

A close-up portrait of Benjamin Forrest Williams, an elderly man with a full white beard and hair. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a light-colored, button-down shirt. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a thoughtful expression. The background is a blurred blue wall.

**Benjamin Forrest Williams**  
a biographical essay

by Jillian Zausmer Goldberg

## COLOPHON

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This book is not a formally authorized biography, although Ben Williams reviewed the manuscript and gave his permission verbally to publish the material. Information and anecdotes in the text were gathered from live conversations with Mr. and Mrs. Williams. The author does not assume responsibility for the validity of the materials or the consequences of their use. Where references to Wikipedia entries and other published academic work have been made, the author has made every effort to quote accurately and to acknowledge sources. The timeline and list of Mr. Williams' publications was acquired from materials in the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. These materials were submitted by various parties in support of the nominations for State awards made on behalf of Mr. Williams over the years.

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Photo by Christer Berg

## Introduction

When I retired from teaching art in 2005, I decided that it was time to challenge myself to create my own work, instead of telling others how to do it. The results in my classes of children and adults had been wonderful, and had given me continuous joy over nearly thirty years. I was proud of my students and felt successful as a teacher. Facing a blank canvas myself was another matter entirely. Making art can be a very lonely business; without the cumulative energy of a classroom environment where ideas feed off one another, painting alone feels a bit like dancing in the dark.

Through my friends in the local Chromazones painting group, I heard about an art critique class in Raleigh led by an older gentleman, and my friends urged me to join. What an extraordinary experience that has proven to be: this little book is a tribute to Ben Williams, the man who has led this group for some thirty years, and to the wonderful people I have met there!

Some of the artists in the critique group have been attending for literally thirty years; some have passed on now and are fondly remembered. Members range in age from 94 to people in their forties who have heard about this opportunity only in recent years. All are characters and all have proven to be very generous in their support and encouragement of one another. All are painters who are passionate and devoted to their art and many of them rank amongst the very finest in the state.

Ben Williams is now 89 years old. Listening to his stories during the critiques, it became clear to me that he had led a most extraordinary life, yet Internet searches about him turned up next to nothing. I sought out the librarian at the North Carolina Museum of Art and visited the NC State Archives to find out more, and found myself overwhelmed by the scope of his academic writings and his lifelong contribution to the art of North Carolina. I decided that I would do my best to gather as much information as I could and get it out into the world for others to hear about. My husband suggested I make a Wikipedia page for Ben, and that led us to interview him for a short documentary film. I was fortunate to meet a local photographer, Christer Berg, who had taken wonderful portraits of Ben, and he generously granted me permission to use those in this book. My friend Carol Joy Shannon, who had also been attending the critiques for some years, decided to mount an art show at her gallery to honor Ben and so a wonderful synergy was born.

For those readers who have never met Ben Williams, as well as for those who know him and love him, I hope this tribute will help to keep his legacy alive.

*Jillian Zausmer Goldberg  
Cary, North Carolina  
July 2014*



## A Biographical Essay

Footsteps echo down the linoleum floor of the cinderblock building and the heavy door pushes open. Greetings are exchanged quietly with looks and waves, paintings are set down face towards the wall around the room as the members of the group settle themselves into plastic chairs. The low buzz of chatter dies down as Ben steps forward. He takes his place in front of the class and begins to speak. Although many people there may have heard the stories before, everyone is silent as he explains what art is and why it is important. “It’s the art spirit,” he says. “Mr. Henri called it that in his book, *The Art Spirit*. No two paintings are alike because you all have that art spirit, and it comes through in a unique way in each of your work. No one can ever paint like you paint. Although we all learn from one another and although there is really nothing new under the sun, there is still the indefinable uniqueness of everyone’s own mark. Sys cannot paint like Mary and Marriott cannot paint like Ella, no matter how much they may try. *That* is the art spirit.”

It is a mantra that many of the people in the room have been hearing for thirty years. Twice a year these men and women have gathered once a week for an eight-week session, to share their work with Ben and to hear his remarks.

“Enough of that,” he will say, after telling the story of going to Paris to study with Matisse, “let’s see what you have brought!” and he will sit down while one of us puts the work up on the easel. “Isn’t it wonderful!” he will often exclaim with a happy sigh, “It’s so wonderful. Whose work is this?”

Everyone who puts their work up on the easel waits to hear these words. Often they are followed by, “Don’t touch it, it’s perfect!” at

*Photo by Christer Berg*

which the artist will beam and visibly relax. The others may chuckle softly, vicariously relieved that the piece has passed muster. When Ben says it's done, it's done. No one would dare put a brush to a piece upon which this pronouncement has been made. Sometimes the piece goes up and there is a long silence of several minutes during which you could hear a pin drop. The gathered artists stare at the work, straining to read the art spirit within,

and Ben stares too, or gets up slowly to make his

“ You know what this needs?  
A tiny red dot, right there! ”

way to the back of the room. “You have to be able to see it from twelve inches away or twenty four feet away,” he says. He may then silently make his way back to the easel and after a pause say, “Just here, this area, it needs a very light glaze, just a tiny bit to push that shape back.” Or he may say, “You know what this needs? A tiny red dot, right there!”

And that will be it. Ben's pronouncements are like a benediction; his eyes have looked at thousands of original masterworks that most of us will never see, and to have those eyes rest on one's own work is surely a rare honor. To hear him say that it is perfect, is to feel that one has joined the very pantheon of the world's great artists.

At the age of 89, Ben Williams has been an artist and a curator for over seventy years. He has met people who are legends to the rest of us, and has known and worked with artists who are towering figures in the history of twentieth century art. The works in his home speak to the story of his life, the places he has been and the people he has known, and the extraordinary eye he has for identifying the art spirit, the very best that has come out of both European and North American art in his lifetime.



Ben with Margaret Hill (L) and Sys Oppenlander (R) in the background.  
Photo by Christer Berg  
Mary Storms points out an area in her work. Photo by Christer Berg



Works from masters of the past are there too: in the parlor are two enormous dark oil paintings, one of which is by Thomas Gainsborough. Ben found this extraordinary piece at an exhibition of antiques in Raleigh years ago. It was being sold as a Dutch seventeenth century landscape, but Ben realized that it was not from the seventeenth century but more likely from the eighteenth century. He also knew that Gainsborough, who lived from 1727 to 1788, had been fond of copying the Dutch masters.

His instincts told him to take a closer look. He found that it was in fact

“ I thought I should get to it before the termites do. ”

a copy of a Jacob Ruisdael, and with infra-red light he discovered that Gainsborough's signature had been painted out. He cleaned and patched the old canvas and it hangs proudly now in the parlor. The other large piece, hanging over the fireplace, is by Charles Bridges, born in 1680, who was a well-regarded painter at that time. It depicts the Governor of Virginia, William Randolph.

And then there are his own works, paintings and sculptures, and tables carved in the last two years from an old walnut tree in the garden. “It lay there for thirty years,” he says. “I thought I should get to it before the termites do.” He shows us two long, low coffee tables with live edges, their shapes gently sinuous and the surfaces planed and polished. One has inlaid blue Delft tiles: “I found these tiles which date from the year before Rembrandt was born,” he says. “We were in Amsterdam, looking at the Jan Six house, and saw that the house next door was being torn down. The old stove in there was original to the house, and I asked if I might buy some of the tiles. Here they are: I finally found a home for them in this piece where we took out some rotted wood. What do you think?”

Ben's passion for the splendor of the visual excites him still; he speaks of the wonderful views from his window and his plans

to paint them. He shows us a large oil painting in progress: a towering tree silhouetted against a fiery sunset. His paints, palettes, and rags are spread about and one has to pick one's way through the stacks and piles of books and paintings. We point out a striking portrait of a lovely woman wearing a large fur hat, and with a twinkle in his eye he says, “This is a painting of a fellow student that I did when I studied at the Corcoran. I think I will show this one and call it The Lady in the Beaver Hat.” He picks

up another painting of a domestic interior: “This was the kitchen in our

first apartment in Raleigh. We paid \$52 a month.....I can't remember which one of us painted it, Margaret or me!”

The house that Ben and his wife Margaret live in was built before the Civil War in 1842. Known as Clarendon Hall, the house sits on a seventy acre property, located off Main Street in the little town of Yanceyville, North Carolina, the seat of rural Caswell County. Driving past the deserted central square, one can imagine a time when the now-derelict foursquare homes, modest storefronts, and tiny Art Deco cinema stood shoulder to shoulder.



Clarendon Hall in Yanceyville, built 1842.  
Photo by Diane Fields



der amidst a modest bustle of commerce. One striking edifice remains, a palace-like structure replete with Italianate pavilions, archways, columns, and cornices. This is the County Courthouse, built in 1861 and lovingly preserved. The tower is topped by a domed cupola that supports a golden sphere which Ben proudly points out from the kitchen window. "I covered that entire thing with gold leaf by myself," he says. "Have you ever worked with gold leaf? It's a daunting task." One can see the joy he takes in being part of the historic preservation of the town.

Clarendon Hall is set in lush meadows carved out of a wilderness of honeysuckle, wisteria, and ivy. When they bought the property in 1989 the house had fallen into terrible disrepair and was being used for farmyard storage. Undaunted, they set about restoring floors where weeds grew through great gaps in the boards, scraped down woodwork inside, and plastered over damage to the two-foot thick brick walls. Today towering Leyland cypresses, planted by Ben when they were little sprigs in paper cups, line the long driveway, and white pines, magnolia, and camellia bushes fill the gardens.

Ben points out the mantelpieces, carved by Thomas Day in the mid-1800s. (See page 28) He and Margaret have scraped off decades of paint by hand, revealing elegant neo-classical designs on mantels, window frames and molding. Thomas Day<sup>i</sup> was a free black American furniture designer who built an extraordinarily successful business in Caswell County, employing both black slaves and white apprentices, and supplying furniture to the state government and the University of North Carolina.

Many of the mantles display *face-jugs* (See page 26), the celebrated folk art of the Seagrove area and the Catawba Valley in North Carolina.<sup>ii</sup> These hand-thrown vessels were originally made by slaves working in the potteries of the early settlers. Slaves were forbidden to raise grave markers on the burial plac-

es of their loved ones and so these grotesque face-jugs, intended to scare away evil spirits, were placed on the sites instead. Some folklore suggests that the jugs held bootlegged liquor or moonshine, and that the ugly faces were meant to scare off the children. Nowadays face jugs by prominent potters like Ben Owen III are highly prized by collectors and museums all over the world. Ben tells us about Juliana Busbee and her husband Jacques, founders of the Jugtown Pottery, begun in 1917. These two artists from Raleigh, N.C. discovered traditional salt glazed earthenware being made in Moore County, and they decided to support and revive the old craft that was dying out. They set up the Village Store in Greenwich Village, New York, where they sold the work of such legendary potters as J. H. Owen, Charlie Teague, Rufus Owen and his son Ben Owen I. During his career with the North Carolina Museum of Art, Ben advocated for the recognition and inclusion of this pottery in the collections of both the North Carolina Museum of Art and the North Carolina State University Art Museum, later to become the Gregg Museum. He points to the lustrous green bowl on the large dining table where we sit. "Ben Owen I made only four of these bowls with this particular green-blue glaze," he says. "We have two of them."



*A bowl with a rare green-blue glaze, by Ben Owen 1, son of Rufus Owen. Ben Owen 1 joined the Jugtown Pottery in 1923 and later became their sole potter.  
Photo by Susan K. Jones.*

We sit at the big oval dining table in the main room, surrounded on all sides by works of art. I am startled to recognize works I know so well from art books, and I ask about the Ben Nicholson painting on the wall. “That was the first painting we couldn’t afford,” says Ben with a chuckle. “Margaret and I saw it at the Gimpel Fils<sup>iii</sup> gallery in London and we loved it. The owner was very kind and allowed us to pay it off over time.”

There are hand-signed prints by Joan Miro, a white porcelain tea set designed by Eva Zeisel on the sideboard, and in pride of place, an original painting by Morris Graves. Ben says, “We inherited that one....do you know from whom?”

“Dr. Valentiner?” I ask, and he beams. One can see the affection in his face as he recalls his dear friend. The painting, titled *Joyous Young Pine* (See page 28), was painted in 1944. Ben tells us that he will donate the painting to the new Morris Graves Museum in Eureka, CA, when the time comes.

Each piece, painting, sculpture and ceramic, looks comfortable in its spot. Ben says with amazement, “I loaned the painting that hung right there, a portrait of Margaret by our good friend Sarah Blakeslee<sup>iv</sup>, for an exhibition recently, and how we miss it!” These works are interwoven with the tapestry of his and Margaret’s long lives. Ben points out the chairs we sit in: simple yet powerful in their sleek modernity. “We commissioned these chairs from George Nakashima<sup>v</sup>, but we could only afford to buy one every four years,” he says with his impish smile. I point out that there are six chairs in all in the room. “Yes, he says, “we collected these over twenty-four years. We would visit him in his studio in New Hope, Pennsylvania,” he adds wistfully. “He has passed now .”

I admire the heavy crochet placemats on the table. Margaret tells us, “Ben’s mother made those using the string she collected from

the parcels that came to the post office all those years that she worked there.” Her comment evokes images of a quiet rustic life in the South of bygone times, when a postmistress may have sat in a rocker on the porch, a jar of sweet iced tea beside her, crocheting mats from the bits and bobs of twine she put aside. I wonder if she could have imagined her humble placemats in the same room as all these treasures.





*Portrait of Margaret by her good friend, Sarah Blakeslee.  
Photo by Susan K. Jones.*

*Left: A chair by George Nakashima. The painting is an original by Ben Nicholson.  
Photo by Susan K. Jones.*

In 1950, Ben went to New York to work for Knoll Associates<sup>vi</sup>, as the exhibition designer in their showrooms. He became good friends with Hans and Florence Knoll and he and Margaret stopped by their home on Sutton Place when they visited New York on their honeymoon some years later. Ben is fond of pointing out the modernist white topped table in the entry hall, asking if we know who designed it. “Isamu Noguchi,<sup>vii</sup>” he says, “we showed his work at Knoll Associates and this table is still in production.”

Ben’s wife Margaret was born on February 15, 1930, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James Harold Click of Elkin, North Carolina. They met on the campus of the University of North Carolina in Greensboro where Margaret was studying art. She was not only talented but determined and focused and was able to forge a distinguished career at a time when most young women married young and stayed home. Ben says with wonder, “Margaret completed a Ph.D. in Industrial Design at NC State, and learned how to use computers, but do you know by the time she learned how to use one computer it had all changed and she just could not keep up!” Neither Ben nor Margaret have computer, cell phone, or a modern television set. On a hand-carved coffee table in their library sits an old transistor radio, and on the couch lies a beautiful, soft blanket that Ben wove long ago. Surrounded by piles of books, he remains content and engaged despite the absence of electronic media. I send snail mail letters by US Postal Service when I need to get in touch.

Ben recalls that when he lived in New York City, he was at a dinner party when the hostess ran out of milk for coffee and asked him to run next door to borrow some. He did, and met the neighbor who turned out to be Louise Rainer<sup>viii</sup>, the star of his favorite film, *The Good Earth*. He says that it was one of the best films ever made, and we tell him that we can order him a copy. Ben is amazed by this news. Curtis, their care-taker, is tasked with set-



*Portrait of Margaret as a young girl.*

ting up a DVD player and TV monitor for them. I would love to be a fly on the wall when they watch the film.

Margaret taught art history at St. Mary’s College in Raleigh for thirty years and chaired the Art Department. Anne Gregory, a Durham artist who studied under Margaret, says, “Her knowl-



*Margaret on her wedding day, July 2, 1955.*

edge of art history was vast; from classical art to folk art, which didn't even have a name back then. She even made her own slides. She taught me everything I know about art, and I owe my career to her." Anne remembers Margaret as rigorous and austere, and she says that recently she told Margaret how her students were in awe of her. "Margaret seemed really surprised

when I told her this," she says. Others who have known Ben and Margaret for many years will always remark on Margaret's excellent recall of details from the past, and her insistence on accuracy even today. Although she is quiet and gives Ben the floor, she pays close attention and corrects him if necessary. She has a dry sense of humor which pairs well with his mischievous one.

They share a love of music, and both volunteered in leadership positions for years to advance the cause of classical music in the area. Ben studied the cello while at Chapel Hill, and recalls playing in a group with James Taylor<sup>ix</sup> when his father served as the

“ We said to Margaret,  
*Your husband is a man of many talents.*  
Yes, she replied,  
*and I know every one of them.* ”

Dean of the Medical School. Ben says that one of his proudest accomplishments in his long career was in founding the Friends of the College Concert Series<sup>x</sup>, an organization dedicated to presenting the very best in musical talents from across the nation, to the people of Raleigh. He and Margaret brought in the Boston Symphony, the New York Philharmonic, the New York Ballet, Leonard Bernstein and more. Performances were held in the Coliseum at N.C. State campus. "Performances were held four times each year, and our program lasted for ten to fifteen years, I think," he says. "We charged one dollar per show!"

Ben and Margaret were married in the Arboretum at Chapel Hill on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, 1955. Ben remembers it being a sweltering day. The reception was held at the Carolina Inn<sup>xi</sup>, which remains one of the most lovely and gracious of the old buildings on cam-

pus. Ben shows us the photograph of the wedding party on the lawn, and points out Juliana Busbee, their dear friend from Jugtown Pottery. She wears a white summer dress and a hat with an enormous brim. The bridesmaids wore gowns of a champagne color, says Ben, “But warm champagne, not cold!” Margaret designed her bridal gown and those of her retinue, and her designs were sewn by a well-known seamstress from the black community in Raleigh, named Dora Otey. The happy couple took a month long honeymoon, driving up the East Coast and spending their first night at the same hotel in Washington DC where Margaret’s parents had stayed on their honeymoon. En route they spent time in New York, attending an exhibition of automobiles at the Museum of Modern Art. While driving down Fifth Avenue, in the shiny black Studebaker coupe that Ben had purchased in his home town of Lumberton, they noticed pulling up alongside them, a car identical to theirs. Ben says, his eyes twinkling with joy, “Can you believe it, we look over and there is none other than Raymond Lowey<sup>xii</sup> himself! The designer of my car!”

For many years Ben and Margaret travelled to Britain, the Continent, and the Far East and even behind the Iron Curtain. Twice they sailed on the Ile De France, the elegant ocean liner famous for its Art Deco interior decoration. It was on one of these trips, in 1957, that they were invited to dine with Fabian Bowers, a widely read New Yorker theater critic, and his wife, who was from India. They introduced the Williams’ to Janet Flanner<sup>xiii</sup>, who also worked for the New Yorker, writing a weekly letter home from Paris. Ben happened to mention that he would have loved to have met Alice B. Toklas<sup>xiv</sup>, who had published her famous cookbook, in 1954. It turned out that Ms. Flanner knew Ms. Toklas very well, since she worked at the L’Oeil Gallery around the corner from 5, Rue Christine, and she arranged for them to get together. Ben and Margaret received a letter inviting them to tea at 2 PM when “the light was best.” Ms. Toklas, who was eighty years old at that time, was small and retiring, and spoke in a soft,

musical voice. Margaret adds suddenly, “She had a long mustache,” drawing a make believe mustache and indicating that it hung down on either side of her mouth. Ms. Toklas referred to her late partner, Gertrude Stein, as “Miss Stein” in the conversation, and showed them many of the priceless works of art by iconic Modern artists, that still hung in the apartment.<sup>xv</sup> She had several works by Juan Gris, and Ben says, “She kept saying *poor Juan*. We didn’t know what she meant.” Although the big brown portrait by Picasso of Gertrude Stein<sup>xvi</sup> was not there, as it had been willed to the Metropolitan Museum, there were many of Picasso’s pink nudes on the wall. Time flew, he says, and they apologized for overstaying their welcome; “You must stay for a little supper,” Ms. Toklas insisted. “She gave us Ritz Crackers with some paté,” says Margaret.



*Portrait of Gertrude Stein by  
Pablo Picasso: © 2014  
Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists  
Rights Society (ARS), New York.*

Ben was born on Christmas Eve in 1925, in the little mill town of Lumberton<sup>xvii</sup> in the far southeastern corner of North Carolina. Despite having barely gone beyond sixth grade herself, his mother became the local postmistress and also taught in the one-room schoolhouse, although Ben comments, “Mother always said she was the Postmaster, and not anyone’s mistress.” Ben’s nephew, Greg Williams, recalls his grandmother as a woman of extraordinary intellectual strength. Ben was the first born son and shared his mother’s passion for the arts and learning. His

younger brother Herman, two years his junior, took after their father, becoming an engineer. Ben's father was a skilled machinist and he found work in the naval shipyards in Washington DC, commuting by train to visit his family in Lumberton. When young Ben was ready for high school he left the countryside and moved to DC to live with his father, and continue his education in the city. But his memories of elementary school days remain fond and colorful. He recalls his art teacher, Christine Getty, who taught them to sketch from sculpture, a discipline which remains central to the study of drawing in many art colleges today. He tells us, "In Lumberton, would you believe, a woman was teaching music who knew Cezanne in France?"

During the summers in Washington DC, Ben got himself the job of copying masterworks at the National Gallery, which had opened not long before, in 1941. "Mr. Mellon had in his will that the public should be able to copy masterworks," says Ben. "The Museum was instructed to furnish easels and drop cloths and even set aside locker rooms with showers for the copyists."

In those days, museum staff was afraid of damaging the masterworks with the strong lights needed for photography. Ben was employed to make the copies which were then laboriously photographed with many plate changes to create the complex colors. These were printed up on paper and sold for twenty-five cents apiece in the museum. He painted everything from the Rembrandts that were shown there for the first time in the United States, to Turners and Constables, which he says were the most difficult to copy. He has only one copy left now, a Rembrandt, which hangs upstairs in his studio. He tells us that he gave a large copy of a Turner to his old High School in Lumberton. "I wonder if it is still there?" he says.

“ *He painted everything from the Rembrandts... to Turners and Constables, which he says were the most difficult to copy.* ”

Around this time Ben enrolled at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, DC. It was 1942 and he says that he spent many happy hours at the Library of Congress. He remembers a small, timid man, shorter than him, often sitting next to him in the adjoining carrel. In those days one had to request books from the librarian and those were then transferred via pneumatic tunnels underground and brought to your desk. Ben's neighbor asked on several occasions that he request selected books for him as he could not understand the library system. Eventually Ben asked one of the librarians if she knew who this man was, and she replied, "Why, that's Dr. Albert Einstein!"

Dr. Einstein was but one of an extraordinary parade of iconic figures that Ben would get to know. While working in the National Gallery, he was introduced to Sir Winston Churchill, when the great man toured with his host, President Roosevelt. Ben became well-acquainted with Mrs. Roosevelt. "She was a very nice lady," he says. "I don't know how she managed to do all the things she did, keeping a journal, touring and giving speeches and supporting the many causes she held dear. I would go over to the White House early in the morning, to bring the paintings from the Corcoran Gallery that were to be on display for the month, and Mrs. Roosevelt would often open the door herself, wearing her robe, and invite me to join her for breakfast."

In 1945 and 1946, while still a student at George Washington University in DC, Ben attended two of the famous Summer Institutes at Black Mountain. Black Mountain College<sup>xviii</sup> had been founded in 1933 in the bucolic hills of western North Carolina, near Asheville, by several former teachers from Rollins College in Virginia. By the time that Ben visited, the students and faculty

at the college included many artists, writers and musicians who had fallen foul of the Nazi regime in Germany and had fled for their lives. These émigrés brought with them the ideas and spirit of the Bauhaus movement, which would prove to have a lasting influence on the aesthetics and philosophy of art in America. Ben absorbed this culture and formed lifelong friendships with several of the luminaries that he met there. The principle of cooperation between the arts, and the synergy between creative works of poetry, music, dance, and painting informed his outlook and inspired him to later seek out the best in regional crafts as well as fine art .

One of the émigrés with whom he would collaborate was Angelica Rackendorf, a former Bauhaus instructor. Ms. Rackendorf taught art to the Native American students at the “Pembroke College for Indians” near Lumberton, and she and Ben would take the students

to Black Mountain to study for weeks at a time.

Ben fondly points

out a small tapestry she made that hangs in the stairwell and then shows us an extraordinary cabinet in the living room. Ms. Rackendorf and he worked together in true Bauhaus spirit on this piece: he carved and assembled the cabinet and she wove panels of pine straw and linen which he then set into the doors.

Black Mountain was also where Ben first met Josef and Anni Albers, who had arrived in 1933. After the Bauhaus was closed down by the Nazis, those artists whose work was then deemed “degenerate” fled for their lives. Anni Albers, who was Jewish, was in a desperate position, but in those days, finding a way out of Germany, and finding a country that would accept them, was extremely difficult. The US had strict quotas on Jewish immigration and only a personal letter from a relative or other sponsor

could possibly lead to a visa being granted. The Albers’ received an invitation to America from the highly regarded modernist architect Philip Johnson and were amongst the fortunate ones who would go on to recreate their lives in this country. Later, countless works of art, literature and music in Germany would be destroyed in the name of Aryan purity; not only purity of race but also of thought and taste. The notorious exhibition mounted in 1937 in Munich, named the Degenerate Art Exhibition, featured 112 artists whose work was condemned as “un-German”, and most of these artists were banned from teaching, exhibiting or selling their work. Some perished in the concentration camps, others fled and went into exile, and some committed suicide.

The Albers’ forged a lifelong friendship with Ben and Margaret and Ben talks fondly of the extensive correspondence they maintained after Josef and Anni left North Carolina to take up positions at Yale

University.

Many original paintings and hand-pulled

prints by Albers, regarded as the father of modern color theory, grace the walls at Clarendon Hall. “The last time I saw Josef,” he says, “was when I went to get him at the train station in Raleigh; he would never travel in airplanes. I drove him to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he received an Honorary Doctorate.”

Amongst other refugees who became a good friend was Lyonel Feininger, whose work had been included in the Degenerate Art Exhibition. Although born in America, Feininger was forced to leave his career in Germany because of his Jewish origins, and he too found a home at Black Mountain. Many of Feininger’s delicate prints fill the stairwell.

“ *Although Margaret did not study at Black Mountain, she too recalls the intellectual and artistic fervor of the day.* ”





*A small tapestry by Ben's dear friend from Black Mountain days, Angelika Rackendorf. Photo by Susan K. Jones.*

Although Margaret did not study at Black Mountain, she too recalls the intellectual and artistic fervor of the day. She saw performances by Merce Cunningham, the ground breaking American dancer and choreographer who taught and formed his first dance company there. “They performed *Brigadoon*,” she says, suddenly animated and slicing through the air with her arms to demonstrate. “They used real swords. We were all scared!” At the time she was working on her Master’s degree at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (known then as the Women’s College of North Carolina.) John Cage, the composer who collaborated with Cunningham, staged his first “happening” at Black Mountain. Although the College operated for only 24 years, the innovative ideas and idealistic principles on which it was based, would prove to be a lasting influence on fine art and fine craft in postwar America and would later surface in Pop Art too.

It would be much later, in 1968, that Ben would once again find himself involved with Black Mountain: working at the NCMA as chief curator, he supported a successful application to the National Endowment for the Humanities to fund a research project on Black Mountain College. Ben was appointed lead researcher with a team of six scholars. He collected many boxes of letters and documents which are still in his home in Raleigh and he conducted many audio interviews with teachers and students who had been there. Later, Mary Harris, one of the researchers who at the time taught at UNC Chapel Hill, published the research in a book titled *The Arts at Black Mountain*, (MIT press, 2002) which is now well known. Sadly, Ben’s research was not credited. His face takes on an expression of disappointment and frustration as he says, “Do you know that the audio tapes we made at Black Mountain are *still* sitting in the basement of the State Archives?”

“ *It was in Paris that he decided  
to take classes with Henri Matisse...* ”

When the US entered the war after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the National Gallery decided to move some of the collection from Washington DC where it might have been vulnerable to attack. They chose the Biltmore House<sup>xix</sup> in Asheville, North Carolina, possibly for its remote location and the sturdiness of the buildings. McGill James was the curator of these works; he and Mrs. James moved into the vast mansion, while the paintings were installed. At 178,926 square feet, the Biltmore remains today the largest privately owned house in the United States. Living there all alone, in the mountains of western North

Carolina, Ben says, “They were bored stiff.” One evening Ben found himself invited there for dinner together with Dr. Valentin-er, the Director of the North Caro-

lina Museum of Art at that time. “The dining room was enormous, and we ate at one end of the long table,” he remembers and then adds with a chuckle, “I happened to walk past the butler’s pantry before dinner, and there I saw Mrs. James fishing the cocktail onions out of our drinks glasses! She added them to the chicken dish and I must say it was delicious.”

In 1949, Ben had completed an A.B. in Art Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and set sail for France to study at the Paris extension of Columbia University. Students travelled in a troopship, which was operated by Columbia, and they slept in bunks stacked two and three up in fairly primitive conditions. It was in Paris that he decided to take classes with Henri Matisse, but sadly he met with the great man only twice as Monsieur Matisse was already frail and ill and died five years later. However, it was during this visit abroad that a letter arrived for Ben bearing the gold seal of the Office of the Governor of North Carolina. During his time at Chapel Hill, Ben had volunteered at what was then known as the State Art Gallery in Raleigh, keeping it open for visitors on the weekends. The Gov-

error, Kerr Scott, invited Ben to return to North Carolina to “help him spend the one million dollars” that had been awarded by the State Legislature to assemble a collection of fine art for the museum. He was promised a job and a place to stay, but says Ben, “when I arrived they sent me to stay at the YMCA and I refused! I paid for my own hotel room instead.”

After the ravages of the Second World War, British collectors were in desperate need of funds and Ben knew that extraordinary bargains were to be had. He went to New York City where he helped to acquire 139 European and American paintings and sculptures, which make up the core of the permanent collection of the NCMA. Of the many superb pieces that were purchased, he is particularly proud of the painting of the Pepperell family by John Singleton Copley (1738-1815). Copley, who was born in Boston, became a famous portrait painter in both colonial America and England. Ben says, “We purchased the painting for \$18,000, and today it is worth \$6 million!” He was excited that the Pepperell family, whose name continues in the fine linens produced by WestPoint-Pepperell Inc., had a Southern connection. The family was instrumental in setting up mills in Alabama during the reconstruction of the South after the Civil War. He recalls with his trademark sense of humor, “When the collection arrived by ship from New York, I went to Wilmington to receive it. It was Christmas and pouring with rain,” he says. “It was miserable!”

Ben’s long career at the North Carolina Museum of Art began with his first appointment as “gallery assistant” on October 1, 1949, at what was then known as the State Art Museum. He was officially named as Curator in 1956, when the institution was renamed the North Carolina Museum of Art, but in effect,

Ben shepherded the collection from its inception throughout the years, as the museum grew to become the world class institution it is today.

After occupying first the Old Supreme Court building downtown, and subsequently moving to the top floor of the Education Building on West Edenton Street, the State Museum opened in the renovated State Highway Division Building on Morgan Street in downtown Raleigh in 1956. At this time the Kress<sup>xx</sup> Collection was added, the Kress family having pledged matching funds

when the State awarded the one million dollars for the purchase of art. There was one large room where exhibitions were hung

and changed monthly. Dr. William Valentiner<sup>xxi</sup>, whose scholarship, experience and personal collection were legendary, was hired as the first Director. Ben and Margaret met him at the airport when he arrived and offered him a place to stay. They became close friends and when Dr Valentiner sadly took ill some two years later, the Williams’ helped to take care of him. He died in 1958 at the age of 78 and he left his collection to the NCMA. Ben says, “Dr. Valentiner took the post at the North Carolina museum just to get it on its feet. He was the greatest museum man in the world.”

By the 1960s the Museum had outgrown its Morgan Street location. In 1967 the state legislature created a 15 member State Art Building Commission to choose a new site. Choosing the Blue Ridge Road location was controversial. While Ben advocated for a building that could adequately showcase the collections and afford room to grow, he also felt that Raleigh should continue to have a downtown gallery, where local artists could have work shown. “I’m all for a cultural center downtown,” he

“ *Dr. Valentiner took the post at the North Carolina museum just to get it on its feet. He was the greatest museum man in the world.* ”

said at the time. He hoped that the new museum would include space for architecture, and possibly a great plantation house where regional craft could be shown, because as he said, “Art is so much more than paintings in a gallery.” He recommended a textile institute, a ceramics institute and the inclusion of decorative arts of all kinds. He also advocated for the inclusion of ethnic arts from other cultures, including Africa and the Far East. Visiting our beautiful museum today, nearly fifty years later, one can enjoy the sweeping array of works from distant lands and long lost civilizations, far beyond the traditional Eurocentric scope of museum collections of his time.

Ben is in many ways a Renaissance man, yet firmly rooted in the landscape of his birth. Although his passion and his talents lay in fine art, he sought out excellence and innovation wherever it was to be found. He and Margaret collected fine cookware and kitchen tools that they enjoyed using in their gourmet cooking; they both threw themselves into the support of chamber music in Raleigh and they never tired of getting involved in architectural restoration and renovation in the area. Ben’s commitment to the Bauhaus principles of synergy amongst many forms of art, led him to purchase a gigantic loom in Stockholm. In order to accommodate the loom, which took up an entire room, they had to knock out the whole roof of the house. Putting it all together took months, but he loved weaving bright tapestries on it. Talking with Ben one soon realizes that the scope of his knowledge and expertise in all things related to art and art history is monumental; yet it is his genuine, simple affection for people that leaves one so touched. Even at his age, when he struggles with so much physical compromise and discomfort, Ben thoroughly enjoys people, loves having people to his home, and loves to tell stories about the characters he has known. He remembers all the names of the students in his critique group, even those that have joined in the last few years. He remembers where they come from and manages to identify characteristics of their personali-



*Charcoal drawing of Ben and Margaret by Maud Gatewood.  
Photo by Susan K. Jones.*

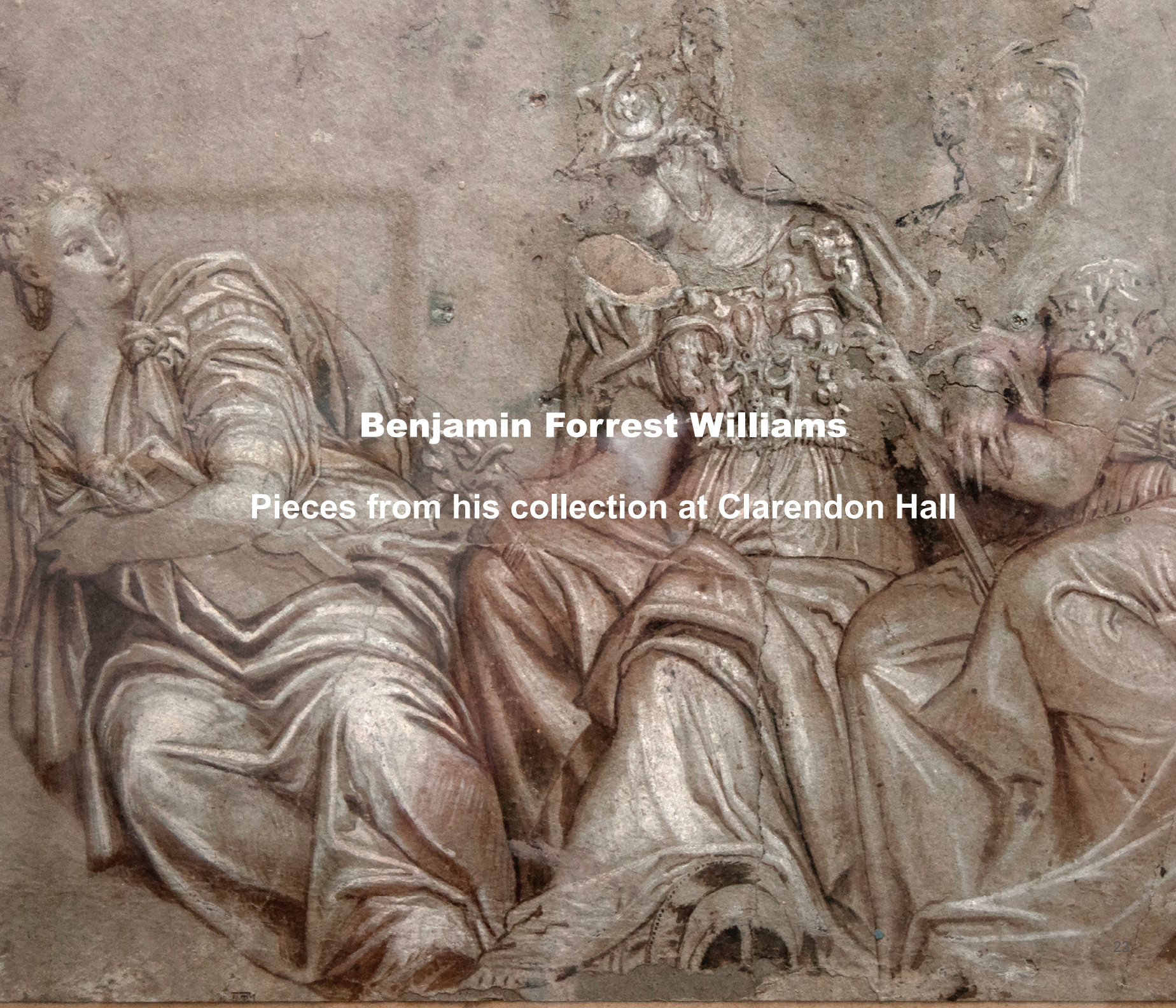
ties as well as their art. He will often chuckle mischievously during a critique, gently poking fun at the idiosyncrasies he knows so well. His face lights up when one visits their home, and he leans in for a hug, sighing, “Isn’t this wonderful!”

This year, as in every spring for over thirty years, members of the critique group travelled to his home to celebrate the season and dance around the Maypole. No one really knows how the Maypole ribbons work except that one holds onto one’s ribbon and faces one’s partner, proceeding to move around the pole in

an under-over pattern, but within minutes everyone is confused and laughing and getting tangled which is all part of the fun. Everyone there loves Ben and Margaret, and everyone is grateful to Curtis Steele, a neighbor who met them fifteen years before when he came to help out with the yard work. For several years now Curtis has taken care of them, checking in daily, working with Ben on his renovation projects and driving them when they need to go into town. Curtis says that he and Ben “just hit it off” and that he thinks of Ben and Margaret as his “mother and daddy” now that his own parents have passed. Curtis Steele is not alone in claiming Ben for his own; it is apparent sitting in the critique class that Ben’s family has extended itself to many generations of men and women. We have all been touched by his gentle, loving soul and his unshakeable faith in “the art spirit.”

“Art is soul food,” he likes to say. “Art satisfies the whole being.”





**Benjamin Forrest Williams**

**Pieces from his collection at Clarendon Hall**



*Sculpture by Ben's friend, Harry Bertoia. He became famous for large sculptures with moving parts that "sang." Bertoia's wife, Birgitta, was the daughter of Wilhelm Valentiner.  
Photo by Susan K. Jones*





*Dandelion sculpture by Harry Bertoia, Italian born sculptor and designer.  
Photo by Susan K. Jones.*



*Face jug made at Jugtown, Moore County NC.  
Photo by Susan K. Jones.*



*Juliana and Jacques Busbee gave this pair of white glazed vases, made by Juliana, to Ben and Margaret as a wedding present. Photo by Susan K. Jones..*



*Mantelpiece in dining room carved by Thomas Day.  
Morris Graves painting, "Joyous Young Pine" painted in 1944  
Photo by Susan K. Jones.*



*Drawing by Veronese.  
Photo by Susan K. Jones.*



*Print by Le Corbusier, signed 50/100.  
Photo by Susan K. Jones.*



*Painting by George Bireline, professor of art at NC State University.  
Photo by Susan K. Jones.*





An open wooden artist's palette box is shown, resting on a wooden surface. The lid of the box is propped open, revealing a wooden palette with various colors of paint (red, yellow, black, white) smeared on its surface. Inside the box, several tubes of paint are visible, including brands like 'Winsor & Newton' and 'Sennelier'. A palette knife with a wooden handle is also present. The box is situated in a workshop or studio, with a wooden easel and other art supplies visible in the background.

**Benjamin Forrest Williams**  
Some of his own works at Clarendon Hall



*Tree at Sunset.*  
*Photo by Susan K. Jones.*



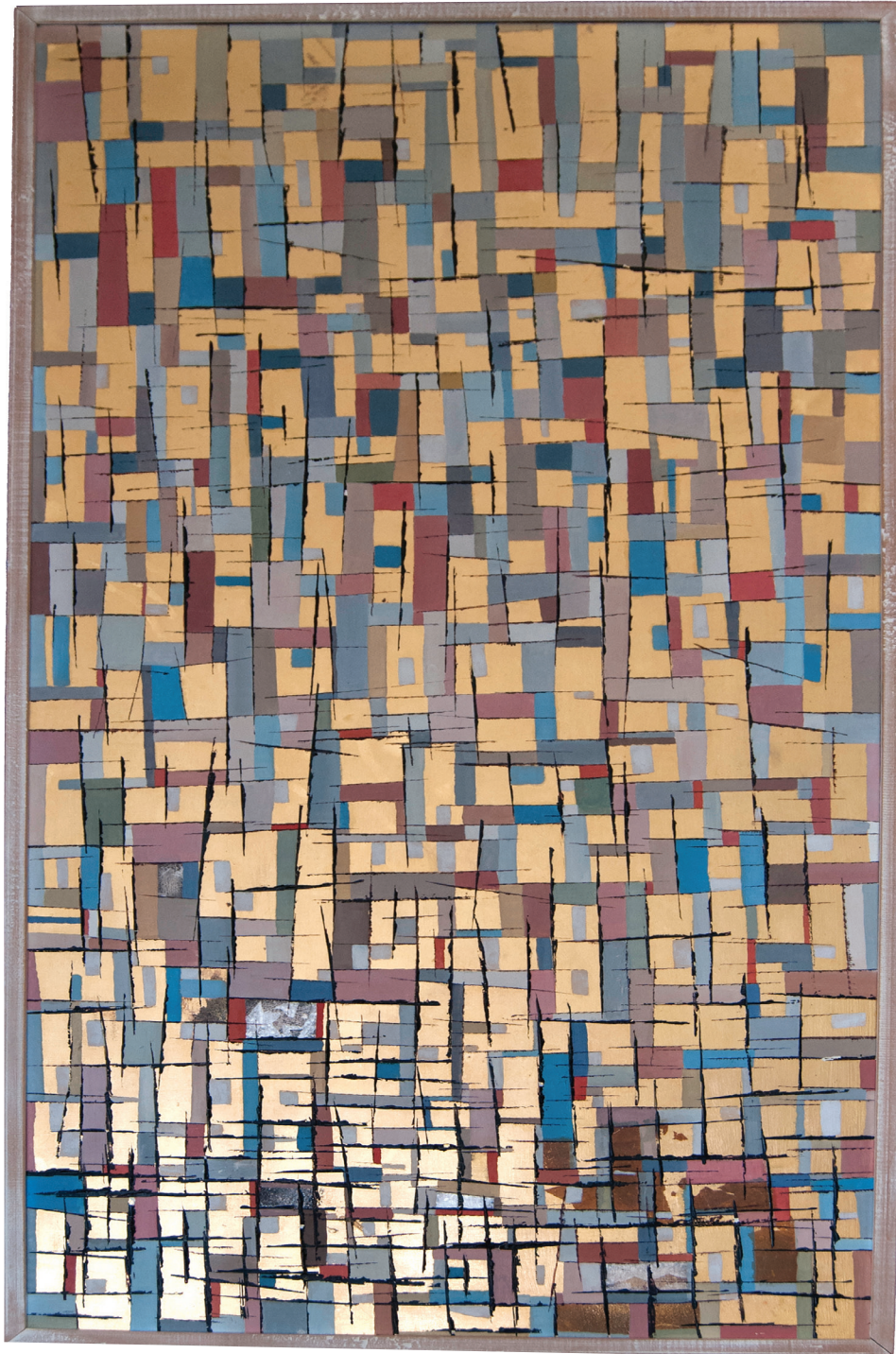
*Grey and red abstract..  
Photo by Susan K. Jones.*



*Red Sumac and fall foliage.*  
*Photo by Susan K. Jones.*



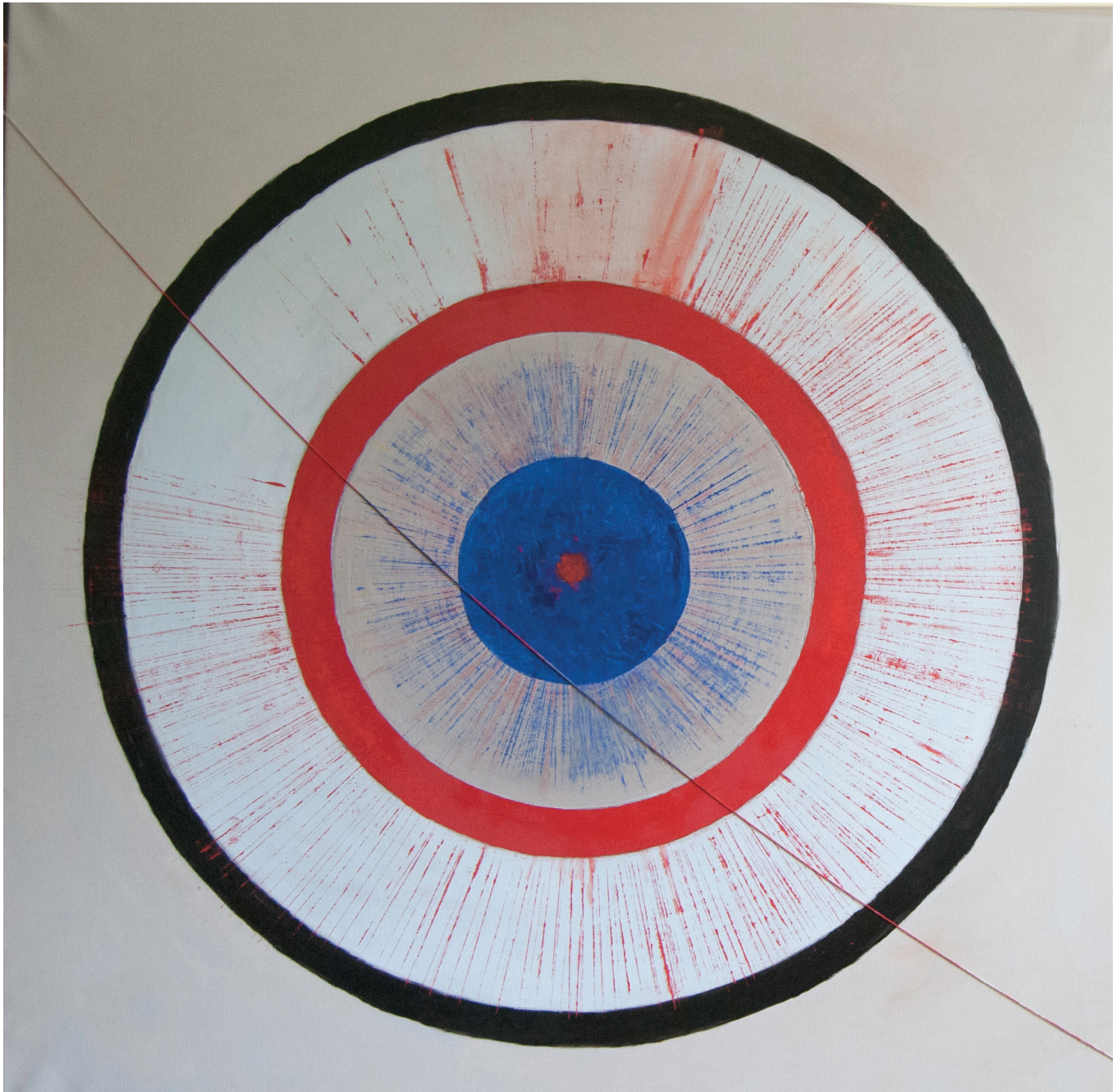
*Cubes with gold leaf.*  
*Photo by Susan K. Jones.*



*Large abstract gold leaf.  
Photo by Susan K. Jones.*

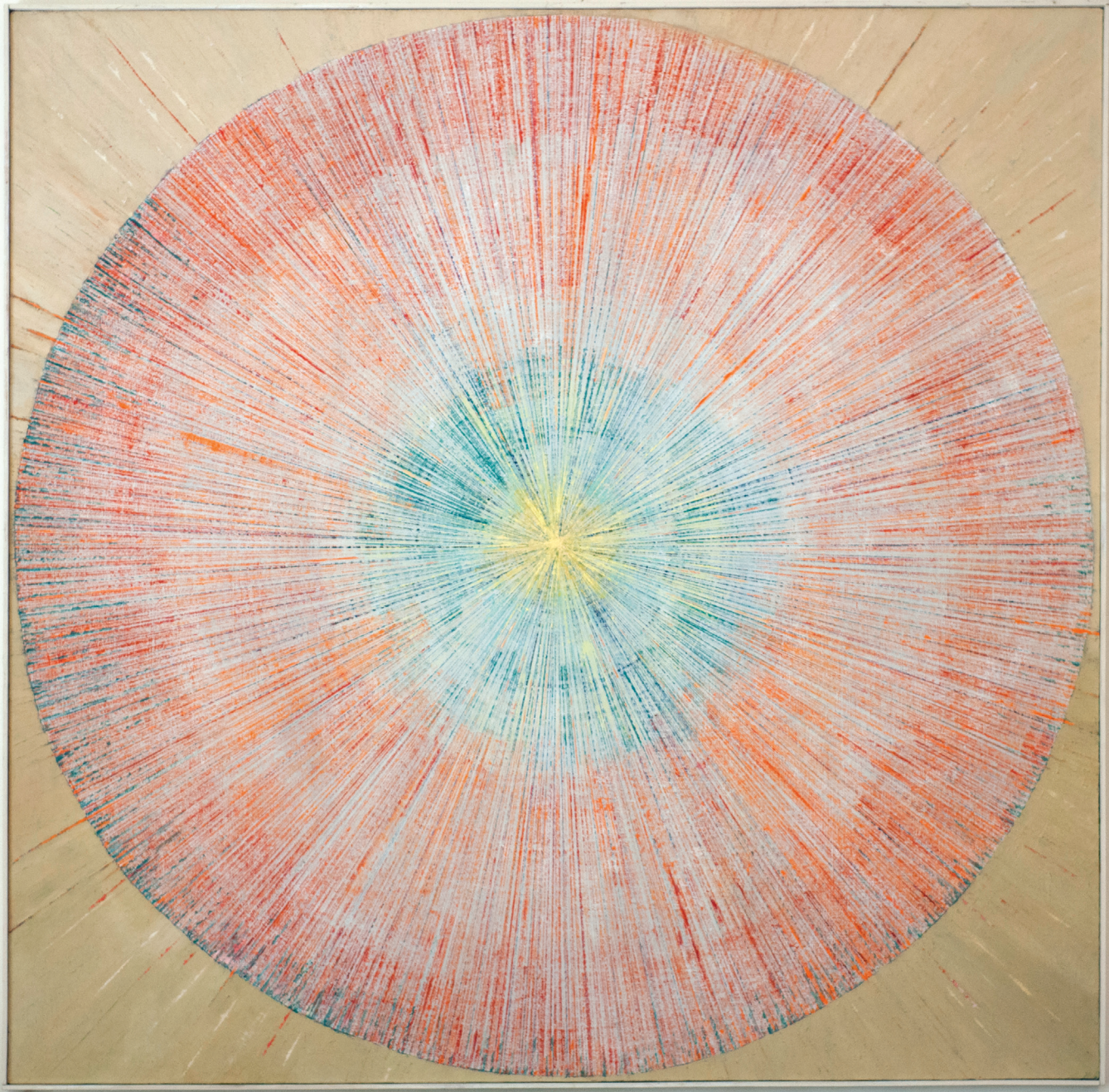


*Cast stone head (made while at the Corcoran).  
Photo by Susan K. Jones.*



*Circle painting in progress. Photo by Susan K. Jones.*





*One of a series of four circle paintings; this one is "Summer". Photo by Susan K. Jones.*



*Looking down the well. Photo by Susan K. Jones.*



*Ben carved this bench with inlaid antique Delft tiles. Photo by Susan K. Jones.*



*Ben's hand carved cabinet with pine straw weaving by Angelika Rackendorf  
Photo by Susan K. Jones.*



*A table by Isamu Noguchi with Ben's walnut wood sculpture.  
Photo by Susan K. Jones.*



## Benjamin F. Williams: Publications

### Books

*North Carolina's Capital, Raleigh.* Ben F. Williams, Chairman, Editorial Committee. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC. October 1967, and May 1968

### Magazine Articles

« A Raleigh, Caroline du Nord. Un des rares Musees Americains Qui Ne Soient Pas Dus a l'Initiative Privee. » ' *L'Oeil, Revue D'Art Mensuelle.* Paris, France, No 155, November 1967.

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Middleton, Margaret Simons, "Henrietta Johnston of Charles Town, South Carolina, America's First Pastellist." Columbia University of South Carolina Press, 1966. *North Carolina Historical Review*, October 1969

Middendorf, J. William II, and Shadwell, Wendy J. "American Printmaking: The First 150 Years," *North Carolina Historical Review*, December 1969.

Cowdrey, Mary Bartlett, "American Academy and The American Art Union," *North Carolina Historical Review*, April 1955

### Periodicals

Williams, Benjamin F., "Acquisitions of Twentieth Century Paintings," *North Carolina Museum of Art Bulletin*, Volume 1, Spring 1957.

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*Mr. and Mrs. Francis Speight, Man-Wife Show.* North Carolina Museum of Art, October, 1949. Checklist

*John Chapman Lewis Paintings.* North Carolina Museum of Art, February 1950. Checklist

*Davis-Kachergis (Sculpture and Paintings).* North Carolina Museum of Art, March 1950. Checklist

*H. TH. Wijdeveld, One Man Show.* North Carolina Museum of Art, April 1950. Checklist

*Hobson - Pittman, One Man Show.* North Carolina Museum of Art, October 1950. Checklist

*Knoll Associates Furniture Show (Design for Today).* North Carolina Museum of Art, October 1950. Checklist

*NC Artists Annual Exhibition.* North Carolina Museum of Art, November 1950

*Paintings from Three Centuries (Knoedler Galleries).* North Carolina Museum of Art, December 1951. Checklist

*Group Show, School of Design Faculty.* North Carolina Museum of Art, February 1952. Checklist

*Matisse - Etchings, Lithographs, Small Bronzes.* North Carolina Museum of Art, March 1952. Checklist

*Good Design*. North Carolina Museum of Art, September 1952. Checklist  
*15<sup>th</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition*. North Carolina Museum of Art, November 1952  
*Mr. and Mrs. Pryor Exhibition*. North Carolina Museum of Art, June 1953. Checklist  
*16<sup>th</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition*. NCMA, Dec. 1953. Checklist  
*Leslie Laskey, One Man Show*. NCMA, Feb. 1954. Checklist  
*Portraits by North Carolina Artists*. NCMA, March 1954. Checklist  
*17<sup>th</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition*. NCMA, Dec. 1954. Checklist  
*18<sup>th</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition*. NCMA, Dec. 1955. Checklist  
*Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*. NCMA, August 1956. Checklist  
*19<sup>th</sup> Annual North Carolina*. NCMA, Dec, 1956. 13 pages  
*Panel's Choice- Contemporary Art*. NCMA, April 1957  
*Hajime Kato Ceramics*. NCMA, April 1957. Checklist  
*New Acquisitions of Contemporary Art*. NCMA, October 1957. Checklist  
*20<sup>th</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition*. NCMA, Dec. 1957  
*E.L. Kirchner, German Expressionist*. NCMA, Jan 1958. 132 pages  
*21<sup>st</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition*. NCMA, Dec. 1958  
*Masterpieces of Art – W. R. Valentiner Memorial Exhibition*. NCMA, April 1959. 324 pages  
*Southern Highlands Handicraft Guild*. NCMA, Sept 1959. Checklist  
*New European Paintings and Sculpture*. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Sept. 1959. Checklist  
*22<sup>nd</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition*. NCMA, Dec. 1959  
*Coptic Art Show – Olsen Foundation*. NCMA, Jan. 1960. Checklist  
*Modern French Art, Monet to Picasso (Maurice Wertheim Collection)*. NCMA, June 1960  
*23<sup>rd</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition, NCMA, Dec. 1960*  
*Francis Speight Exhibition*. NCMA Feb. 1961. 38 pages  
*24<sup>th</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition*. NCMA, Dec. 1961  
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*Arts of the Pacific Islands*. NCMA, July 1962. Checklist  
*Sculptures of Tilman Riemenschneider*. NCMA, Nov. 1962. 68 pages  
*25<sup>th</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition, . NCMA, Dec. 1962*  
*Hobson Pittman Exhibition*. NCMA, Feb. 1963. 96 pages  
*Carolina Charter Tercentenary Exhibition*. NCMA, March 1963, 146 pages  
*26<sup>th</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition*. NCMA, Dec. 1963  
*Jacob Marling Exhibition*. NCMA, March 1964. 55 pages  
*Prints and Arts of Japan*. NCMA, Mary 1964. Checklist  
*Contemporary British Artists*. NCMA, Oct. 1964. 28 pages



*27<sup>th</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition*. NCMA, Dec. 1964  
*Victor Hammer Retrospective*. NCMA, April 1965. 91 pages  
*Fedor Zakharov Exhibition*. NCMA, May 1965. 84 pages  
*Harry L. Dalton Collection*. NCMA, Sept. 1965. 70 pages  
*Arnold Munzinger Exhibition*. NCMA, Oct. 1965. 64 pages  
*Christian Art*. NCMA, Dec. 1965. Checklist  
*28<sup>th</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition*. NCMA, Dec. 1965  
*Mies Van Der Rohe Exhibition*. NCMA, Jan. 1966. Checklist  
*Designer – Craftsmen Exhibition*. NCMA, March 1966. Checklist  
*29<sup>th</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition*. NCMA, Dec. 1966  
*Governor's National Art Tour Exhibition*. NCMA, Feb. 1967. Checklist  
*Acquisitions from North Carolina Annual*. NCMA, March 1967. 88 pages  
*American Paintings Since 1900 ( from NCMA Permanent Collection)*. NCMA, April 1967  
*North Carolina Collects*. NCMA, Oct. 1967. 282 pages  
*30<sup>th</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition*. NCMA, Dec. 1967  
*Marguerite Wildenhain, Potter*. NCMA, Feb. 1968. 22 pages  
*Japanese Abstract Art*. NCMA, April 1968. Checklist  
*Paul Hudgins Memorial Exhibition*. NCMA Sept. 1968. 58 pages  
*31<sup>st</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition*. NCMA, Dec. 1968  
*American Abstract Artists*. NCMA, Feb. 1969. 29 pages  
*Henry Pearson Retrospective*. NCMA, April 1969  
*Drawings and Watercolors*. NCMA, Summer 1969. 70 pages  
*32<sup>nd</sup> Annual North Carolina Artists Exhibition*. NCMA, Dec. 1969

**Special Research for the Following Publications:**

*John Singleton Copley in America, 1738-1774*. Jules David Prown. Published for the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., 1966. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2 vols.  
*Ernst Ludwig Kirchner*. Donald E. Gordon. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Mass.  
*The World of Rembrandt, 1606-1669*. Robert Wallace and the Editors of Time-Life Books, 1968



## Time line

- . 1941-42: Ben studies at the National School of Art in Washington DC
- . 1942-45: Ben studies at the Corcoran School of Art, Washington DC
- . 1945-46: Corcoran School Saturday instructor
- . 1945-1947: Ben studies at George Washington University, receives an A.A. degree in art criticism and art history
- . 1945-46: Summer Institutes at Black Mountain College NC
- . 1945: Art Institute in New York City, studies under John Corbino
- . 1946: National Gallery of Art in Washington DC; studies in color lithography
- . 1947-1949: UNC-Chapel Hill, A.B in art education, history of art.
- . 1948-49: UNC-Chapel Hill, graduate assistant and director of exhibitions at Person Hall Art Gallery
- . 1949-1956: North Carolina State Art Gallery, associate curator
- . 1949: Columbia University extension program in Paris France. Gothic Architecture and Renaissance Painting
- . 1949-1951: UNC-Chapel Hill graduate studies
- . 1950-1952: Knoll Associates, New York City, museum exhibitions designer
- . 1952: Meets Margaret Click, his future wife, at UNC Greensboro
- . 1955, July 2: Ben and Margaret marry at the Arboretum on Chapel Hill campus.
- . 1954-1958: North Carolina State University in Raleigh, special studies in industrial arts
- . 1956, April 6: NCMA opens in the renovated State Highway building on Morgan Street
- . 1956: Dr. William Valentiner arrives to become the first Director of the new NCMA
- . 1956: Appointed Curator of the North Carolina Museum of Art
- . 1956: Curates the Rembrandt exhibition, the only one in the US to celebrate the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rembrandt's birth
- . 1956, September 11: Black Mountain College closes after it's beginning in 1933
- . 1957: Summer studies in 18<sup>th</sup> century decorative art at the Cole du Louvre, Paris France
- . 1961-1965: UNC Chapel Hill studies in music. Plays cello in an ensemble with James Taylor
- . 1964: Ben travels to London and assembles the work of six artists for "The Young British Painters" exhibition at NCMA
- . 1964: Summer studies in Amsterdam, Holland at the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (history of art)
- . 1966: Ben negotiates with the British Museum to bring 113 surviving drawings by John White, to the NCMA for an exhibition. John White was a settler in the first English Colony in the New World, on Roanoke Island, later to become known as the Lost Colony. These drawings were also shown at the National Gallery in Washington DC and at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York
- . 1971: The NCMA embarks on a major project to document the visual arts program at the Black Mountain College in western NC, 1933-1956

- . 1971: The State Art Museum Building Commission selects Edward Durrell Stone and Associates of New York to design the new Museum building on Blue Ridge Parkway. Holloway Reeves of Raleigh are selected as Associate Architects. Durrell Stone and Associates designed the Kennedy Center, the Museum of Modern Art and the N.C. Legislature Building in Raleigh.
- . 1972, July: Moussa M. Domit selected as Associate Director. He was the Curator at the National Gallery at that time and had been the Associate Director at the Corcoran Gallery
- . 1973: NCMA receives accreditation by the American Association of Museums
- . 1973: Ben curates the exhibition of the Robert F. Phifer Collection.
- . 1975: Ceremonial Art in the Judaic Tradition is established at the NCMA with the major donation of artifacts by Dr. Abram Kanof.
- . 1979: Ben Williams resigns to accept the position as Curator of Art at the Visual Arts Center at North Carolina State University. A resolution is written by Joseph C. Sloane to honor Ben's thirty years of service to NCMA
- . 1981: Ben retires from the NCSU
- . 1989: Awarded the Raleigh Medal of Honor for the Arts by the NC Department of Cultural Resources. Begins critique group meeting weekly for two semesters each year,

## Endnotes

- i Thomas Day, (c.1801 – 1861) born to free black parents in Dinwiddie County, Virginia. His family moved to Caswell County in 1824. Day began his cabinetmaking business in Milton, NC with his brother, John Day, Jr., but his brother left in 1825 and later emigrated to Liberia where he served as Chief Justice. Day was a successful businessman, at one point becoming a stockholder in the State Bank of North Carolina, and owning significant real estate. Day used steam-power to drive much of his furniture-making implements, greatly increasing his production volume and efficiency. Day is not known to have signed his work; the only piece that can be attributed to him through discernible markings is a dresser at the North Carolina Museum of History, which has an interior plank made from wood recycled from a shipping crate. The plank is clearly addressed to Thomas Day. A statue of Thomas Day stands outside the North Carolina Museum of History.  
Wikipedia.
- ii Face jugs: [www.jugtownware.com/history](http://www.jugtownware.com/history)  
Also called “face vessels,” “ugly jug,” or “voodoo jug,” these amusing pots probably originated sometime after the beginning of the twentieth century. Produced most commonly in the Catawba Valley, face jugs are usually characterized by their ears, prominent mustaches and toothy grins. When face jugs were first produced, they seemed to be an enormous effort for very little return because not many of them sold. To produce a face jug, potters first turn the piece, then let it dry for a few hours. Then the potter adds at least thirteen pieces of clay to create the face, and optional features such as a mustache, beard or horns can increase this amount. Teeth are created from jagged pieces of commercial whitewares.  
Excerpted from <http://www.unctv.org/content/folkways/episodes/potters>  
See also: <http://www.folkart.org/mag/introduction-seagrove-pottery>
- iii Gimpel Fils gallery in London was founded by the brothers Peter and Charles Gimpel on November 26th 1946 in honor of their father Rene Gimpel, art dealer and collector.
- iv Sarah Blakeslee, born in Evanston Illinois, January 13, 1912, died January 12, 2005. She was a painter who worked primarily in oils and occasionally in watercolors. She studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, which awarded her its traveling scholarship, enabling her to paint in Europe from 1933-1934. During her studies at the Academy, she met and married her instructor, painter Francis Speight. Both Sarah Blakeslee and Francis Speight were close friends of Ben and Margaret and many of their works hang in their home. Blakeslee’s work has been exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and Philadelphia Museum of Art, and was featured internationally at the 1939 World’s Fair and Golden Gate Exhibitions.

- v George Nakashima (May 24, 1905 – June 15, 1990) was born in Spokane Washington. He received a Bachelor's of Architecture from the University of Washington, and a Master's degree in architecture from M.I.T. He became one of the leading innovators of 20<sup>th</sup> century furniture design and a father of the American craft movement. In 1983, he accepted the Order of the Sacred Treasure, an honor bestowed by the Emperor of Japan and the Japanese government. During the war he was interned at Camp Minidoka in Hunt, Idaho. Antonin Raymond, an American architect who had collaborated with Frank Lloyd Wright on the Imperial Hotel in Japan, and whom Nakashima had worked for, successfully sponsored his release from the camp. Nakashima went to work on his farm in New Hope, PA. Nakashima's home and studio near New Hope is listed on the US National Register of Historic Places and is designated a National Historic Landmark too. Wikipedia; see also <http://www.nakashimawoodworker.com>
- vi Knoll Associates: The origins of this celebrated USA furniture manufacturer and distributor lay in the New York showroom of the Hans G. Knoll Furniture Company established in 1938 by German-born Hans Knoll. Producing furniture by many leading 20th-century designers, it became closely identified with Modernism and the image of corporate interiors in post-Second World War America. In the second half of the 20th century the company produced many 'classic' designs from the 1920s and 1930s by Mies Van Der Rohe, Marcel Breuer, and others. From Oxford Dictionary of Modern Design. Read more: <http://www.answers.com/topic/knoll-associates#ixzz34G30GEpf>
- vii Isamu Noguchi (November 17, 1904 – December 30, 1988) was born in Los Angeles, CA. He became well known as a sculptor and landscape architect and designed stage sets for dance productions by Martha Graham. He worked with the Herman Miller Company where together with George Nelson, Paul Laszlo and Charles Eames he produced a catalog of modern furniture now considered to be highly influential. He also developed a relationship with Knoll Associates. His Noguchi table remains in production and his legacy can be seen at the Noguchi Museum in New York City. Although not interned during the war, he attempted to halt the internment of Japanese Americans and served voluntarily in a camp in Poston. He would later tell of his wartime experiences in the British documentary, *The World at War*. Wikipedia
- viii Louise Rainer, born January 12, 1910, in Germany. She is now 104. She was spotted by a talent scout for MGM in the early 30's as Hitler came to power, and seized the opportunity to emigrate. Later, her American born father and German mother would join her. She was the first actor or actress to win two Oscars back to back: for the Great Ziegfeld in 1936 and for The Good Earth (from Pearl Buck's novel) in 1937.
- ix James Taylor, a singer/songwriter who has earned 40 gold, platinum, and multi-platinum awards for his songs and albums. Member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the prestigious Songwriter's Hall of Fame, and has received Billboard magazine's Century Award for distinguished creative achievement. In 1971, *Time* magazine featured him on its cover

and called him the harbinger of the singer/songwriter era. Some of his most well-known songs include “Fire and Rain,” “Country Road,” “Something In The Way She Moves,” “Mexico,” “Shower the People,” “Walking Man,” “Sweet Baby James,” “Never Die Young,” “Copperline,” and of course, “Carolina In My Mind.” Born in Boston in 1948, James Taylor came to Chapel Hill with his family when he was three years old. He began writing music in the mid 1960’s while a student at a New England boarding school. He graduated from Chapel Hill High School. Isaac Taylor, James’ late father, was for a time Dean of the UNC-Chapel Hill medical school.

See [www. http://www.chapelhillmuseum.org/Exhibits/Ongoing/JamesTaylorExhibit](http://www.chapelhillmuseum.org/Exhibits/Ongoing/JamesTaylorExhibit)

x Ben was the founder and first president of The Friends of the College Concert Series and served as a board member for six years. He was also an officer and board member of the Raleigh Chamber Music Guild, and the president of the Arts Council of Raleigh, 1966-1967. Margaret devoted herself to selling subscriptions for the concert series.

xi The Carolina Inn:  
Built in 1924 by John Sprunt Hill - distinguished alumnus, successful businessman and University trustee. In 1935, Hill donated the Inn to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with the stipulation that after meeting expenses, profits from the Inn were to be used for “the maintenance and support of the University library, and especially for the support of the collection of books and papers known as the North Carolina Collection.” Mr. Hill’s wishes are still carried out today as the Inn returns its profits to the University to support the University library. The Inn is a beautiful and well-known icon on the UNC campus in downtown Chapel Hill that architecturally represents both the colonial and antebellum South. The 1924 design incorporates late 18th century elements from George Washington’s Mount Vernon, particularly the two-story portico and cupola on the original Cameron Avenue façade, and early 19th elements from Richland, a plantation house in Louisiana. The Richland elements include the familiar hipped-gable brick end walls with integral flat double chimneys above a central demi-lune window. The hotel has undergone five major renovations since 1924 (including three major additions), and a sixth is now underway. Renovation work since 1995 has sought to return the Inn to its original grandeur and traditional warmth, while offering guests the most up-to-date services and amenities. Now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

[www.carolinainn.com/about-historic-carolina-inn](http://www.carolinainn.com/about-historic-carolina-inn)

xii Raymond Lowey (November 5, 1893 – July 14, 1986) French-born American industrial designer who achieved fame for the magnitude of his design efforts across a variety of industries. He was recognized for this by *Time* magazine and featured on its cover on October 31, 1949. Amongst many iconic designs including the streamlined Greyhound bus, the Lucky Strike package, the Sears Coldspot refrigerator, the interiors of NASA’s Saturn I, Saturn V, and Skylab and much more, Lowey is famous for his long relationship with Studebaker. He was involved in the design of the iconic bullet-nosed Studebakers of the 1950 and 1951, and in 1961 he was commissioned to design the Avanti.

Wikipedia

- xiii Janet Flanner (March 13, 1892 – November 7, 1978) was an American writer and journalist who served as the Paris correspondent of *The New Yorker* magazine from 1925 until she retired in 1975. She wrote under the pen name, “Genet.” In September 1925 Flanner published her first “Letter from Paris” in *The New Yorker*. Flanner was a prominent member of the American expatriate community which included Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, e. e. cummings, Hart Crane, Djuna Barnes, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein – the world of the Lost Generation and Les Deux Magots. While in Paris she became very close friends with Gertrude Stein and her lover, Alice B. Toklas.  
Wikipedia
- xiv Alice B. Toklas, April 30, 1877- March 7, 1967, born Alice Babette Toklas in San Francisco, California, into a middle-class Jewish family (her father had been a Polish army officer) and attended schools in both San Francisco and Seattle. For a short time she also studied music at the University of Washington. She met Gertrude Stein in Paris on September 8, 1907, the day she arrived. Together they hosted a salon that attracted expatriate American writers, such as Ernest Hemingway, Paul Bowles, Thornton Wilder, and Sherwood Anderson, and avant-garde painters, including Picasso, Matisse, and Braque. Acting as Stein’s confidante, lover, cook, secretary, muse, editor, critic, and general organizer, Toklas remained a background figure, chiefly living in the shadow of Stein, until Stein published her memoirs in 1933 under the teasing title *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. It became Stein’s bestselling book. Toklas published her own literary memoir, a 1954 book that mixed reminiscences and recipes under the title *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*. The most famous recipe therein (actually contributed by her friend Brion Gysin) was called “Haschich Fudge.” In 1963 she published her autobiography, *What Is Remembered*, which abruptly ends with Stein’s death. She converted to Catholicism in her old age. Toklas died in poverty at the age of 89 and is buried next to Stein in Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris, France; Toklas’s name is engraved on the back of Stein’s headstone.
- xv The collection at 5, Rue Christine, has a strange history. During the Second World War, when France fell to German troops, the French government, headed by Premier Major Philippe Petain, signed an armistice with Hitler on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July 1940. The Northern two-thirds of France, including Paris, was occupied by the German Army, while the Southern third of France was nominally under the control of a French Government, known as Vichy France after its capital, Vichy. This regime collaborated with the Nazis and continued the enforcement of Nazi racial policies in both the Vichy territories as well as the occupied territories where they provided certain of the civil services. Under these policies, Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, Communists, and the mentally handicapped were rounded up and placed in concentration camps and shipped to the gas chambers in Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, both of whom were Jewish, and whose lesbian relationship was well known, closed up their Paris apartment and went to the south of France where they survived the worst of the war. Her collection did not fall victim to the Nazis because she became very close friends with a man named Bernard Fay, who had been appointed by Petain to hunt down Masons, Jews and other “undesirables.” In November of 1942 the Nazis suspended the armistice, and occupied all of France, while allowing the Vichy government, now fully compliant with Nazi policy, nominal control of civil affairs.



*According to Fay himself, he prevailed upon Philippe Petain, the head of the Vichy regime, to protect Stein and Toklas. Fay also stepped in at the request of Picasso, who somehow knew exactly whom to contact – when the Nazis showed up at Steins apartment to seize her collection.*

Excerpted from *The Strange Politics of Gertrude Stein* by Barbara Will, professor of English at Dartmouth College

When Ms. Stein died in 1946, she left most of the art collection to her partner, Alice B. Toklas, including their shared art collection (some of them Picassos) housed in their apartment at 5, Rue Christine. As the paintings had appreciated significantly in value, Stein's relatives took action to claim them, eventually removing them from Toklas's residence while she was away on vacation and placing them in a bank vault. Toklas then relied on contributions from friends as well as writing to make a living. She died penniless.

Stein said in an interview published in the New York Times magazine of May 6, 1934:

*"The Saxon element is always destined to be dominated. The Germans have no gift at organizing. They can only obey. And obedience is not organization. Organization comes from community of will as well as community of action. And in America our democracy has been based on community of will and effort.... I say Hitler ought to have the peace prize...because he is removing all elements of contest and struggle from Germany. By driving out the Jews and the democratic Left elements, he is driving out everything that conduces to activity. That means peace."*

xvi

Picasso's portrait of the expatriate writer was begun in 1905, at the end of his Harlequin Period and before he took up Cubism. Stein is shown seated in a large armchair, wearing her favorite brown velvet coat and skirt. Her impressive demeanor and massive body are aptly suggested by the monumental depiction. In her book *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1932), Stein described the making of this picture: "Picasso had never had anybody pose for him since he was sixteen years old. He was then twenty-four and Gertrude had never thought of having her portrait painted, and they do not know either of them how it came about. Anyway, it did, and she posed for this portrait ninety times. There was a large broken armchair where Gertrude Stein posed. There was a couch where everybody sat and slept. There was a little kitchen chair where Picasso sat to paint. There was a large easel and there were many canvases. She took her pose, Picasso sat very tight in his chair and very close to his canvas and on a very small palette, which was of a brown gray color, mixed some more brown-gray and the painting began. All of a sudden one day Picasso painted out the whole head. "I can't see you anymore when I look," he said irritably, and so the picture was left like that. Picasso actually completed the head after a trip to Spain in fall 1906. His reduction of the figure to simple masses and the face to a mask with heavy lidded eyes reflects his recent encounter with African, Roman, and Iberian sculpture and foreshadows his adoption of Cubism. He painted the head, which differs in style from the body and hands, without the sitter, testimony to the fact that it was his personal vision, rather than empirical reality, that guided his work. When someone commented that Stein did not look like her portrait, Picasso replied, "She will."

From the Metropolitan Museum Website, <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/47.106>

- xvii Ben says that Lumberton is in the “state of Robeson” in the Burnt Islands, where all were known as the Britts, owing to the original colony of British settlers. There are many theories surrounding the origins of that community and the possible link to the original British colony on Roanoke Island, now known as the Lost Colony. Drawings by John White, a British explorer who traveled to Roanoke Island in 1585, made a map and other drawings. Later, in 1587, White led a group of 116 settlers who landed on Roanoke Island. White returned to England for supplies and due to the war between England and Spain he could not return until 1590. He found no trace of the settlers, thus the name “The Lost Colony.” These drawings by John White are in the British Museum. Ben and Margaret traveled to London to secure the loan of the drawings, which were shown at the NCMA, the National Gallery of Art and the Morgan Library. At this time, no mainstream historian has endorsed the theory that the people of Robeson County are descendants of the original Lost Colony settlers and local Native Americans known as the Lumbee, who saved them from starvation on Roanoke Island.
- xviii Black Mountain College: Active 1933-1957, rented the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly buildings south of the town of Black Mountain, NC. In 1941, it moved to its own campus at Lake Eden. The property was later purchased and converted to an ecumenical Christian boys residential summer camp, Camp Rockmont. This became the home to the Black Mountain Festival and the Lake Eden Arts Festival.  
Wikipedia, see also <http://blackmountaincollege.org>
- xix The Biltmore House in Asheville: Biltmore Estate is a large private estate and tourist attraction in Asheville, North Carolina. Biltmore House, the main house on the estate, is a Châteauesque-styled mansion built by George Washington Vanderbilt II between 1889 and 1895 and is the largest privately owned house in the United States, at 178,926 square feet (16,622.8 m<sup>2</sup>) of floor space (135,280 square feet (12,568 m<sup>2</sup>) of living area) and featuring 250 rooms. Still owned by one of Vanderbilt's descendants, it stands today as one of the most prominent remaining examples of the Gilded Age, and of significant gardens in the *jardin à la française* and English Landscape garden styles in the United States. In 2007, it was ranked eighth in *America's Favorite Architecture* by the American Institute of Architects.  
Wikipedia
- xx The Kress Foundation: Guided by a dual purpose – a sense of the public responsibility imposed upon great wealth, and a belief in the moral force of great art – Samuel H. Kress and the Kress Foundation created between 1929 and 1961 a series of unprecedented programs to share the artistic legacy of Europe with the American people. In the depths of the Great Depression, a touring exhibition of 50 pictures from Samuel Kress's private collection introduced Italian art to an eager public in 24 American cities, and throughout the 1930s his gifts of art placed the first Old Master paintings on the walls of local museums in many parts of the country. By 1941, his role as a Founding Benefactor of the National Gallery of Art reaffirmed both the value of his collection and his constancy of purpose. A more expansive vision evolved as a staggering number of incomparable European masterpieces entered the Kress Collection during and after World War II. Rearrangement of the 34

Kress galleries at the National Gallery made a large quantity of museum-quality paintings available for viewing elsewhere. This opportunity gave rise to a novel, generous, and logistically complex program that offered representative surveys of Italian art to selected museums across the country. Through this national program in art philanthropy, the Kress Foundation ultimately donated more than 700 Old Masters to regional museums in eighteen American cities during the 1950s. Another 200 paintings were divided into study collections for twenty-three colleges and universities. Major gifts of special collections were also bestowed on the Metropolitan Museum of Art (French porcelains and furniture, and a complete Robert Adam room with Gobelins tapestries), the Pierpont Morgan Library (drawings and illuminated manuscripts), and the Philadelphia Museum of Art (thirteen tapestries based on designs by Rubens and Pietro da Cortona).

Excerpted from [www.kressfoundation.org/collection/history](http://www.kressfoundation.org/collection/history)

xxi

Dr. William Reinhold Valentiner, (1880-1958) born in Germany, acquired American citizenship in 1930. He was a world renowned scholar of European art, particularly of Rembrandt and other Dutch and Flemish masters. Through his many connections with major collectors and avant-garde artists in Europe, Valentiner acquired works of great significance for American museums. He championed modern art and commissioned Diego Rivera to paint murals for the Detroit Art Institute. In 1907 he was appointed curator of the department of decorative arts at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. He served in the German army in World War I. Appointed Director of the Detroit Institute of Art from 1927-1944, co-director of the Los Angeles County Museum in 1946 and director of the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

Biography: *The Passionate Eye: The Life of William R. Valentiner* by Margaret Sterne, published by the Wayne State University Press in 1980.

Wikipedia



## About the Author

**Jillian Zausmer Goldberg** graduated from the University of Cape Town with a BA in Art Education, and taught in private and public schools in South Africa. Jillian and her family emigrated to the US in 1983, settling in Charlotte, North Carolina. She founded the Gifted and Talented Development Center based on a model created by Carole Berman in New York, and she operated camps at Charlotte Country Day School and Queens University in Charlotte for twenty years. In 1994 Jillian acquired a license from Mona Brookes, author of the international bestselling book, *Drawing with Children*. She created an art school to teach the Monart Method at Queens University and over the next eight years she opened seven art schools in the Charlotte and Triangle areas.

Since retiring, Jillian has enjoyed painting and taking workshops, and she is represented at the Village Art Circle in downtown Cary, where she lives with her husband. They love spending time with their five gifted and talented grandchildren.

Her work can be seen at [www.jillzart.com](http://www.jillzart.com)

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## About the Photographers

**Christer Berg** is an award-winning photographer based in Raleigh, North Carolina. Born in Sweden in 1963, he has resided in the Triangle area of North Carolina since 1995 and is now a naturalized U.S. citizen. After a successful career as an IT executive and entrepreneur, Christer has made photography his second career and now photographs people, music, places, events and anything else that exhibits passion, conveys emotion or evokes thought. Christer has been published in numerous publications, including newspapers, news and photographic magazines, and online. He has received many awards at juried photographic exhibits and art shows in and outside of North Carolina.

Christer's portrait of Ben Williams as seen on this book cover, won First Prize at the Professional Photographers of North Carolina annual competition as well as winning the People's Choice Award in August 2014.

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**Susan K. Jones** holds a Masters Degree from North Carolina State University College of Design. She is active in area arts organizations and is a founding member of Tipping Paint Artists in Raleigh.



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Jillian Zausmer Goldberg  
Cary, North Carolina.

