

Jennifer Bartlett (b. 1941)

Jennifer Bartlett became one of the most well-known artists in the 1970s and 80s when her enormous painting, *Rhapsody* (1975–76), was shown in a gallery in New York. The painting was made from 987 twelve-inch-square enamel plates that had been prepared to look like graph paper, and installed like a grid that covered more than 150 feet of the gallery walls. In addition to its size, the painting was surprising because rather than representing a particular artistic style, it seemed to be an overview of many diverse historical styles, including Impressionism, Expressionism, Abstraction, Pop Art, Minimalism, and Conceptualism.

Bartlett studied art at Mills College in Oakland, California, and at the Yale School of Art and Architecture, where she met other artists who, like her, developed styles that were independent of Minimalism, which was predominant at the time.

Early in her career, in the late 1960s, Bartlett made the decision to limit her materials and process for the next few years by painting only on steel plates and the graph paper grid. She also followed strict rules for each work, using only dots of paint within the squares. The resulting work was unpredictable and sometimes playful. After several years of painting in this style she created *Rhapsody*, which broke many of her own rules—it was lushly painted and included recognizable objects—and set a direction for her new work.

In years following *Rhapsody*, Bartlett continued to paint using the grid on steel plates for which she had become known. She also worked with oil on canvas, printmaking, and sculpture. In her subject matter, she explored both abstraction and representation; some of her work shows houses, gardens, and water, while others are created solely of colorful dots painted on top of a grid.

In her most recent work, Bartlett incorporates text to create “word paintings,” in which words and phrases are painted on her signature steel plates. The words are built up with multi-colored dots, making them hard to read. But once deciphered, they are personal, poetic, and witty.

Selected Bibliography

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