further knowledge of the visual arts. Enrolling in the program has presented an excellent opportunity to further my goals of growing as an artist and as a teacher. I feel that I truly benefited from the interaction and discussions held with other artist and teachers in the course of my classes. This experience will prove invaluable to me in the future.

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## Appendix

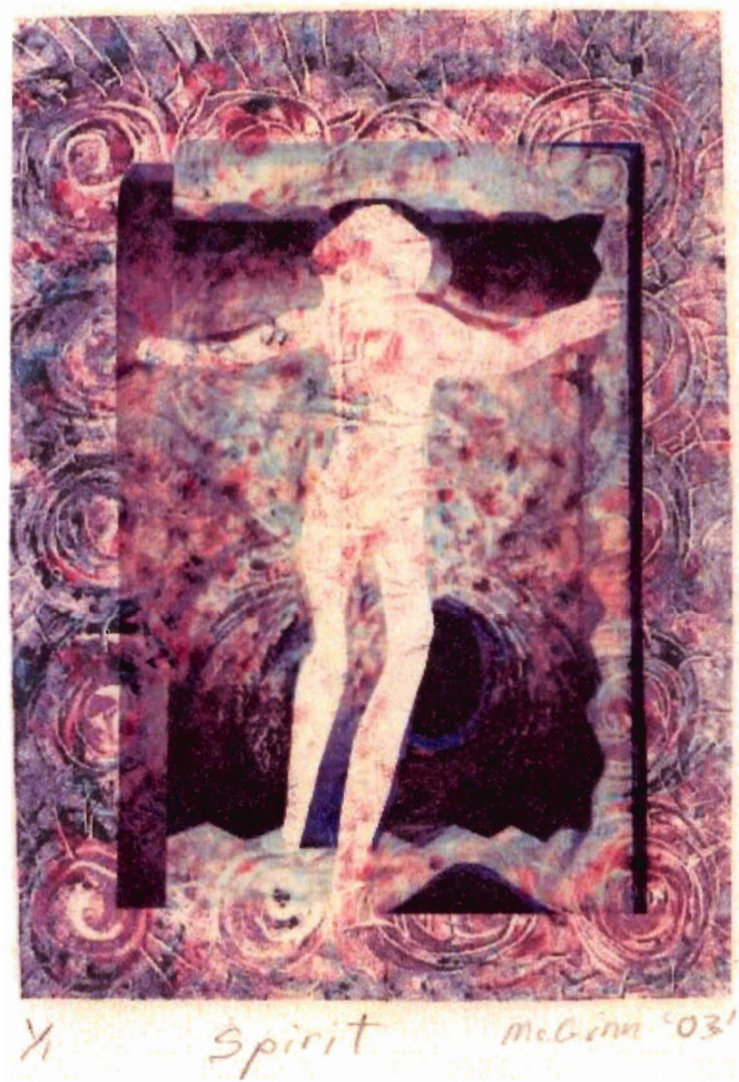
### Image List

1. *Elementary Art Teacher*, crayon on paper, 39" x 27", 2004.
2. *Spirit*, monotype (CIT), paper, 4" x 3", 2003.
3. *Gemini Me*, oil, acrylic and mixed media on paper, 22"x 28", 2002.
4. *Category II*, oil on canvas, 40" x 30", 2006.
5. *Art in Heaven*, oil and mixed media on canvas, 59"x33", 2004.
6. *Isabel Cometh*, oil on canvas board, 20"x16", 2002.
7. *HI HII*, pastel and acrylic on paper, 24"x18", 2005.





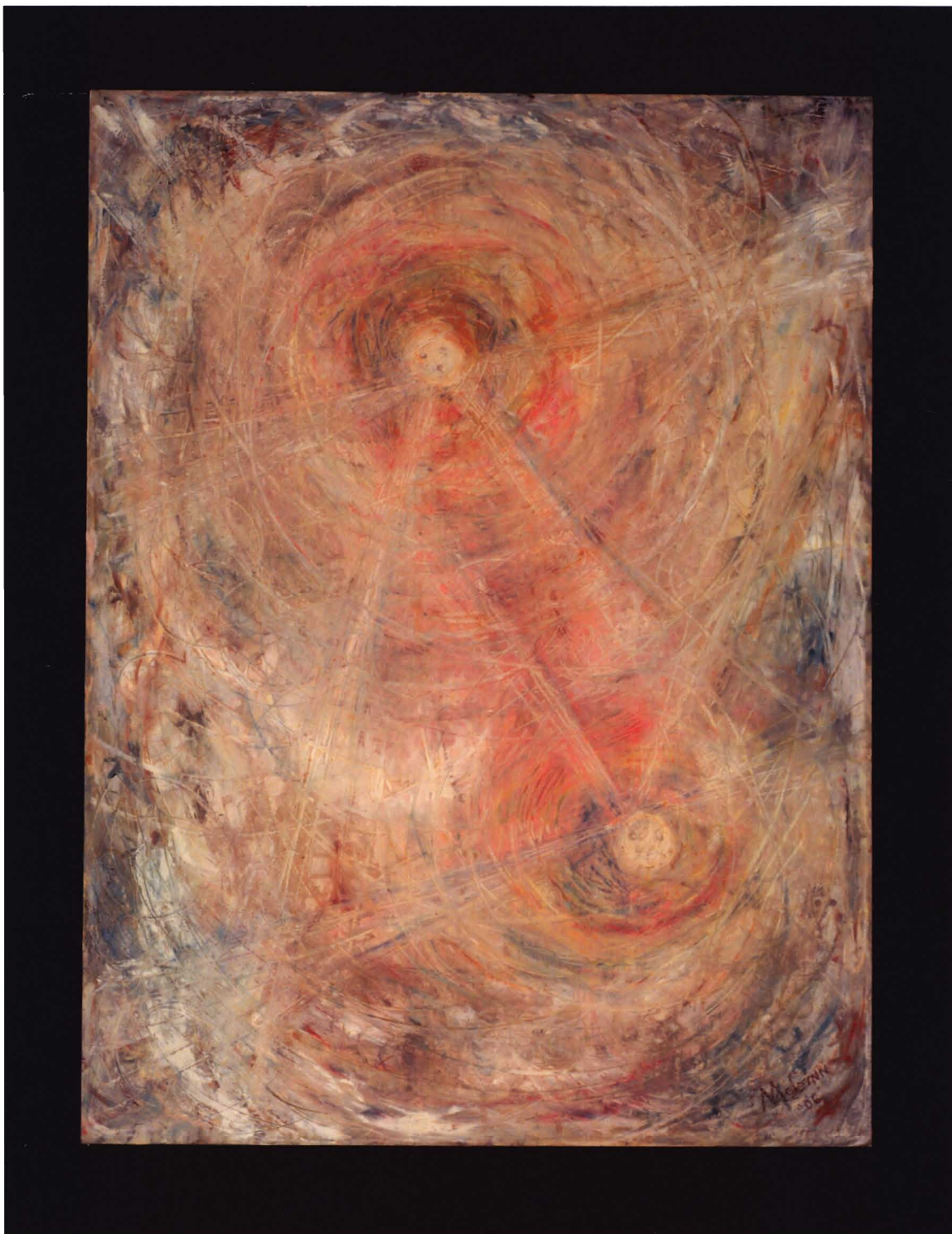
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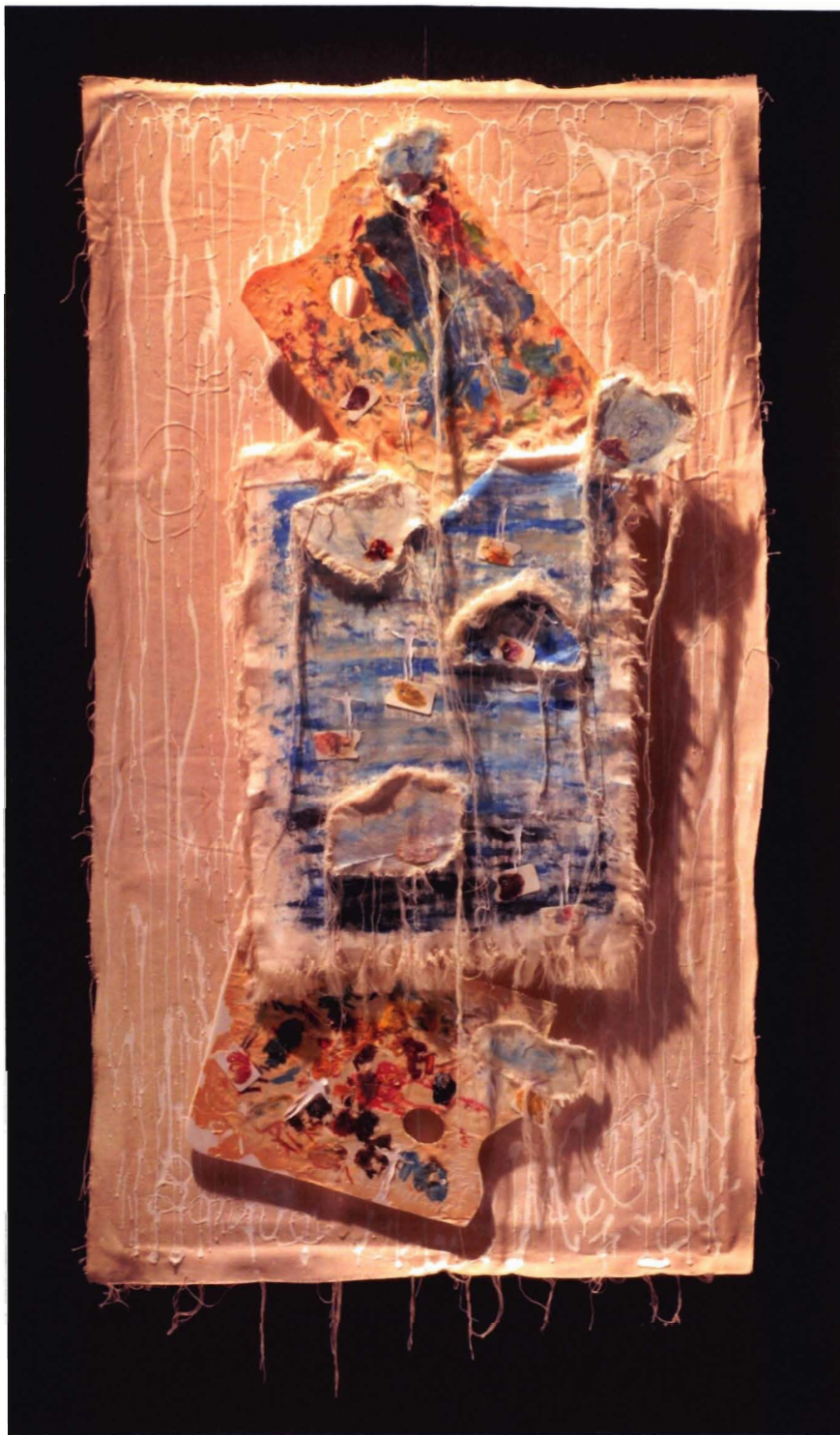
2. *Spirit*, monotype (CIT) on paper, 4" x 3", 2003.







4. *Category II*, oil on canvas, 40" x 30", 2006.

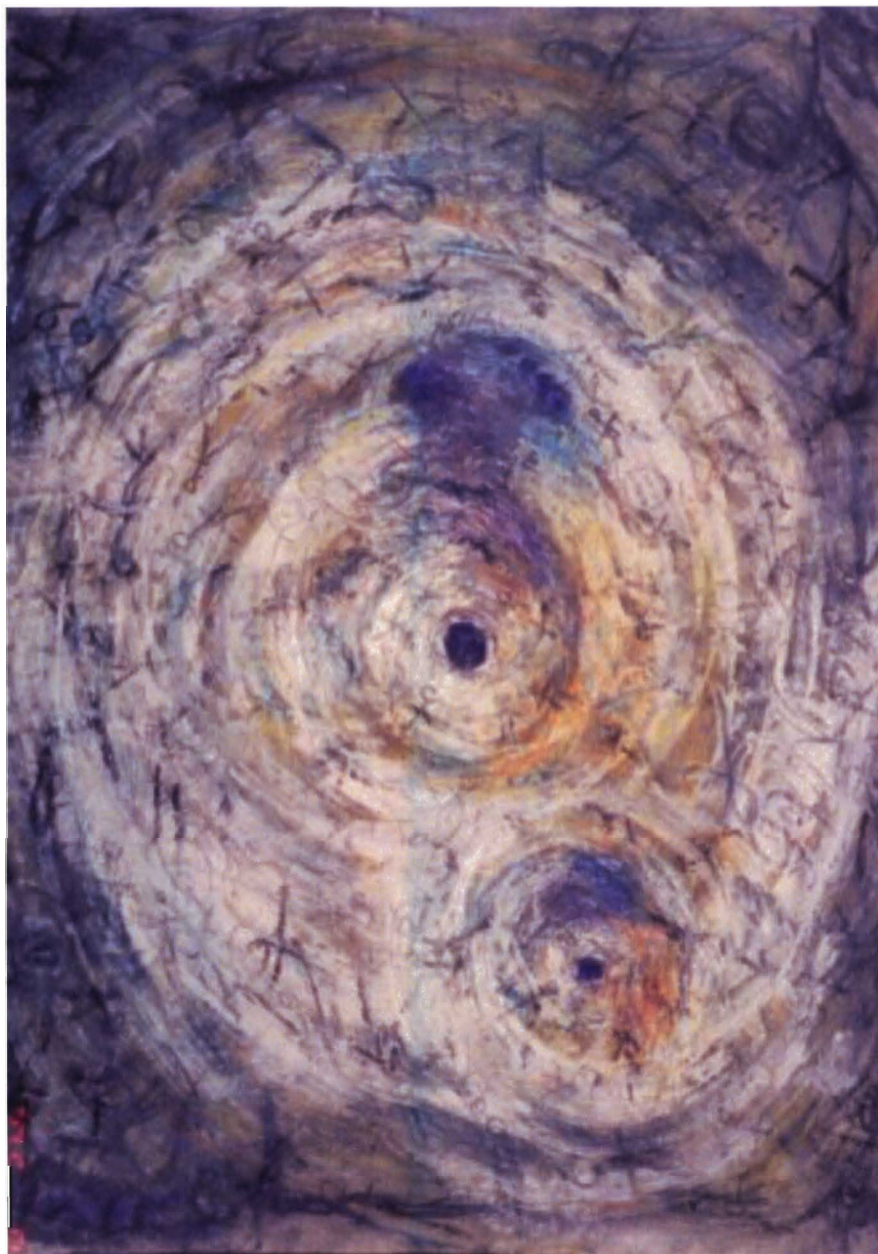


5. *Art in Heaven*, oil and mixed media on canvas, 59"x33", 2004.





6. *Isabel Cometh*, oil on canvas board, 20"x16", 2002.



7. *HI HII*, pastel and acrylic on paper, 24"x18", 2005.

## Bonnie Gay McGinn

### Education:

- 2007                      Master of Interdisciplinary Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- 1973                      Bachelor of Science, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA.  
Art Education.

### Teaching Experience:

- 1992 - present           Elementary Art Teacher (K-5), Norfolk Public Schools, Norfolk, VA.
- 1990 -1991              Art Substitute, Norfolk Public Schools, Norfolk, VA.
- 1978                      Art Instructor (K-2), Children's Art Center, Norfolk, VA.
- 1975                      Art Specialist (4-7), Norfolk Summer Enrichment School, Norfolk, VA.
- 1973 – 1976              Art Teacher (K-6), Norfolk Public Schools, Norfolk, VA.
- 1981,1990 - 1991       Graduate Study: 9 hours, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA.
- 1977                      Graduate Study: Two quarters, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL.

### Professional Organizations:

- 2002 - present           Tidewater Artist Alliance
- 1992 - present           American Federation of Teachers: Parent Teacher Association
- 1992 – present           Tidewater Virginia Art Education Association

### Selected Exhibitions:

- 2006                      *Creative Matrix*, Master of Interdisciplinary Studies Thesis Exhibition, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA., Cape Henry Collegiate School, The Phillips Family Gallery, Virginia Beach, VA.



**Exhibitions continued:**

- 2006 *Tidewater Art Alliance: **Flying High Juried*** Charles H. Taylor Art Center, Hampton, VA. Durwood Dommissie (Juror)
- Tidewater Art Alliance: **Significant Expressions Exhibition***, Portlock Galleries, Chesapeake, VA. N. Benson (Curator)
- 2005 *Tidewater Virginia Art Education Association: **18<sup>th</sup> Juried Exhibition***, Hermitage Foundation Museum, Norfolk, VA. Larissa Sutherland (Juror)
- Tidewater Art Alliance: **“Luxury” Juried Exhibition***, Charles H. Taylor Art Center, Hampton, VA. Jeffrey W. Allison (Juror)
- Tidewater Art Alliance: **“Miniature” Juried Exhibition***, Hermitage Foundation Museum, Norfolk, VA. Helen Stockman/Todd (Juror)
- Tidewater Art Alliance: **“Hot Stuff” Juried Exhibition***, Charles H. Taylor Art Center, Hampton, VA. Sally Bowring (Juror)
- 2004 *Tidewater Art Alliance: **Members Show***, The Berry Robinson Art Center, Virginia Beach, VA.
- Tidewater Virginia Art Education Association: **17<sup>th</sup> Annual Juried Exhibition***, Norfolk State University: Wise Gallery Hamm Fine Arts Building, Norfolk, VA. Gary Jenks (Juror) (**3<sup>rd</sup> Place**)
- Tidewater Art Alliance: **“Miniature” Juried Exhibition*** Hermitage Foundation Museum, Norfolk, VA. Carlton Abbott {Juror}
- 2003 *Tidewater Virginia Art Education Association: **16<sup>th</sup> Juried Exhibition***, Hermitage Foundation Museum, Norfolk, VA. Dr. Carol Hubbard (Juror) (**Honorable Mention**)
- Tidewater Art Alliance: **“Mystery” Juried Art Exhibition***, Charles H. Taylor Art Center, Hampton, VA. Ginger Levit (Juror) (**Award of Merit**)
- New Waves 2003 Juried Exhibition*, Contemporary Art Center, Virginia Beach, VA. Annie Adjchavanich (Juror)
- Virginia Art Education Association **Juried Conference Exhibition***, Jefferson Art Center, Roanoke, VA