

Bonnie Stone

Women's Work is Never Done



Tabletop Flight, Watercolor

Robert T. Wright
Community Gallery of Art



College of Lake County

Bonnie Stone: Women's Work Is Never Done

Man may work from sun to sun, but woman's work is never done.

As the saying above goes, so goes Bonnie Stone's work. Her watercolors exemplify the motto both in subject and technique. As an artist she explores different aspects of domestic issues with a non-compromising hand and eye, defining all subtle nuances. In other words, this artist's work is never done. More specifically, Stone's vibrant watercolors symbolically depict women's roles in traditional Judaic and African-American cultures. This has been an underlying theme to her work for decades that has been refined both aesthetically and conceptually. While her watercolors delve into two traditional cultures, they touch upon certain universals. Her compositions are completely filled with domestic imagery such as children, spouses, various food, tea, clothing, and houses. Bonnie Stone's forty watercolors and four lithographs in this exhibition investigate the work and activities that comprise daily home life. Her paintings celebrate the never-ending tasks that make up everyday life.

For many years Bonnie Stone has resided in Saratoga, California, but she spent her formative time in Chicago. While she went to high school in Chicago, Stone attended Saturday classes at the Art Institute. She later taught art for nearly four years at Maine Township High School West. This exhibition is her first one-person show in the Chicago area. Her work, though, has been widely exhibited on the west coast and around the country. Stone's work is represented in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, as well as other prestigious public and private collections.

Running throughout most of Stone's works is the subtext of Judaic images. It exemplifies the artist's heritage and identity. These images include prayer shawls, menorahs, styles of dress, and Hebrew writing. In this way there is a connection to the paintings of 20th century artist Marc Chagall who also employed Jewish imagery. This element gives the work a certain cultural texture, however her domestic imagery maintains universal appeal. A number of the works on exhibit depict African-American women. Stone, though not African-American, broadens her scope to deal with cultural diversity issues, yet she maintains the common thread of women's roles throughout work.

Stone's compositions also have been influenced by traditional Japanese prints: she often employs oriental print design elements such as vertical spatial arrangements. Western art uses linear perspective to imply depth. In Eastern art things at the bottom of the picture plane are in the foreground and things at the top are farther away. Another design element in Japanese prints is the depiction of people in ornately patterned and colorful costumes. Stone's figures, in their Eastern European garb, are beautifully rendered with intricate geometric patterns and saturated hues. As with the genre of the Japanese print, the pattern is used to flatten the forms of the figures and objects, while the vertical space flattens the depth of the composition. In the 1990s Bonnie Stone had an exhibition in California titled *Oy Butterfly*. This tongue-in-cheek title was a nod to her combination of Japanese stylistic devices with Judaic imagery.

Bonnie Stone's watercolors utilize certain female icons as a means of social commentary. Some of these symbols include aprons, cookbooks, and quilts. At first glance, one sees these images as coming from the cookie cutter mold of Betty Crocker's 1950s America. However, Stone's underlying themes deal with changing roles for women, social reforms, and breaking traditions.

Aprons

Bonnie Stone has been collecting vintage aprons for many years. She is fascinated with the untold stories of the women who wore them. Aprons have become outmoded as a part of the American kitchen, perhaps symbolically replaced by the microwave. Food preparation used to take hours, but now can take mere minutes. A friend of Stone's, Michelle Gabriel, wrote in an essay, "There's comfort in the image of someone putting on an apron in order to prepare nourishment for another person." Gabriel goes on to say, "Remarkably, as the apron strings tie the apron to the body, so too does the universality and commonality of . . . women's experiences and narratives forever tie us emotionally and spiritually to one another."

Aprons are a prime symbol for Stone's "domestic landscapes." In her painting *Tabletop Flight* a woman with an apron floats over a table laden with foodstuffs. The apron pocket contains various household items. The artist suggests that the figure, which was previously bound by the garment, is moving on to new roles. In the background, to reinforce this image, is a woman standing behind "bar-like" windowpanes. This piece exemplifies a recurring theme in Stone's oeuvre: "the changing roles of women." With this in mind it is interesting to note her watercolor *Evening Repast*. In this piece the apron appears on a male figure. As women's roles have changed, so too have men's. In many households today, gender roles are no longer so rigidly defined. It begs the question, however, do men still work only "from sun to sun."

Quilts

This exhibition, *Women's Work Is Never Done*, revisits some themes that began in an earlier series of black and white drawings that focused on quilts. Included in this show are four lithographs taken from that drawing series. Quilting in the 19th century was often organized around larger protest themes, such as the abolition movement. Given this noble history, quilting imagery is used by Stone as a symbol of women pressing for social reform. In addition quilting has been an important part of the cultural heritage for African-American women. *Cookie Jar* depicts black women engaged in quilting. Their colorful 19th century dress suggests African textiles and is in keeping with Stone's penchant for depicting women in elaborate garb. A needle case in the foreground bears the motto "Land of the free, home of the brave." This is a direct reference to the abolitionist movement. The aforementioned *Tabletop Flight* also has references to quilting with various sewing tools in the apron pockets.

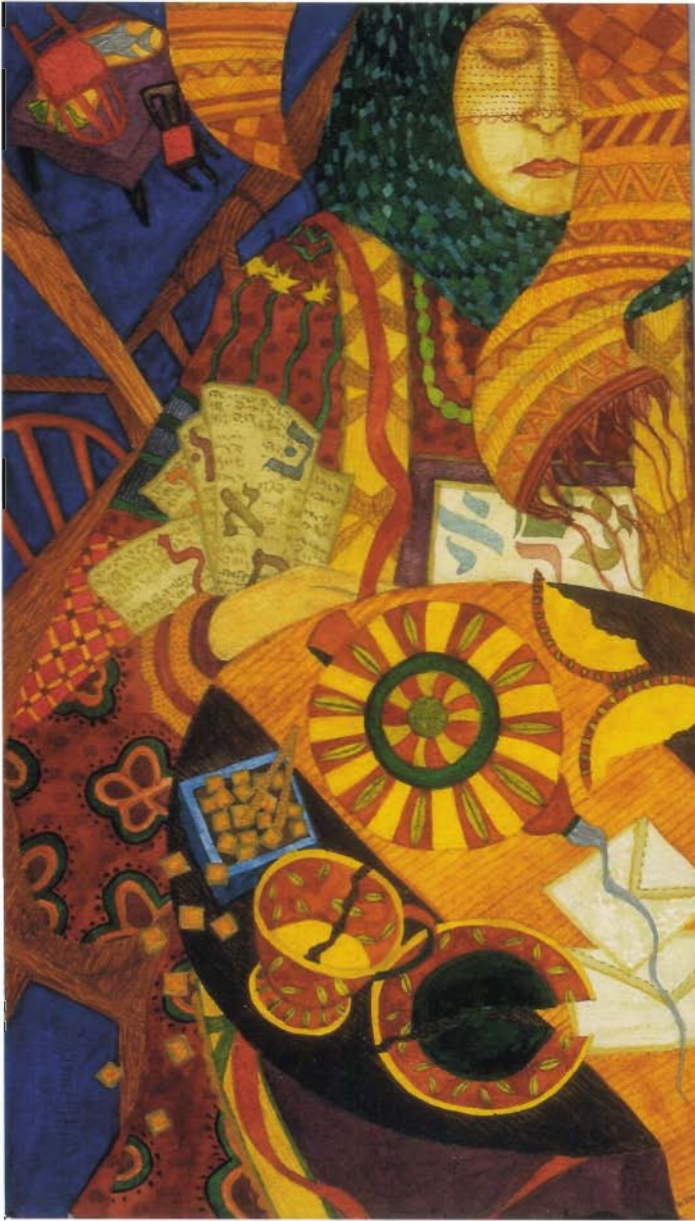
Cookbooks

In addition to aprons, part of Stone's "domestic " collecting also includes cookbooks. She says that the books' recipes and ingredients can provide insightful historical information. A woman's identity is frequently delineated by her cooking skills. Stone's watercolor *New Recipes* depicts a cookbook with a torn page. Standing sentry-like next to the book is a black doll with a spoon held at attention. The torn page has a quilting pattern on it and there are scraps of material scattered about that may lend themselves to a quilt. The illustrated recipe page depicts greens or herbs used in some sort of folk dish.

(Continued on page 5.)



Net Working, 2002-04
Watercolor
11 1/4" x 12"



Esther's Tea Tray, 2002-04
Watercolor
12" x 6 3/4"



Curtain Call, 2002-04
Watercolor
15" x 5 1/2"



Cookie Jar, 2002-04

Watercolor
14³/₄" x 15"

Curtain Call continues the culinary theme, but this time in a humorous vein. This elegantly tall and narrow composition depicts a woman standing on a tabletop. She is laden with foodstuffs and clutching a cookbook. She is topped with a headdress comprised of various leaves and vegetables, which obscures her eyes. Regarding this painting Stone says, “when asked to provide food for community gatherings each woman thinks her contribution is the most outstanding and deserves center stage.” In the background other recipe pages are dropping like leaves in the fall, but the woman is “blinded” to the efforts of others.

The past few decades have brought about a constant state of flux to women’s roles the world over. Women are striving for more education, better health care, equal opportunities, and a chance to improve their status. Stone attempts to dramatize this altering of the status quo in *Esther’s Tea Tray*. Esther is wearing a head covering and clutches papers with Hebrew writing. An afternoon’s cup of tea is supposed to be a soothing social affair. However, the tea tray, tilted at an oblique angle, is spilling tea, cups, and saucers. Tables and chairs are also flying through the air, further disrupting the staid conventions. This work may also give a veiled reference to the Biblical Esther whose strength and courage saved Israel.

Seen from Above

A number of works in this exhibition are composed from a “bird’s eye view.” This device depicts the perspective of looking straight down on the scene. *Net Working* is one such example. Seen from above, four women are standing close together and facing each other. They are on top of a loose net with fish and aprons caught in it. The work’s “double entendre” title suggests that these women are caught in gender roles, while it also implies that they are communicating with each other. As the ladies talk together they are exchanging books and recipes. Viewing the scene from above adds to the intimacy of this private discussion. It also imparts an abstract design element to the composition.

Bonnie Stone has synthesized diverse elements into one body of work. From the Japanese print she has drawn upon its stylistic devices and elaborately rendered textile patterns. From her own heritage she has incorporated Jewish symbols and Hebrew writing, as well as eastern European dress. By extension, she has done the same for African-American culture. Her female oriented iconography includes aprons, cookbooks, and quilts. All of these bits and pieces are assembled into her own style of “quilt,” that is to say, her watercolors. Stone paints with intense hues, delicate lines, and elaborate visual surface textures. Her images celebrate domestic life yet also challenge staid notions of gender roles. The forty-four works on exhibit are aesthetically beautiful and intellectually stimulating. As for Bonnie Stone the artist, one hopes that this woman’s work is never done.

Steven Jones
Art Gallery Curator



New Recipes, 2002-04
Watercolor
9 3/4" x 15 1/2"

BONNIE STONE

BACKGROUND

University of Illinois, Urbana, IL, BFA, Art Education, 1960
Institute of Design, Illinois Institute of Technology, graduate work

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2003 *Bonnie Stone: A Retrospective Exhibition*, Peninsula Volunteers, Little House, Menlo Park, CA
2001 *30 Year Celebration*, White Bird Gallery, Cannon Beach, OR
1995 *Quilts, Quilters, Quilting: Narrative Threads of Our Social Fabric*, Stanford faculty Club, Stanford, CA
1990 *Oy Butterfly*, Tandem Computers, Cupertino, CA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2003-04 *Ninety from the Nineties*, A Decade of Printing, New York Public Library, New York City, NY
2002 *Los Gatos Open Juried Show*, Art Museum of Los Gatos, Los Gatos, CA
2002 *Women's Works, 15th Annual Exhibition*, Old Court House Arts Center, Woodstock, IL
1998 *Book as Art X*, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
Museum of the Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, CA
National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.
New York Public Library, New York City, NY
The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City, NY

SELECTED HONORS

- 2002 Baber Award of Merit, 2002 Biennial Art Award, National League of American Pen Women
1997 Visiting Artist, Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, TX
1990 Purchase Award, *Works on Paper '90*, Koret Gallery, Palo Alto, CA

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- 1997 *The True Collector*, by Frederica Postman, illustrated by Bonnie Stone, P'Nye Press, Los Altos, CA
1988 *The Yiddish Alphabet Book*, by Frederica Postman, illustrated by Bonnie Stone, Adama Books, New York City, NY

Bonnie Stone: Women's Work Is Never Done

August 16 – September 26, 2004

Exhibition Checklist

Numbers 1-40 are watercolors

1. *A Delicate Balance*, 11 1/4" x 12"
2. *Arrival*, 22" x 7 1/2"
3. *Bareback Rider*, 9" x 12"
4. *Battle For A Small Table*, 18" x 11 3/8"
5. *Breaking Tradition*, 14 7/8" x 11 1/2"
6. *Candy Box Hat*, 15" x 5 1/2"
7. *Cookie Jar*, 14 1/4" x 15 3/4"
8. *Curtain Call*, 15" x 5 1/2"
9. *Departure*, 22" x 7 1/2"
10. *Domestic Sunset*, 15" x 5 1/2"
11. *Esther's Tea Tray*, 12" x 6 3/4"
12. *Evening Repast*, 19" x 14"
13. *Famous For Her Dessert Tray*, 15 1/4" x 14"
14. *Game Of Chance*, 11 1/4" x 12"
15. *Hanging Out To Dry*, 16" x 6"
16. *Hold On To Your Hat*, 22" x 11"
17. *Holiday Cloth*, 15 1/4" x 7 1/2"
18. *Kale, Kale, The Gang's All Here*, 10" x 10"
19. *Net Working*, 11 1/4" x 12"
20. *New Recipes*, 9 3/4" x 15 1/2"
21. *Next Course*, 11" x 8"
22. *Night Feathers*, 30" x 5 1/2"
23. *Not A Drop Will Be Spilled*, 15 1/2" x 11 1/2"
24. *Picket Fence*, 9" x 12"
25. *Piece By Piece*, 13 1/4" x 10"

Gallery hours:

Aug. 16-20

Mon-Fri 8:00 am-4:30 pm

Aug. 23 - Sept. 26

Mon-Thu 8:00 am-9:00 pm

Fri-Sat 9:00 am-4:30pm

Sun 1:00-5:00 pm

Closed: Sept. 6 & 7

26. *Precarious Banquet*, 11 1/4" x 11 1/4"
27. *Preparing For Journeys*, 9 1/2" x 11"
28. *Preparing For Voyages*, 11" x 13"
29. *Rama's Shoes*, 12" x 9"
30. *Ring Around Rosie*, 11" x 11"
31. *She's Going To Pieces*, 13 1/4" x 10"
32. *Sister, Sister, The Scraps Are Flying*, 15" x 11"
33. *Spring Buds*, 14" x 10"
34. *Tabletop Flight*, 22 1/2" x 15 3/4"
35. *The Artist Imagines Three Dancers*, 11 1/4" x 12"
36. *The Last Word*, 22" x 15"
37. *Three Cooks, One Fish*, 14 3/4" x 11"
38. *Three Scholars And A Glass Tea*, 9" x 12"
39. *Urban Headdress*, 11" x 15"
40. *Voyager*, 18" x 18"

From the **Quilt Series**, 1990-1992

41. *Am I Not A Woman And A Sister*, offset lithograph, 20/36
 42. *Her Quilted Flying Suit*, offset lithograph, 30/36
 43. *Picnic Hampered*, offset lithograph, 19/36
 44. *Quilted Bag of Tricks*, offset lithograph, 11/36
- These four lithographs are a gift to the college from the artist.

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