

INTERVIEW WITH MRS. LEONE BOWERS HAMILTON

with William Pruitt

December 1978



Question: Do you remember when you were first interested in art?

Mrs. H.: *Yes. When I went to the attic and found a roll of white ceiling paper, wallpaper that had been put away for future use. I brought it down and I drew the automobile we had and the house. My parents thought it was real good. My father told me I didn't have enough spokes in the car wheels. I realized I knew how many spokes were in it, but it didn't matter. So I thought, well, people want things just like they are and I'm going to have to start looking a little more closely. At that time I started observing very closely. People and artists.*

My mother was so nice about taking us on walks, especially early in the morning on the farm. We would see beautiful things like the color of toadstools, or Johnny-jump-ups near a log in the woods. Even the spider webs with dew on them were so beautiful. In the wintertime, the crystals over the stream that had frozen over would have pictures inscribed on the ice. In the summertime, we'd watch the sunsets and the clouds would make pictures for us. So I came up looking for pictures. That was the earliest I can remember being interested.

There were some other instances, but I think I'd better keep those to myself.

Question: Then your parents encouraged you with your art?

Mrs. H.: *Oh yes.*

Question: Did you have training fairly early?

Mrs. H.: *Well, father died in 1914 when I was eleven. But he and mother that summer had talked it over a lot, and he said he thought that I ought to study art. When we went to Birmingham as usual for the winter, mother put me in the seminary under a teacher, an Art Institute graduate, who was just about the height of a twelve-year-old child, which helped to make her an excellent teacher. I studied under her throughout my high school years. Her idea of watercolor was, "It's water color, so dip your brush in and get it wet. We'd throw water and watercolor all over the studio. Thanks to her I learned to love watercolor. She would let me stay alone after time in the studio. One day, I remember, I stayed three hours extra.*

That was my earliest experience in school. From there I went to Agnes Scott College. And of course I took art. In 1921 credit was not given for art in college. In order to get art, which I was determined to do, I had to take five years of college. Because it was necessary to get nine hours in the studio to do the art and the college wouldn't allow a student to take seventeen hours. So I had to take an extra year, which I thoroughly

enjoyed. The year after that I was back at Agnes Scott on a scholarship and doing a little work for the college, drawing plots as the college was accumulating land at that point. The president, Dr. McCain, would get me to do the land drawings for the purchases. During that time, I entered a competition for designing a bookplate for the college. My design won and is still used today.

In the summer of 1927 I went to Pennsylvania Academy of Art Summer School in Chester Springs, PA. I thoroughly enjoyed that. It was a good experience and a beautiful setting. The students had a great deal of freedom. I was old enough to know how to enjoy the freedom. So I did. I had a very good time there, socially as well as learning a few things more about art. Daniel Garber was the teacher. Then, after I was married and living in Decatur, which is a suburb of Atlanta, I went to the Atlanta Art Institute for one year and studied with Robert Rogers. He had a different slant on things, which was quite different from the first teacher who was from the same school. I didn't go there but one year. After that I painted on my own for a long time until my children (born in 1932 and 1934) were old enough for me to get back to work a bit more.

I went back to Agnes Scott where a new man had come to head the art department, Howard Thomas. Miss Louise Lewis, who had been there since the turn of the century, had reached retirement age. Mr. Thomas came down from Wisconsin. He had a great many ideas about art that were new to me. I had thought if you were making a composition, you used exactly what you were looking at. But he figured if you had the space in your composition and you wanted to put a newspaper in it, or a dog, you could. That was an eye opener to me. He impressed us with the fact that it wasn't a photographic representation of what we saw that was important, but the finished product of our picture.

I remember the first composition I did in which I completely ignored linear perspective. It was very exciting. I was practically looking down upon a typewriter, dictating to it, and for some reason put a traffic light in the window. That was my first encounter, I suppose, with what we now call modern art.

In order to get students thinking along lines other than their own way of working, he told us to choose an artist that we did not like and to study him. And then for us to come in with a composition that used the principles of that artist. At that time, I did not like Leger. So I came in with this painting called "Dictation", which forgot Leger entirely by the time I finished with it. But I had a good time with it. And I still like the picture. It's not in my possession any more, but I have it in my mind.

Then, let's see, I think Mr. Thomas was there two years only. When he left, he asked the college authorities to put me in his place as the teacher of drawing and painting. He thought I could handle it and that I would be a good bridge between his work there and the incoming head of the department who would emphasize art history. I was just the lab instructor. Mr. Thomas' idea was: the best way to learn art history is through experience in art. Then you can explore art history from there. At the end of the year, the new head of the department wanted me to stay, but I resigned.

I loved teaching the girls, but they weren't easy to teach. They were quick learners and I had to stay ahead. I wouldn't say they were easy to teach, but they were exciting to teach. It was fun to see them open up their minds and begin to accept beyond their former concepts. I felt this time was well spent.

After that year (1945), I continued teaching in Dekalb County at the invitation of the principal of one of the schools. Her daughter had been in my class at Agnes Scott. I taught two years, all seven grades. When I started, there were nine classrooms. But we were having a population explosion or something, because the next year we had eleven classrooms, and then the next year we had eighteen. When we went up to twenty-one, that was too much and I left.

The city of Decatur wanted me to teach in their new Recreation Center. And I did. I taught afternoon classes for the children. Then Georgia State asked me to come in, so I went there and stayed three years. I really enjoyed it. I like to teach college age. Well, the fact that I was the last one hired there meant that when there wasn't enough enrollment, I was the one to leave.

I taught that next year at Morehouse College. It's the first I had ever taught the Black population. I found it a real learning experience. But I did not repeat. It was too hard for practical reasons. I had too many students. I was told I would have twenty students and that there would be three classes. When it was set up, I had five classes with thirty-six students each. This was really too much. You can't do any of your own work.

The fact is I wanted to paint, and I wanted to be in shows. I found that I always teach whole hog, and by the time I've taught I'm spent. Let me see, from Morehouse College I went back to Decatur Recreation Center and taught the afternoon or evening classes, which gave me mornings for my own work in my studio at home. The schedule at the Decatur Center suited me and I stayed there for ten years. When I retired (1968), I was still teaching there.

That was very interesting work, because I sometimes taught the in-service teachers who were at Emory or the University of Georgia. It was the kind of thing where you had more freedom than you have in a college classroom. I had my own room, my own set-up, nobody to disturb me when I shut the door. It was one of the easiest teaching situations that I'd had as far as equipment is concerned. That room was built for me. The person in charge of it came in and said, "What would you want?" And I told her, particularly about the sink that had to have an extra-large pipe so it wouldn't stop up all the time. She tried to get everything fixed as I said I wanted it. They kept to their bargain all those ten years I stayed with them.

Question: We seem to have left out Hans Hofmann.

Mrs. H.: We had to leave Hofmann out, because he's such a big part of my thinking that I found out my whole attitude changed. Now when Mr. Thomas came to Agnes Scott he made me realize there were other ways of looking than the one which I had been

taught: academic, and almost photographic as far as representation went. Since the camera had come in there seemed to be not that much need for an artist doing it too. That approach was no longer necessary either for documentation or for the person doing it. I got to the pace I either had to quit or find another expression. It was very timely that Mr. Thomas came along when he did. He left me at Agnes Scott in 1945 requesting I be the teacher for the coming year, and he said, "I think you can go study with Hans Hofmann this summer in Provincetown." So I packed my luggage and went up to study with Hofmann.

Through correspondence with the Hofmanns, Mrs. Hofmann found a place for me to stay. [From Agnes Scott Alumni Article: She stayed at Casa Gernika. (From the internet: Now appears to be a B&B named Somerset House Inn, 378 Commercial Street <http://buildingprovincetown.wordpress.com/2010/01/08/378-commercial-street/>] Mr. Hofmann met me at the bus. When I got off, he carried my suitcase, because there were no porters. He carried it up three flights of steps to my room. I will never forget this great man, toting my suitcase up to my room on the third floor there.

I said, "Now when do I come to the studio?" He said, "Take your time—a couple of days just to be used to the place. And then, when you're ready, come on in." He gave me the hours he taught, the morning hours and the afternoon hours. All the same group. But he said, "You need to take a rest."

That year he had his studio up on top of the dunes. It was open face, so you felt all the time you were there that you were in contact with the whole outside world. It was a very good experience being close to the dune space. What was so wonderful for me was, he taught the use of space on the plane of your canvas and the control of that space, which I thought I knew, but what I knew was just filling it up. (From internet



research: In the summer of 1945 Hofmann lost the lease where he had been, the Hawthorne Class studio, and had not yet bought the property on 76 Commercial Street from seascape painter Frederick Waugh. So the summer of 1945 he used Fritz Bultman's newly built studio at 8 Miller Hill Road - <http://buildingprovincetown.wordpress.com/2010/01/04/8-miller-hill-road/> In the photo above, is Leone the second student from the right standing in the striped shirt?)

A good drawing, I believe, is truly great. A good, completed drawing looks spherical and takes care of the whole picture plane. When you complete it, it looks like it comes forward to you, like a ball. When an object displaces a space, there is recognition of the back side as well as the front side. The whole space-volume is displaced and negative space (that space not occupied by the object) becomes very important.

I was fascinated with negative space. This was one of the things that Hofmann liked in my work. He recognized it immediately. I had gotten an inkling of it when I was doing the work with Mr. Thomas. Therefore, I could go ahead with it. It took me two weeks to get a grasp on it. And then I drew my first composition which he considered very good. I painted this seventeen years later because at that time I had no inkling of how to use color other than academically.

What do you do it for? In this kind of thinking you certainly don't use local color and you don't use values in the sense of the grades of lights, grays and so on. I had a whole other world to learn as far as color was concerned. If the artist goes out of the picture, then it is a failure. You must stay within the four sides of the plane of the canvas. It should not look flat. There is so much modern painting that looks flat. Plastic painting is quite different from a flat, poster-like painting.

Question: What's the name of the picture you mentioned?

Mrs. H.: *It was the one right here on the wall.*

Question: The one with the stump in it?

Mrs. H.: *"The Charred Stump" is the name of it. I drew it seventeen years before I painted it. It was considered a good drawing by Mr. Hofmann. When I painted it, I decided that I would use color that was symbolic of something that I was acquainted with. When I worked it out, I used three sections in the background: bright yellow for the morning sunlight, orange for the afternoon sunlight, and blue for the water and the air that surrounded us there on the dunes in Provincetown. That was the basis for the other colors.*

The stump, which was a gorgeous, charred black stump, couldn't be just black. That was too extreme. It just went flat against these colors. So when I went to paint it, I had to think, "What makes up a charred black stump?" And I decided it would be ashes—so part of the stump is iridescent with ashes. There's the dark, burned part of the stump where it's charred completely, but in the heart of it the flame is still burning. It has to have something in it beyond what you're looking for. Your philosophy of life comes through, you see. It's not just the dexterity or the craftsmanship, but much more.

That was the way I worked out that painting. And it took three years to paint! Over in one corner is a portfolio because the studio was full of other people's work. The portfolio has a design on it which is not like the rest of the work -- showing it belongs to other people.

The drawing had all the principles which I had been taught up to that time.

Question: You didn't study color with Hofmann?

Mrs. H.: *I didn't study color in one sense. His idea was that he could help us with our drawing. He never said he'd do it for us, and he didn't. But he could help us with our*

drawing and our understanding of our page. You can't do a good painting without a good drawing. We drew to the best of our ability, then, we had to paint on our own, because Mr. Hofmann said you couldn't teach painting, that it came from within the person. It's an individual thing for every person, he said.

The principles used in painting in modern art—so different from academic art—include the fact that you use a vibration of color. One color against another. And one tiny spot of color can ruin the whole thing if it's in the wrong place. Put the least bit of wrong color on your canvas and it can ruin the whole canvas, even if it's in a corner. You have to keep your whole canvas in mind the whole time you're painting. It really drains you. Your entire physical abilities as well as your mental abilities.

I remember so well Mr. Hofmann telling me that the work demonstrates the mentality and spirituality of the artist. And that seems to have been the ideal he held up: that each thing you do is done to the best of your ability—in exploring it and in working on it. He did not want us to work like he worked. That wasn't his idea at all. He simply wanted to help us to see and explore and do the things that came from us rather than copying some rule, some regulation.

Question: What was your most interesting teaching job?

Mrs. H.: *Well, the Agnes Scott situation as far as the minds of the girls was concerned was the most exciting thing. There have been various students in the classes other than that, where the student has been the important thing. But one of the most fascinating things that was done for me as far as teaching is concerned was that one of my former students moved out to Seattle, Washington, and kept writing to me, "I want you to come out."*

Finally she said, "I have a class all set up for you and you can teach in my studio; so come out and just stay with me." So I did. We had a two-week session there; morning and afternoon classes. It was so successful that they asked me to come back for four or five years. Which I did, and thoroughly enjoyed. Marjorie Sacre was the name of the lady who had been the former student and she and her husband are still living in Seattle. They've asked me would I please come back. I won't go back at this time. But that was a fascinating thing I thought to happen to a teacher.

Now some of those students have gone on with their work, and are working according to what we were trying to put up. They had very little time to learn, but it was concentrated, the time we studied, and I feel that you can get a great deal done in that time. Maybe more than you can get in a couple of days a week laboratory in schools. I felt that in two weeks' time that we had studied in the manner Hofmann has his students concentrate. That means that you can get an awful lot learned in one day if you stick to it. I enjoyed that as an experience in teaching that was a little unusual because I didn't have to set up the classes. It was all set up for me. I was entertained royally. Any time I could take the time for it. I learned a good bit about the coast by being taken on airplane flights to islands where people have their cottages. And going out in the large yachts—

out on Puget Sound—going to oyster bakes, salmon bakes. There's no salmon like that salmon. You can get it fresh baked, right out of the water there. That whole experience, I think, is one that I'll always cherish.

In my mind there are certain students whose grasp of the work will always stay with me. Margaret Via, who lives in Atlanta, was one who worked with me, and I felt had excellent grasp of the work. She was unusually talented to begin with and very serious in her work. Margaret has gone on with her work. Her color system's quite different from mine, which is as it should be. The thing that I will cherish is that students aren't doing what the teacher does. This is very important to me. That if they get a principle, that they express it in their own way. I think this is the only way you can be an artist.

Question: Don't people sometimes say that students' work looks like yours?

Mrs. H.: *They say that they can spot a student of mine, sometimes. If they can, then that worries me. Because I feel that the student hasn't taken the work to himself. I will not work a student's work. Therefore there's no trace of my own work, as far as my own brush goes—or charcoal. But, I do feel that for a while a student is too close to the teacher not to take some of the traits into the work, if they have seen that work.*

I did fail to mention that they set up a show for me in Seattle and that I sold most of my paintings in a rather large show. I like to think of the paintings being out there. They like the work because of it's bright colors. They have gray winters and so they like bright colors in the house. My work could go very well into their living rooms.

The best show I suppose I ever had—the most complete—was at Agnes Scott when I was leaving Decatur. It was just after the show in Seattle, and I'd expected to put a lot of those paintings in the show at Agnes Scott, but they were sold. However, the show at Agnes Scott was well worthwhile and I sold nearly everything that wasn't already owned. There were alumnae who'd gotten paintings from me, even back at the time when I was in school and was doing portrait work. The picture wasn't purchased, but I gave it to the person in payment for posing. I asked for two of those back to show. I asked for Lilly Bellingrath's back and Virginia Watts' back. In the room where the portraits were, that whole side of the gallery was made up of the still lifes and the scenes which were done in Agnes Scott—my early work.

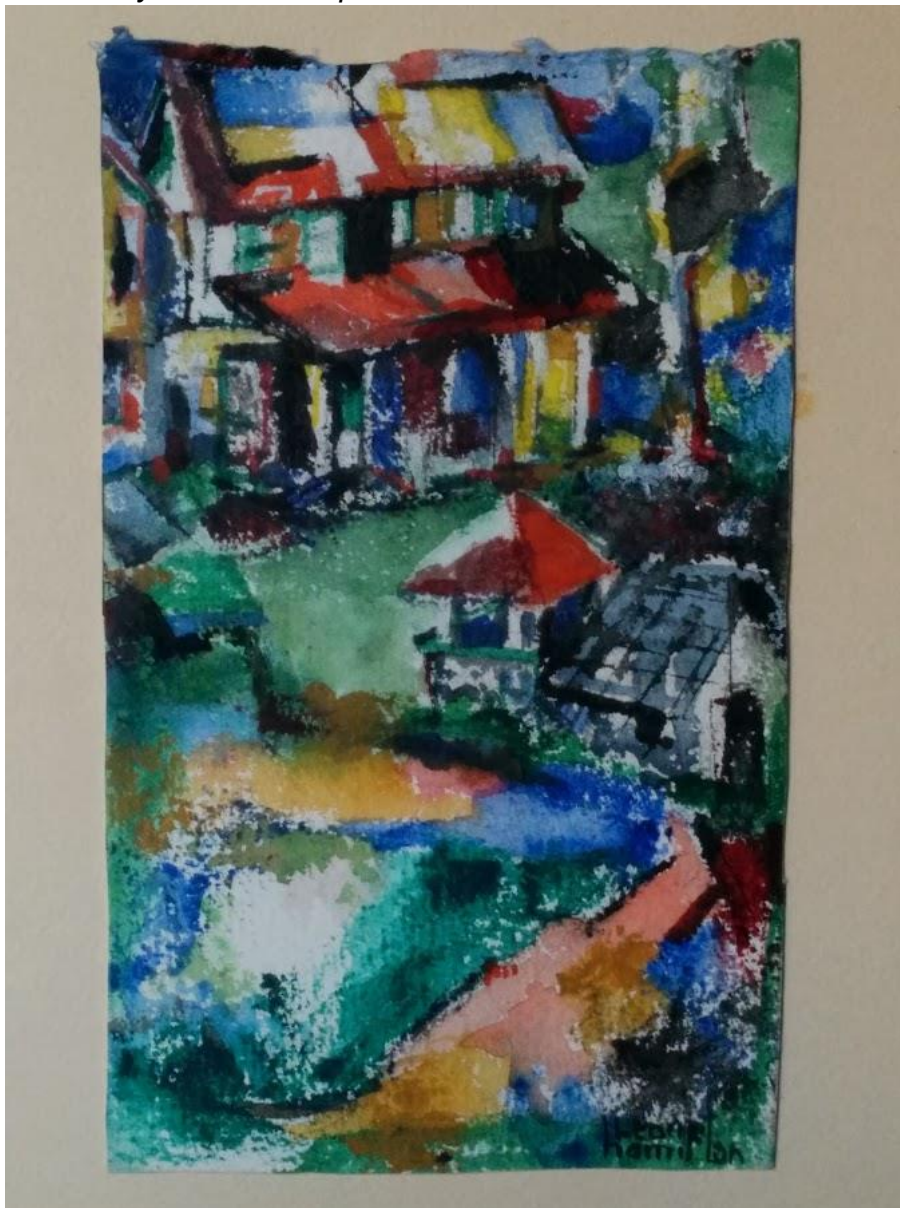
Question: You work principally in watercolor and oil—but the size of your watercolors are much smaller than your oils--

Mrs. H.: *This is very deliberate because I feel that a watercolor is an intimate sort of experience. I hold it in my lap or close in front of me. I don't walk back and forth in front of it as I do when I'm painting an oil. I hardly ever make one that is larger than twelve inches by fourteen inches, which is about a quarter of a standard-size sheet of watercolor paper. I do believe in getting the best quality I can find—but I hardly ever work more than a quarter of a standard sheet. I never do a large watercolor because I*

feel, in almost every one that I've looked at, that they crack in two; that's my way of expressing it.

It's necessary in the more beautiful paintings to let some of the white paper come through, but it also makes it have to be a more concentrated picture. So I work, once in a while, very small.

This little painting over here is of my home place where I grew up as a child in the country in the Shenandoah Valley in West Virginia. It's the home place with the well-house, which is like a pagoda, and the old dairy house, which is an old stone building built back in the late 1700's, and the road up to the house which is up on the hill beyond that. They're both on top of the hill from down on the road there. You could not actually go out and see this. I have concentrated the picture so that I've gotten into it things that would not be in your vision in a range this small. While it looks like it—I feel it looks like it—yet it is not the same. If you look at a photograph you would not get this at all.



The color is color vibrations: reds against greens, blues against oranges. And a great deal of white showing. It's a very quick thing, done really on a scrap of paper—because the paper was good and I didn't want to throw it away. It's been a very successful little painting. It's won awards in shows. It's one that I will not sell. There are some that I will not sell and this is one of them—to go

down in the family to the children. (This painting is owned by Susan Leathers Mitchell, Leone Hamilton's granddaughter, and is named "Elmwood". It measures 5" x 10")

Now this other watercolor over here, was a set-up for a still life. It had a little bird in it. I had walked through the woods early in the year and found a tree that had little things hanging down from bare limbs—sort of like little lanterns. I don't know what the tree was. I brought some up to the house with me and used them in the background. I liked the way it looked and I used it. Then I had a piece of natural wood, a toadstool construction, a frog and a snail. The frog is hard to find, you sort of have to look for him. I believe in this. I don't think you ought to see everything when you first look at a picture. Now the bird is done in a very hasty sort of way. He's left white as the paper. He's called "The Intruder." And the painting's called this. Because the bird flew down into the midst of what was still and quiet and he was just intruding entirely—the territory belongs to these earth-bound things.

There are some other things in it but I don't remember all of them, because after I paint a picture I don't treasure it to the point that it's got to be right there with me. Every one of them is an experiment to me. I learn something with each one of them. In this one I don't think I'd even got that much white space—where the bird landed. I always like enough white to make it jewel-like. Because this is what gives that jewel-like quality. The art is to leave it.

Now the still life up on the wall was done with an entirely different feeling. This is called "Red Sumac" and it's a silver basket. It was in a situation where I was teaching at Decatur High School. The girls had done the study. I liked the study when I set it up—none of the girls had seen this, as I felt it. So I stayed after class and made my own sketch. And I think it's a successful painting.

Now in this next one I used the palette knife with watercolors—which I will do if I want to. I don't see why in the world I should have to take a brush to put it on there if I feel like it needs a different kind of edge, a different kind of feeling. So I will use a palette knife quite often. I use a palette knife a great deal with oils too. In the beginning I didn't like painting in oils with soft brushes. It just wasn't me. So I had to do something about that. The way I overcame it later was to use a canvas with a rough surface and I'd put the paint on as thick or as thin as I wanted to with a palette knife.

Question: You mentioned this watercolor started with the still life. You seem to use a lot of still life for subject matter.

Mrs. H.: *Yes I do. But not only still life. When I do use the still life, it isn't used in the academic approach. That is, it isn't used photographically. It's a question of—well, I want to boss the picture. If I want to boss the picture, then I have to interpret what's there. Interpreting doesn't mean just picking it up and putting it somewhere else—which was the early thinking of most students who wanted to be creative. Their idea of being creative was that if there was a bottle in the picture they'd put the bottle up or down or*

somewhere else than where it was in the painting. But it really didn't make any difference. In my thinking, it has to tell something as well as being aware of the objects.

Here we have three different examples of still lifes right in front of us. All the pictures are similar in size. And often square. I like a square. I think it's very pretty. One is done in more pastel colors, which I seldom use—I was experimenting with them here because I had used strong colors for months preceding it and I felt like I wanted to see if I could handle the softer colors. I put up a stool and put a board on top of the stool, a square board. The stool was the kind that had the scraggly legs to it, and I got the old coffee grinder down, and a butter mold, an old crock, and the butter paddle. That began the picture. Well, when it came to expressing it, the objects are expressed through the use of negative space and transparency. The top of the table, which was actually a checkerboard, was done as though it was glass. I looked right through it and saw the scraggly legs coming to their destination and meeting the objects on the table. The color still had enough vibration in it to work.

The things in the picture are not static. The coffee grinder should look like it could turn if it wanted to, I felt. The drawer which held the coffee in it after it was ground should look like it could be pulled out. The little sides of the coffee grinder are dovetailed, which makes a nice design, and that should show. It was interesting to do that. Parts of it were transparent, parts of it weren't. Same thing with the butter mold. You can see through some of it and some of it you can't.

This thinking isn't like what you usually find in a studio, but it's the way I love to work, and I think it allows such beautiful shapes to come into the picture. The top of the table, which could have been just squares—or it could have been just solid—has come up to me with a meaning for what was below it, what's above it. So that's the way the painting came about.

Now this one over here, which I call "The Edge of the Marsh," even though it's a still life, had some artificial wooden flowers—somebody had given me some made with shavings that I thought were interesting. They were in the background and then I have a bowl that was made by Mr. Westervelt up here. He always puts a foot on his bowls and this fascinated me because there was a space



between the bowl and the table. I had a wooden bird that Marjorie Sacre had given me and a frog—I don't know where I picked that one up, but these things were in the picture and the background came up blue and orange and then the foreground was black and yellow-greens and blue-greens. The frog is white, as the bird was in the watercolor. I didn't realize I was doing these two things with two objects taken from life, originally. But there were no colors that would stick to the two and I was fascinated with wood, when it's bleached, particularly.

They're hard to do, and That's why I fool with them. The bottom of the picture is darker than the rest of it. There's more black in this painting than any that I think I've ever done. I had fun making that work with the other colors in here. In each painting you do learn. Also, in this one is a little bit of transparency. You would not know what the flowers in the background were—it looks like an exploration of a roman candle or something—but it was fascinating for me to do it. That's the way that one was done.

This little one over here, which I call "Lamp, Books and Philosopher", is not a square. It's a little longer than it is high. This was in front of the window on that table. On the table I had a little lamp and a book on Chinese culture. Then the bookends with books between them, which was a pair of bookends I had. One was a monk and the other a philosopher. This is the philosopher.

I set the table up. At that time I was liking to see under the edge of the table. The lamp is a fascinating lamp. If Aladdin's lamp could have been an up-and-down lamp, I think this would have been Aladdin's lamp, because it's one with a vase and a bowl and lampshade on it that could be from China, it could be anything. It's the way I wanted to paint it. Then a couple of books between the two book ends. One of the funny things that happened to me was the sides. I love to do the shapes and the negative space of banisters, the uprights of banisters. I loved the shape of that and I got to thinking about it when I was looking off at the



window and, while my back porch doesn't have any of those on it, I found them coming there in both the left and right-hand side of the picture. And there really was a building in the background through the window: it was the old smoke house. So that's why that is

there. Anybody looking at it would say it was made up of reds, I think. But there's just as much green and just as much blue. I have found it very interesting that people will look at my paintings and one of them will say, "Oh you sure do use a lot of blue." The next one will say, "You like green, don't you?" And they'll be looking at the same picture.

You don't use color because you like it. You use it because it works where you're putting it. That's what counts with color. It's just got to work. Of course, in order for it to work you've got to know what you're doing. If it just happened, then you could never do it again. You've got to learn enough to know when it'll work and when it won't. That isn't easy.

So, those are the three still lifes. Now you asked about subject matter and where it comes from. I have, I suppose, a religious turn of mind, because I do believe we're here on this earth for a reason and that there are certain things which we learned in the past which come into our thinking. I was raised in the church, have always attended, and believe strongly in the church. This comes through in some of my paintings. For instance, one year I got fascinated with the idea of The Robe when the book came out. So I decided I wanted to do some religious paintings using cloaks. I did one of Joseph and his brethren. Well, actually they were greens, yellow-greens on either side of him, but he had on his striped coat of many colors. Decatur Presbyterian Church owns that one. Then I wanted to do one of the Old Testament of Elijah and Elisha and the mantle. So I had the coat of many colors, the mantle, and the robes to work on. This painting is the only one I have left of them: "Elijah and Elisha".



[Leone does not refer to the painting shown here at right, but is a good example of her biblically based subject matter. This one is Christ on the cross with death represented on the right and his resurrection and ascension into heaven on the left.]

The two men crossed over the Jordan River and were standing on the other side. The older man was taken up—a chariot of fire is here, but it does not say he was taken in the chariot, so I simply suggested two revolving red wheels at the top of the picture which show the chariot had come. With no drawing of the chariot. Just a suggestion, an impression, maybe. Then the older man is floating up in the air and his hands are out. He's releasing his mantle to the young man, who is Elisha. Elijah is the one who went up with the chariot. The thing that almost floored me on this one was what to do with the mantle. I knew I wanted it. It was the heart of the picture to me in a way, and yet if I made it like a blanket that's what it would be: just a blanket. And I thought the mantle meant more than that.

If the older man were leaving his mantle, he was leaving his work, his job, to the younger man. So in the mantle, which is almost invisible, I wove the events in the life of Elijah which might affect this man Elisha who was taking up his work. I had him before the king. I had him healing the widow's son. I had him kneeling at the altar where there was the contest before his God and Baal. The prophets of Baal were slain so they're expressed simply as the red areas whereas he is depicted as a person at the altar. Then you remember, he went to the cave and looked out and the voice of the Lord was upon him. So that is what this painting is about. It comes directly from a Biblical reference. It has nothing to do with any picture I've ever seen. That is, it isn't a hang-over copy lingering in my mind.

I also like to work abstractly. When I can think of something that really pleases me as an abstraction I want to work with it too. But even abstractions are not to me thoughtless. They can have an idea back of them, they can have construction in them. I had painted a picture for Scott Candler, of his home on a lake in north Georgia. Before I sent it to him, I thought, "I would like to make an abstraction that comes from this picture." While it was a tall, vertical picture, much taller than it was wide, when I drew the abstraction it came up almost square, but a little taller.

When it came through, it came through as—the subject gives you a clue—it's "The Waters were Separated". It is what I feel was the beginning of creation. The water is being separated from the earth, and the earth being formed. In it is a pattern of almost a hand grasping the whole thing, which could be the hand of God that created it or whatever you want to call it. It isn't evident as a hand, it's just a feeling. Then I couldn't stand for it not to have some light in it. While light is not mentioned with the parting of the waters, I did put a yellow area in at the top, which for me represents the light. The other areas are green and blue, a little bit of black. I feel as an abstraction it is alive.

I also like to do paintings that come from the past as far as memory goes. What did I do when I was a child. The farm[Elmwood on the Opequon] has always been my great love as a homeplace goes. I was happy when my husband retired and we could come back and live here. He wanted to come. It still fascinates me for subject matter.

The well is like a pagoda in form almost. Except it isn't Japanese. It's just a little square with a square top on it. When I began drawing it to paint it—up under the roof when I used to pump there, I always used to feel the dancing sunlight on the ceiling and the leaves' reflection up there—so when it came to doing this underside of the roof, I just looked right through it and had the leaves and trees come through. It has it's four posts and lattice work halfway up. We lattice-worked a good many things. This is the only one that's still left.

Now, I was just saying, the well, with the house over it and the pump in it, wasn't what I wanted it to mean. So I got to thinking, "What was connected to this well?" I thought back to when I was a little girl, when Uncle Billy was with us. My brother and I went down to the well to help him carry buckets back. And you can imagine what help we

were! But there they are in the back of this picture in the lattice work. It carries over from the center back on the right-hand side on the front, where my brother really comes forward into another plane. It's all one picture. Another thing I remembered was my brother cooling watermelons in a tub of water—that's part of the latticework. Then my poodle dog which I dearly loved is in the bottom of the picture. There's a young couple, who for some reason wished to escape the adult's eyes and so they'd go to the well. Above them I was holding a bucket of water. I like to tease my brother, so I threw a bucket of water at him. In the background, vaguely expressed, are birds and a person or two reading.

But to me these things can make up a painting, and are much more interesting to me than going out and just copying what's there as my eye sees it. Because I can feel, I can remember thoughts, all the things that I like are in the painting--if I will paint it. If not, then I'm just doing whatever is there, and I do not control as a painter: using space, using the picture plane, controlling the entire composition. I always draw. Sometimes it's very hard to make the paint say what you want it to say. But you keep at it and keep at it and that's the way it works.

Question: You were saying something about the rhythm: working at something that's very hard and getting depressed—then it works..

Mrs. H.: Yes. In the working of space, if you have not been introduced to it, and you have been working with the use of linear perspective, you have to have a lot of patience with yourself, because even if you're a very bright student you come to this terrible place where you feel like you'd rather hit your head against the wall and be done with it. But all of a sudden a little light breaks through an inch along the way, and you know that there's more beyond that—so just keep on for a few weeks as a student, and new light will come. You just have to be patient with yourself.

Question: But you still have ups and downs afterwards?

Mrs. H.: You don't have too many ups and downs once you've learned to control things. I don't think the picture gets away from you because it's wrong since you can see what the problem is. I can know something that's going to make it look better.

I prefer color to black and white. Even though I like drawing and I think drawing's beautiful just in itself, without any idea of using color. Color is so exciting to me I almost feel sometimes I can get drunk on color. So when a painting comes through and I feel like it has, then I feel it's worth it. That's why I think you get to the place where you can put your time and effort on something that isn't popular; you don't have those long depressed spells. Also, the world has gotten a little more understanding.

It's hard not to have your work accepted, and those masters who could work against the population and could come through with their own thinking and new things in art are the exceptional ones. I will not compromise and I think from that came the building up of the

picture plane. I like to have the paintings on canvas, then put it up on the wall there so I can live with it and feel a great joy in it and see what more is to be done or undone.

Question: Some of these pictures have your name on them and some of them don't.

Mrs. H.: *They're all supposed to have my name on them. If it isn't on there it's just because I've forgotten to put it on. But I do not let a painting go out without my name. I think that all artists should claim their work. Now this was not the case years and years ago. No artist put his name on Egyptian art.*

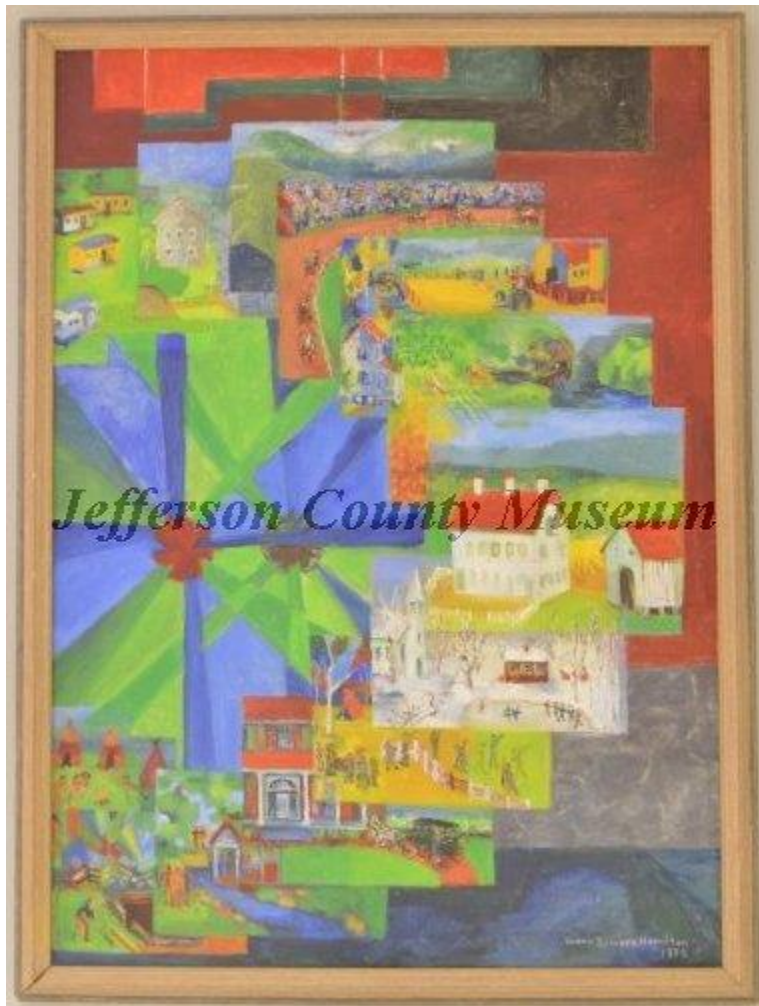
But I feel like if you do the work, put your name on it. I would not like to have pictures attributed to me that I didn't do. So when I do it I like to put my name on it. Now I do forget once in a while. I've even had to unglass pictures when they've been framed because I would realize I hadn't signed it, particularly watercolors. The buyer will say, "You haven't signed it. Why haven't you signed it?" I say, "I'm sorry, I certainly meant to," because I think every artist should have to claim their own work.

OTHER PAINTINGS BY LEONE BOWERS HAMILTON



This large (easily 4 ft x 4 ft) oil painting is called Story Book Room. At the bottom in the foreground, one gets the sense of the room itself with an oriental carpet on the floor, the wall on the right with a key, and a table with a foot stool underneath on the left. On the table are several items including a little brass bell, a snow globe, a bowl of fruit, and toward the back several books. The last book on the right is open and Leone's favorite stories "spill" forth in somewhat of a grid pattern across the top half of the painting. In the top left corner is Robin Hood and to the right Rumpelstiltskin, an elf spinning straw into gold. Next to this is the Wizard of Oz with Dorothy and the Tin Man. Next we see Rip van Winkle nine pin bowling and finally, from the bible, baby Moses floating in a basket with a woman reaching out for him. Directly underneath Moses is Don Quixote fighting a windmill, and to the left of this Alice in Wonderland looking up at a green

caterpillar and the Cheshire cat. To the left further on is a Genie with a magic lamp, and lastly, Robinson Crusoe hiding behind the fruit bowl.



Framed oil painting titled "Grit: A History of Jefferson County," by Leone Bowers Hamilton in 1978. Artist signature and date in bottom right corner of painting.

Hamilton was a participating artist in the 1978 Woodbury Exhibit titled "The Artists in Our Community," sponsored by the Jefferson Arts Council, Shepherd College, and the West Virginia Arts and Humanities Commission. (See attached file in record #1119 on "The Artists in Our Community" reception at Woodbury, 1978.)

Card on the back of painting indicates that it was entered into the 4th Annual Exhibition of Regional Artists. Card contains the following information: Leone Bowers Hamilton, Rt 2 Box 211(?), Kearneysville, WV 25430, 1- 725-5671, Resident of Jefferson County, Grit: A History of Jefferson Co., Medium 011, Price NFS, One entry.



View from the Cross is another large oil painting that is a good example of Leone's biblically based subject matter. About this painting she wrote "...In no way a conventional scene of the crucifixion, this vibrant canvas depicts two aspects of the crucified Christ – one, His death and attendant evil and corruption, and the other, His radiant rebirth with flowers coming to life at His feet and the river of life flowing at His side."

To learn more about Leone Bowers Hamilton and her art visit:
<https://www.elmwoodvillageart.com>