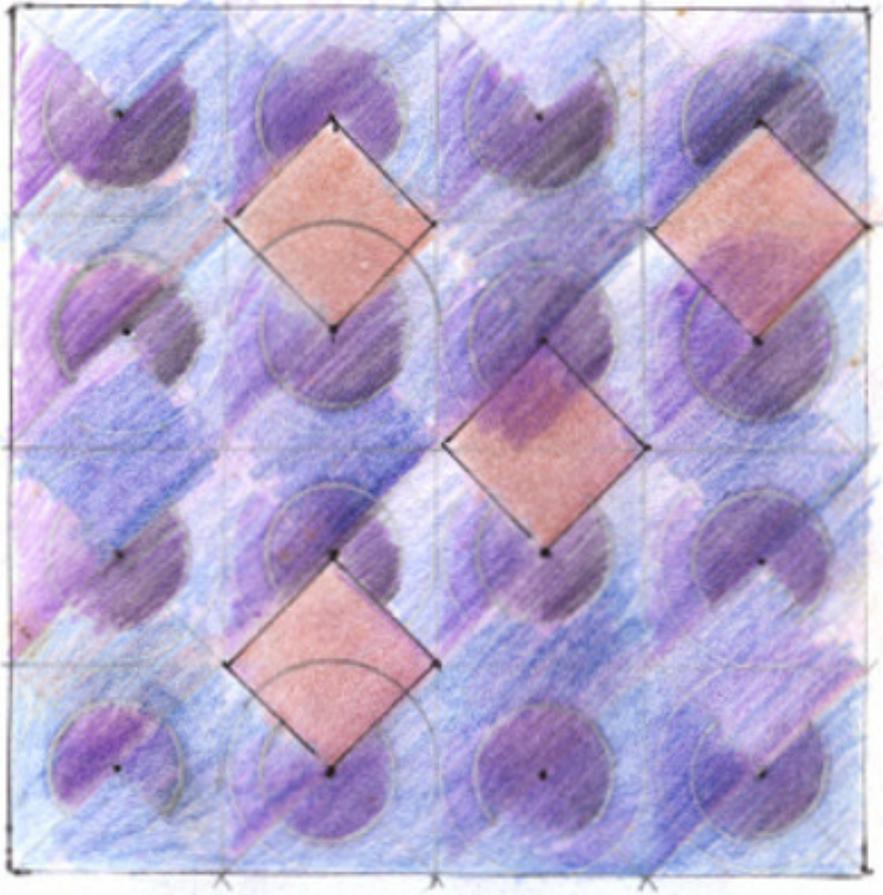


B O N N I E

B R O N S O N

G R I D S



Untitled VI (grids)

Randal Davis: *Found*

This folio of ten mixed media drawings were packed together by the artist, confirming what is otherwise apparent to the eye, that they comprise an integrally related series. While image format of the drawings is identical, a 6 inch square 16-module structure, the paper sizes varied considerably and eccentrically, suggesting that they were originally executed on larger sheets and cut apart.

All seem to have been hung in the studio (pin marks), several in different horizontal and vertical orientations. None of the works are dated or titled. It is probable that they were made in 1985-86, based on some clear similarities to dated sketchbook materials, and more general similarities in palette effects to the subsequent 1987 *Nepali Carpet* designs.

Kassandra Kelly: *What Remains*

In the summer of 2010, Randal Davis told me he found the show. I knew what he meant—a few weeks earlier, Sarrah and Carlos Torres had suggested we do a show of Bonnie Bronson's art work at Winestock. It was a great idea but I was by no means confident that a coherent body of Bonnie's work remained.

During her lifetime, Bonnie was notorious for burning and scrapping whole series of art. All artists do it, in fits of anger or despair or just because they need the work space. But Bonnie did it more than most, and with tragic consequences since her early death meant there would finally be so little of her art.

Randal showed me a folder of delicate mixed media drawings, each demonstrating Bonnie's effortless facility with materials and color. I had never seen them

before. Until the day Randal unearthed them, it's possible no one but the artist herself ever had.

When I look at the *Grid* series, I feel my mother's loss very deeply in the delicacy of the color and the patient sweep of the pencil across the page. I miss the art that she chose not to keep. But I am amazed and humbled by what remains.

Randal Davis: *About the Grid*

As a means of structuration, the grid, loosely or more precisely constituted, was an almost constant presence in Bonnie Bronson's work, appearing as she transitioned away from her Abstract Expressionist paintings in the early and middle 1960s, and remaining in her last works.

Lucy Lippard's 1972 essay on the grid could well have been written with Bronson in mind. "The grid," she wrote, "is music paper for color, idea, state of mind....It is a handy but potentially overemphasized instrument by which to control the void...a way to violate the ominously blank surface. For the artist proving him- or herself against order, its perfection is temptingly despoilable."

And thus Lippard proceeds through a cataloging of what amounts to the grid's dialectical tensionings as a compositional device. But like many such essentially oppositional modelings, the message can rather take over; I'm hardly more convinced that Bronson was "proving herself against order," whatever that means, than I am of some of Lippard's other possibilities, but that is, perhaps, finally the point – that Lippard was trying to map the grid as a space of possibility, of potential.

Jasper Johns said it earlier, simply and more mysteriously, in what became one his most oft-quoted remarks, from a 1959 profile: “It all began with my painting a picture of an American flag. Using this design took care of a great deal for me because I didn’t have to design it. So I went on to similar things like the targets - things the mind already knows. That gave me room to work on other levels.”

The underlying 4 by 4 modular structure of Bronson's drawings is at once the common feature to each of the series, yet it is also at times itself hardly visible, an armature almost completely obscured by dense washes of color, or overhung with competing geometries of circles and diagonals.

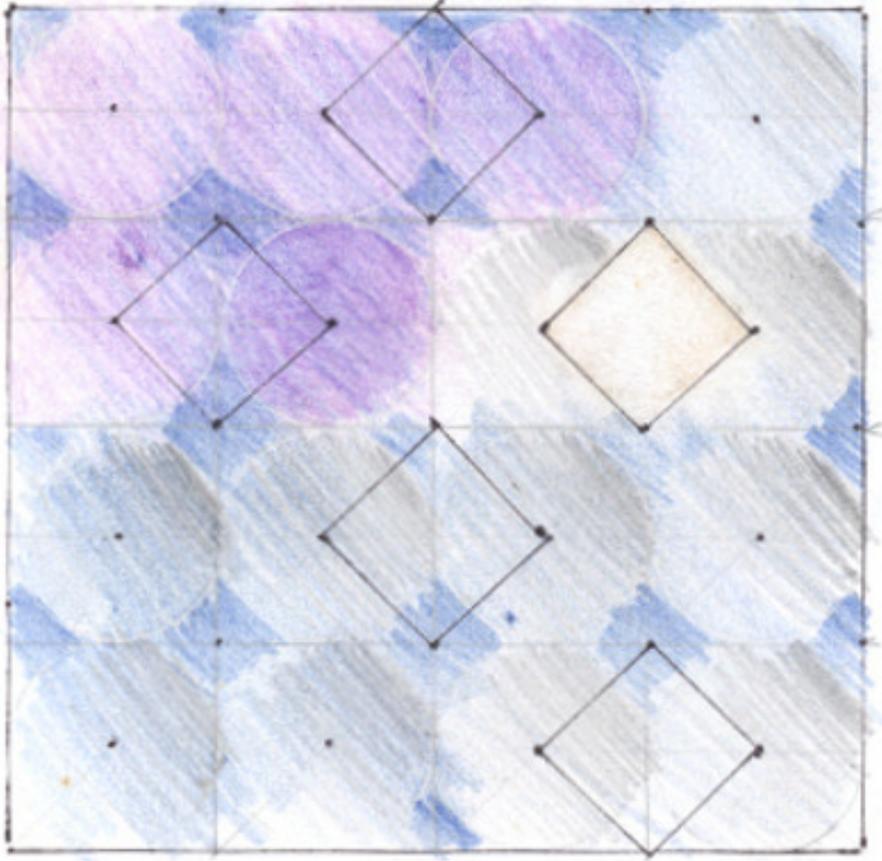
What is extraordinary about these small works is how thoroughly they ring the changes on what might otherwise seem highly restrictive; the bilateral symmetry of the basic structure will obviously favor the

kaleidoscopic tilings found in *Untitled I, III and VIII*. But this modesty of scale does not seem intrinsic to the more diffuse fields of, say, *Untitled II, IV or IX*.

The differences between these are in part what Rosalind Krauss called “centripetal” and “centrifugal” works – the former “a mapping of the space inside the frame onto itself” while the latter “compel[s] our acknowledgement of a world beyond the frame.”

Different ways of looking at art, to be sure, but different ways of looking at the world as well. And, as Jasper Johns would have it, ways of looking at oneself and the world “on other levels.”

Art lets us hold them in our hands.



Untitled IV (grids)

Bonnie Bronson *Grids*

December, 2010

Winestock Oregon City, Oregon

Works in the exhibition

Untitled I – X (grids) (1985-86)

Color pencil, graphite & ink on paper

6 by 6 inches each

All works courtesy of The Estate of Bonnie Bronson, represented by the Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, Oregon.

Thanks to Sarrah and Carlos Torres, Lee Kelly and Susan Hammer, staff of the Elizabeth Leach Gallery, and The Hive Encaustic.

Visit www.bonniebronsonart.com.