



**The Early Years**

**Bonnie Bronson**



**Bonnie Bronson**





Bonnie Bronson

The Early Years  
Works from the 1960s

Randal Davis  
Kassandra Kelly

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Book designed and produced by Randal Davis for The Estate of Bonnie Bronson.

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*About this book...*

In 1961, Bonnie Bronson, then 21 and a student at the Museum Art School in Portland, Oregon, met a sculptor named Lee Kelly. He was seven years older, already a successful artist, and a widower with a small child, myself. In less than two years, she had a baby of her own, Jason, born in 1962. The family then moved to a farm in an unincorporated area south of Oregon City.

Bonnie and Lee's grand experiment in the country was to make art and raise a family. From the beginning they collaborated on one another's large commissions and both maintained active studio practices. They constantly renovated their living and working spaces, changing them to accommodate new projects or materials. I remember a photography dark room, a clay studio, spaces devoted to porcelain enamel, a spray booth for applying large coats of enamel or lacquer, and a revolving series of drawing and painting studios.

They raised two children, cared for a farm full of animals and grew an organic garden that filled every sunny corner of the property not already occupied by horses, chickens, playground equipment or sculptures. And friends came to stay while writing dissertations, making art, escaping from other entanglements, or just to see what it was like to live off the grid in the 1960's.

Bonnie also assumed the duties of a wife of that era. She had dinner on the table every night by six. Because the water supply for the property was a seventy-five foot well serviced by a rickety old pump and water shortages were a constant concern, Bonnie gave the family's washer, dryer and dishwasher to another artist who made sculptures out them. She did the family's laundry at a laundromat up the hill in Oregon City every week for twenty-seven years. While she waited for the clothes to cycle through the wash, she sat in a plastic chair and did her nails. It was one of the few times I remember her sitting still.

People don't stay so perpetually busy without deriving joy from the work before them. Bonnie was happy. She had no other employment except her art—this was the 1960's and only divorced women worked outside the home. She had time for everything. In the next generation, mine for instance, the need for outside employment would divide women's lives into strict

compartments: work, art, children, home. But for Bonnie, these elements flowed into one another easily, the boundaries indistinct and each day full of possibilities.

Within a few years, the women's movement would crack open the boys club of the visual arts and Bonnie's career became notable for her experimental use of industrial enameling technique. In 1978 she lost her son and went on to create large public art commissions by which she is still known. In the year she created an exterior wall sculpture in Renton, Washington, she earned more money from her art than Lee.

She died in 1990 at the age of fifty, which now seems so impossibly young.

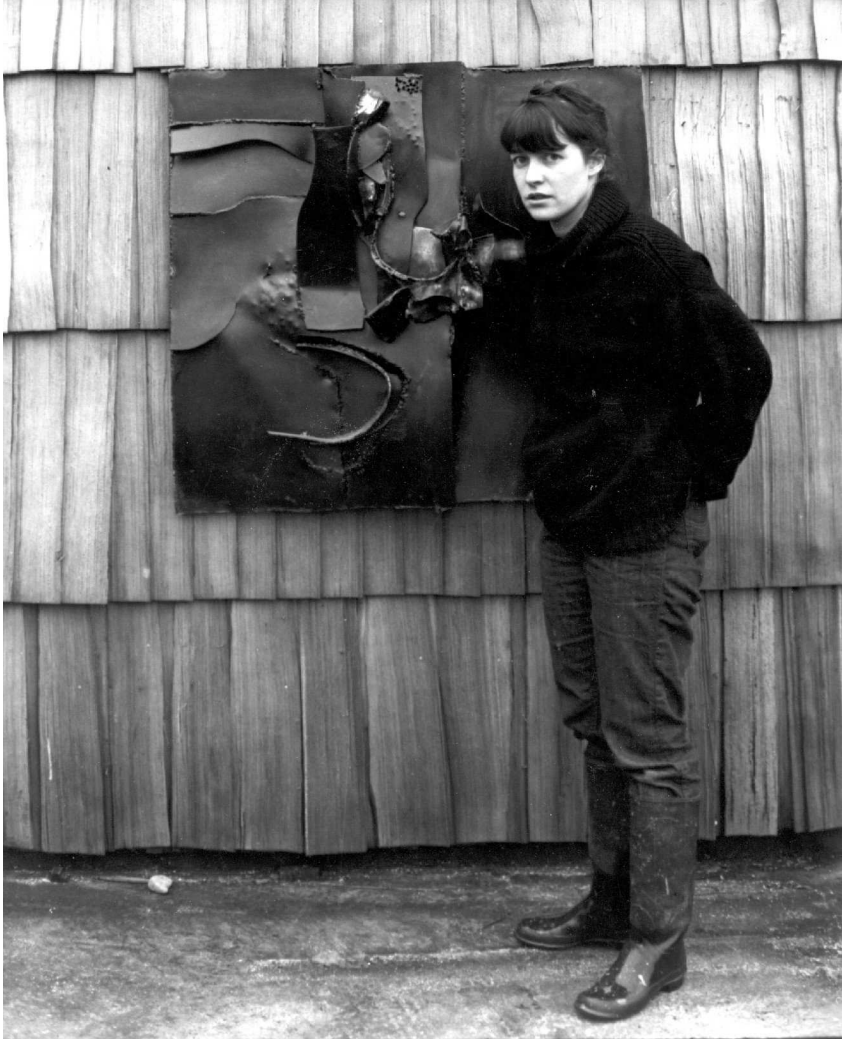
The images in this book come from the 1960's, and when I look at them I see a fluidity of materials and forms that are so very much of that time, but also restless, competitive, seeking—a young woman on the edge of the defining events and circumstances of her life.

Kassandra Kelly, April 2015

Studio, Winter 1965



























Randal Davis      *Bonnie Bronson – The mooring of starting out*

“For this is action, this not being sure, this careless  
Preparing, sowing the seeds crooked in the furrow,  
Making ready to forget, and always coming back  
To the mooring of starting out, that day so long ago.”

John Ashbery, “Soonest Mended”

For Bonnie Bronson, the "mooring of starting out" was the idiom of later Abstract Expressionism, in which she demonstrated precocious fluency. A work from her student years is charged with all the feeling of someone ready for change. A large (34 x 22 inches) charcoal and graphite study of a standing figure, drawn on inexpensive Kraft paper, was nearly completed before being partially eradicated by bold splashes of color, decisively leaving behind the anonymous proficiency of student work. "Action painting" enacted.

Born in 1940, Bronson was at least one, if not more, generations separated from the Abstract Expressionist vanguard, most of whom were born in the first decade of the century. She was even significantly younger than many of the second generation's luminaries, such as Joan Mitchell (b. 1925) and Alfred Leslie (b. 1927). Her only major body of paintings, created for her one-person debut at Mt. Angel College in 1964 unsurprisingly shows much in common with that later generation, particularly Leslie, a point to which I will return.

Another work from her student years at the Museum School (now Pacific Northwest College of Art) provides an interesting perspective on just how fast she was developing. *Untitled [still life]* presumptively dates from 1960-1961, and is far more assured (although hardly original) than the countless number of essentially interchangeable works by art students and second-tier painters at the time.

Aspects of the *passage*, the transitions between the planes of pictorial space, are, one might say, better than they need be and better than what anyone might expect from a 20-year old painter. There is also, as would become evident in later paintings and indeed, through the entire body of her work, a marked aptitude for unusual and subtle color effects: witness, for example, the narrow vertical purple band just right of center.

The difference between the still life and her earliest surviving major painting, *Untitled [blue, green, orange]* (1961) is significant; they may only have been separated by a few months, but the handling of pictorial space is markedly more sophisticated. Bronson's accomplishment in this notably Hoffman-like composition is manifest, though its gentle luminosity suggests a more personal approach.

One can almost read *Untitled [blue, green, orange]* as a detail of *Untitled [still life]* – look particularly at the surface of the table and the area just above – but it is a “detail” that has largely eliminated the Morandian cliché and replaced much of the vagary of the pictorial space in the still life with the beginnings of a more clearly articulated geometry.

It is hardly surprising, however, that her works of the early 1960s were indebted to Abstract Expressionism. As Bruce Guenther observed, “...although Abstract Expressionism was just another style by the late 1950s, it represented a quickening spirit in the air on the West Coast, a new path that gave young artists a footing in avant-garde painting.” By that time, Bronson’s husband, Lee Kelly, was gaining increasing recognition throughout the Northwest for his abstract painting and polychrome sculptures, both of which were well within the idiom of Abstract Expressionism.

However, just a year or so after *Untitled [blue, green, orange]*, she was developing a pictorial language rather more aligned with some of the exemplars of the second-generation New York School but, more important, one articulating concerns that would span her career. Paintings and collages on paper from 1962-63 find the softer cloud-like forms of *Untitled [blue, green, orange]* giving over to a more regulated geometry, such as the dramatic horizontal and vertical banding of *Untitled [gray, black, white]*; note, too, the yellow and black inner “frame” of *Untitled [turquoise, green, blue, yellow]*. The works are still improvisatory, yet there is ample evidence that Bronson was beginning to work in a new formal language.

Some striking color effects still obtain, lyrical bursts of light and shade not dissimilar to Joan Mitchell’s paintings of the late 1950s and early 1960s, notably the yellow triangle and unexpected maroon highlights of *Untitled [green, gray, black, yellow]*. While there are similarities in effect, Bronson became a virtuoso colorist of a different order, coming to prefer a closely-valued palette, relying more on subtle modulations than Mitchell’s exuberant and bold contrasts. Even these early works show a characteristic that remained almost constant throughout Bronson’s work – the exploration of colors, whether vibrant or subdued, within a strictly limited, approaching monochromatic, range. The painting *Untitled [small black]*, despite its modest scale, articulates all of these characteristics.

But as Bronson worked through 1963 on the paintings that would feature in her late winter/early spring 1964 solo debut, the refinement of her palette was secondary to more purely structural concerns, first in the use of collage, and second in large-scale structure.

According to William Rubin, “the essence of collage, then, is the insertion into a given context of an alien entity – not only of a different medium, but of a

different style or, as the Surrealists would later insist, even of a motif drawn from a different context of experience or level of consciousness." At a glance, it might seem that the genteel harmonies of *Untitled [cream]* (1963) are rather at odds with this definition, but I assert that the structure of the painting depends on the possibilities of collage.

There are passages, to be sure, of "pure" brushwork such as the light-grey inverted "L" of the upper right corner. But the surface, particularly the central (vertical) half, is dominated by a dense patchwork of canvas fragments. Sometimes the color and form of the fragments correspond, suggesting a cut-up of other paintings. In most cases, though, the color and directionality of the brushwork remain largely independent of this irregular surface.

Many of the paintings evidence clear large-scale structure, their normative geometry frequently asserting what became her favored compositional device: a quadrated field in which the areas function as discrete structures. This was common in Alfred Leslie's works of the late 1950s. It is not hard to see the rectilinear forms in *Untitled [cream]* (1963), as if built upon a nascent grid. The smoky and crepuscular ambiance of *Untitled [black]* (1963) might superficially appear a different matter, but it too is rectilinear; divided first vertically and then again on the horizontal, presenting an almost perfectly quadrated image.

Leslie's *Quartet #1* (1958) operates similarly, giving the four regions of the painting relatively distinct formal identities. But in Leslie this structuration was often even more explicit, and works such as *Four Panel Big Green* (1957), *Yellow 3rd* (1958), and *Arrivato Zampano* (1959) are strikingly similar to Bronson's. The somewhat later *The Black Line* (1961) is perhaps even more akin to Bronson's work with its complex geometry: the lower half of the canvas is divided into two roughly equal squares, the top half into two horizontal bands, one approximately twice the width of the other.

Richard Kalina has correctly argued that Leslie's practice was less the imposition of a formal redundancy than a defamiliarization, in which the viewer is forced to make "a part-to-part, part-to-whole examination, rather than having the painting swirl away into an easily scanned allover field." This aspect of Bronson's painting was prophetic, and Kalina could almost have been describing Bronson's later work as well. Although she did not codify her use of what she called "modulars" until a decade later, with the commissioning of two large pieces by the upscale retailer Nordstrom, a defining characteristic of her work is its reliance on geometric systems, however idiosyncratic. It is not hard to imagine an artist remaining within an idiom in which one could work with such assurance; indeed, careers have been made on less. But these were, in a sense, Bronson's first and last paintings. Throughout a career tragically abbreviated by her death in 1990,

Bronson was nothing if not mercurial. Following the 1964 exhibition, she changed directions drastically. In conversation with Debra Trione, she recalled the immediacy of these early paintings, but also noted, perhaps ruefully, "I would start with something simple and just start adding things to it and often I would go way too far."

One of the most interesting artifacts of this period is Bronson's earliest surviving sketchbook, begun in 1961 and continued through 1962 and 1963. I believe it goes a long way toward explaining the changes in her work in the early 1960s. *Untitled [sketchbook "A"]* could almost be a grisaille study for *Untitled [blue, green, orange]* but a series of paintings directly on the pages of the sketchbook reveal another aspect of Bronson's developing mastery of the idiom. These brash, predominantly monochromatic, oil on paper works manifest an awareness of Franz Kline, though less perhaps his larger paintings than, in both scale and technique, the distinctive studies executed on the pages of discarded telephone books.

Brushwork in these, particularly "B," "C," "D" and "E," is far different than that of the 1963 paintings. Though, like Kline's large paintings, these show less a Zen spontaneity as something being *constructed*; Irving Sandler is good on this point, quoting the painter distinguishing between "Oriental...infinite space" and his own "painted space, arguing that "calligraphy is writing and I am not writing."

That Bronson apparently valued this sketchbook highly is evidenced by the fact that several of the pages are signed, somewhat unusually for a sketchbook, but particularly so for her, who would increasingly leave even major works unsigned.

And if the densely worked charcoal and graphite *Untitled [study for black sculpture]* suggests anything, it is anticipation of, if not a formal study for, work from Bronson's next series. Look, for example, at the works in the lower studio photograph on page 11. The second work from the right, above the two large black rectangles, bears a striking resemblance to *Untitled [study for black sculpture]* (the same work is directly above Bronson's right shoulder in the exhibition announcement on page 91).

The 1963 paintings showed a young and fluent artist. Surviving works from the next two years suggest both a radical departure and a much more experimental approach. Studio photographs, taken as she was preparing for her second solo exhibition in early 1966, also at Mt. Angel College, reveal a panoply of approaches to constructed metal sculptures, from the overtly painterly manner of *Untitled [blue arc construction]* and *Untitled [large white construction]* (both 1965), the latter of which looks almost as if it might have been excerpted from one of the earlier paintings, to the brutality of *Untitled I*

and II [*small constructions*] (1965). What is conspicuously missing from these photographs is the straightforward painting of the 1964 exhibition, though the photographs here (pp. 10 & 15 appear to show large collage-based works, but it must be remembered here that, startlingly proficient as her painting was, she was hardly departing from common practice. The works from fall and winter of 1965 were clearly something very new.

What interests me particularly is the question of the relation of collage to Cubism. Clement Greenberg famously asserted in his essay on collage that it proposed a major turning point in the evolution of Cubism, and therefore a major turning point in the whole evolution of [M]odernist art in this century." He elsewhere elaborated:

Picasso...solved – or rather destroyed – the problem by raising the collage's affixed material above the picture surface, thus going over into bas-relief. And soon after that he subtracted the picture surface entirely, to let what had been affixed stand free as a construction.

Bronson's metal works of 1965 were an almost literal instantiation of the "going over into bas-relief." Bronson never made Picasso's "subtraction", apart from a handful of collaborations with Kelly, most notably the "sculptural core" of *Rankin House* (1972) and *Leland #1* (1975). She made only one free-standing work in her career and remained oriented, however loosely, to an essentially pictorial space.

An extraordinary series of paintings and collages on paper, believed to date between 1963 and 1965 confirm Bronson's unusual approach. This set of six miniatures, in size hardly larger than index cards, clarify the extent to which she apparently regarded collage as a structural device as much as a material effect. Beth Fagan's profile and review of her 1966 Mt. Angel exhibition confirmed this, at least in general terms (p. 93). It is not so much that each of the elements in these works function as a gesture, but rather function as discrete, one could almost say "completed," compositions. This is evident in the almost perfectly quadrated *Untitled III [small abstract]* (c. 1963-65). The studio photographs of the period show one large collage (top, page 11), which appears to be paper mounted on canvas. The importance of the *Small abstract series* is seen in the close relationship between this large work and *Untitled I* (rotated 90 degrees) and *Untitled II* (the center and left panels).

The collage quality of the metal works is most obvious in *Untitled [corrugated construction]* (1965). The planar structure has at least two discrete layers of corrugated material and two distinct layers of smooth steel, even setting aside the overt 3-dimensionality of the structures in lower center and lower left. And I would even like to suggest that the two small constructions share more than a casual filiation with Picasso's guitars of 1912-1914.

*Untitled [orange construction]* is particularly interesting in this regard. From the top left corner reading down and right, it is conventionally framed as a rectangle and a section of vestigial frame remains along the bottom. The lower left corner is an obvious void. The top element continues across most of the width of the piece, but is substantially obscured by elements above and in front of it. Unlike the quadrature of the paintings, though, *Untitled [orange construction]* proposes a tripartite division of space, the left hand half panel, demarked by the left edge and the long diagonal running toward the lower left corner, and the horizontal split of the right hand half into the upper jumble of tangled fragments and the single smooth curve of the lower. In this, again, it resembles *Untitled I (small abstract)*.

*Untitled [large black construction]* is somewhat of a mystery. Bronson is seen with it in two studio photographs (pp. 7 and 15), but another photograph (lower p. 11) shows two other similarly sized and clearly related works. Neither survive. It is an odd shape, neither precisely rectangular nor precisely trapezoidal, a quality it would seem to have shared with the other two similar works. Despite its sepulchral intensity and commanding presence, it is one of the simpler works of the series. More or less evenly divided down the center, the two halves enact a minor play of convexity and concavity, supporting a central column of burnished arabesques in high relief. It is, in a certain sense, more “painterly” than some of the painted constructions, and is not unrelated to Kelly’s contemporaneous sculptures, which translated the roiling brushwork of his painting into three-dimensions (see *Untitled (sculpture study after Lee Kelly)* and *Untitled [study for black sculpture]* from the *Sketchbook*).

Bronson’s debut on the Portland art scene in the first half of the 1960s brought her as much acclaim as an emerging artist could have expected. I earlier used the term “mercurial” to describe her talents and career: strong language, used advisedly. But deserved – many artists would have been comfortable remaining for some time in the accomplishment of the 1963-64 paintings. Instead, she threw it over for a radically different practice and a wholly new body of work. These early years set a pattern which would characterize the remaining 25 years of her too-short career.

A series of works, sometimes only a handful, rarely more than a dozen, would appear, plainly related to their predecessors in at least some formal properties, albeit proposing some new variations. Yet the new series would differ drastically in palette, materials or technique. Or all three. It was not until the early 1970s that she arrived at the nexus of form, material and palette that most would find the defining characteristics of her “mature” work. But as I have suggested here, many of those concerns began in these early years.

So did the surprises.



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# Paintings

*Untitled (still life)* 1960-61  
Oil on board, 47.75 by 47.5 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson

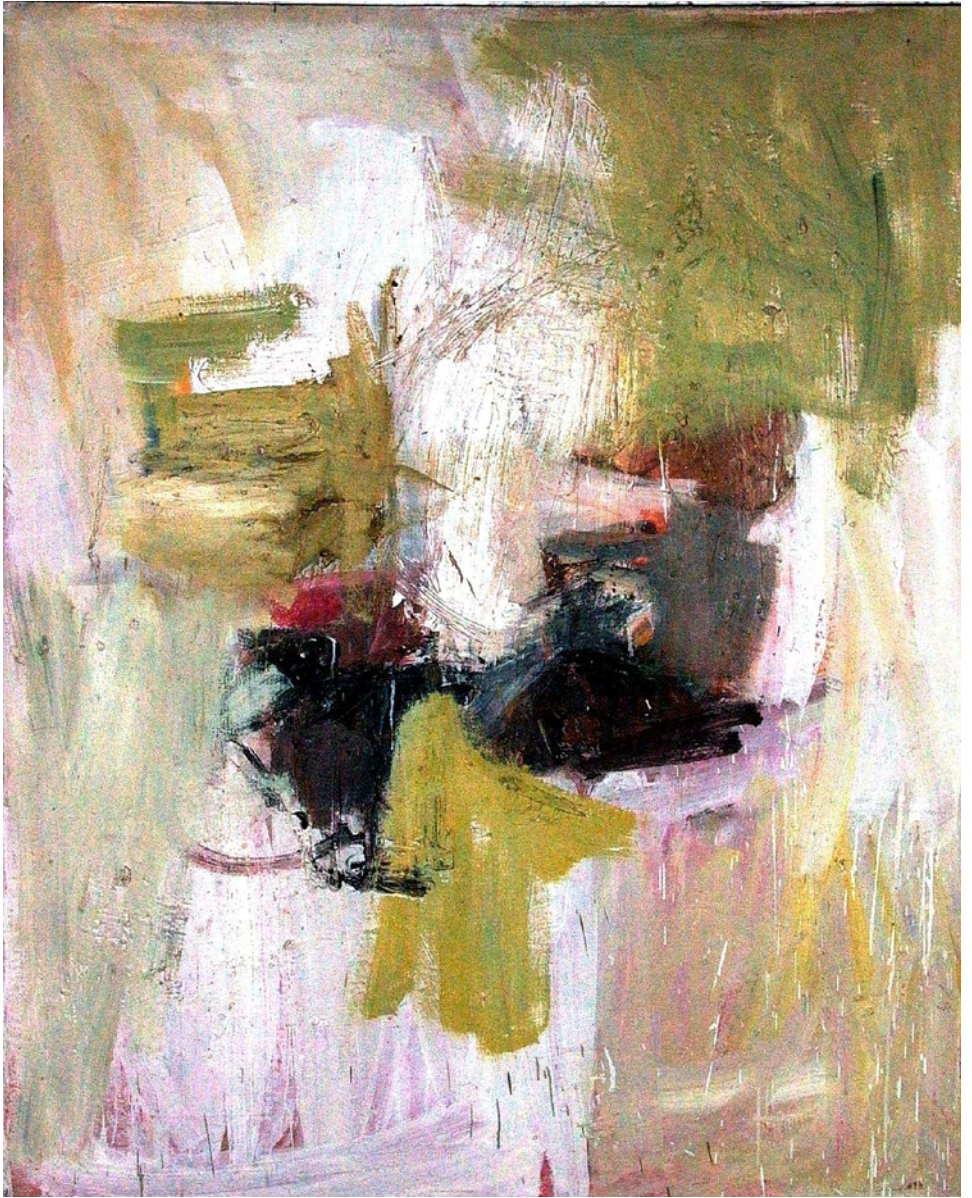


*Untitled [blue, green & orange]* 1961  
Oil on canvas, 31.25 by 31.25 inches  
Collection Susan Hammer



*Untitled [green & cream]* 1963  
Oil on canvas, 60 by 49 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson



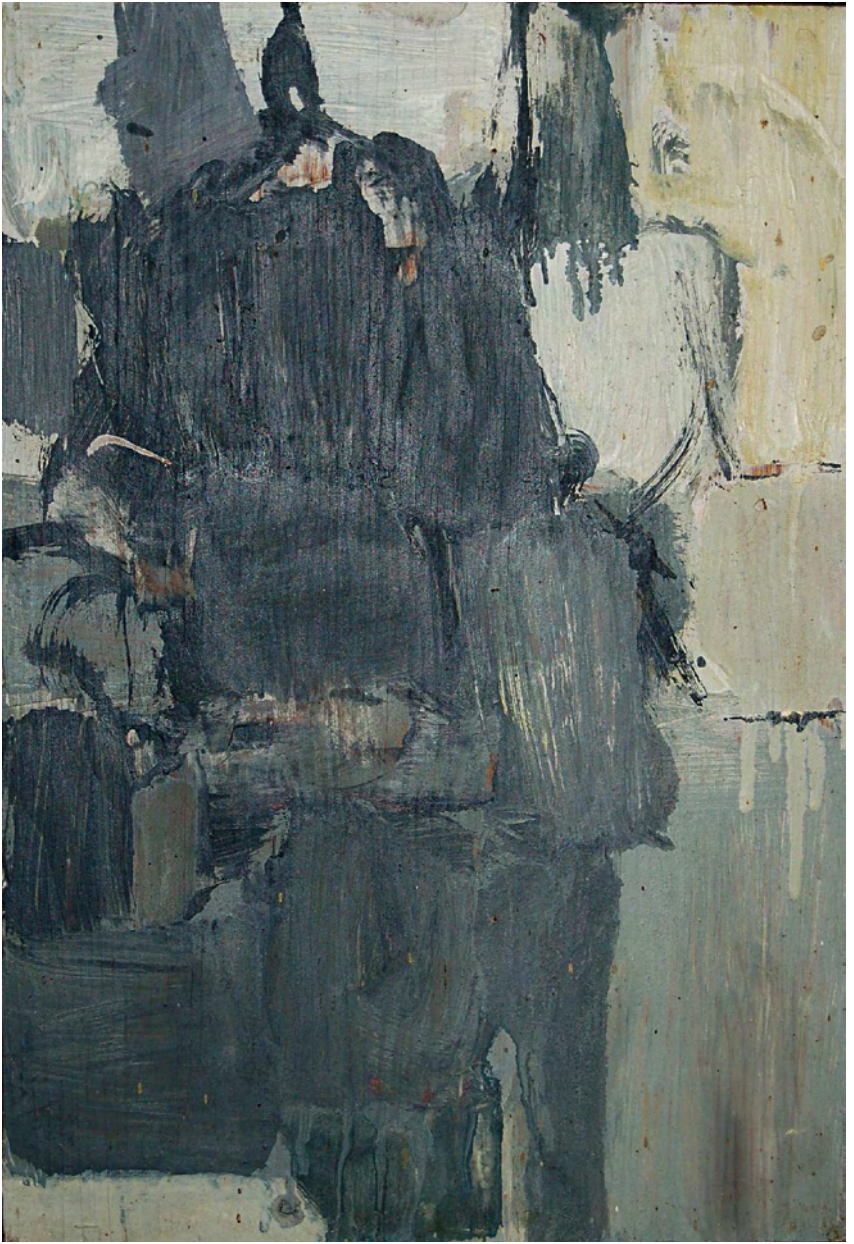


*Untitled [cream, pink & black]* 1963  
Oil on canvas, 69.5 by 56.5 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson



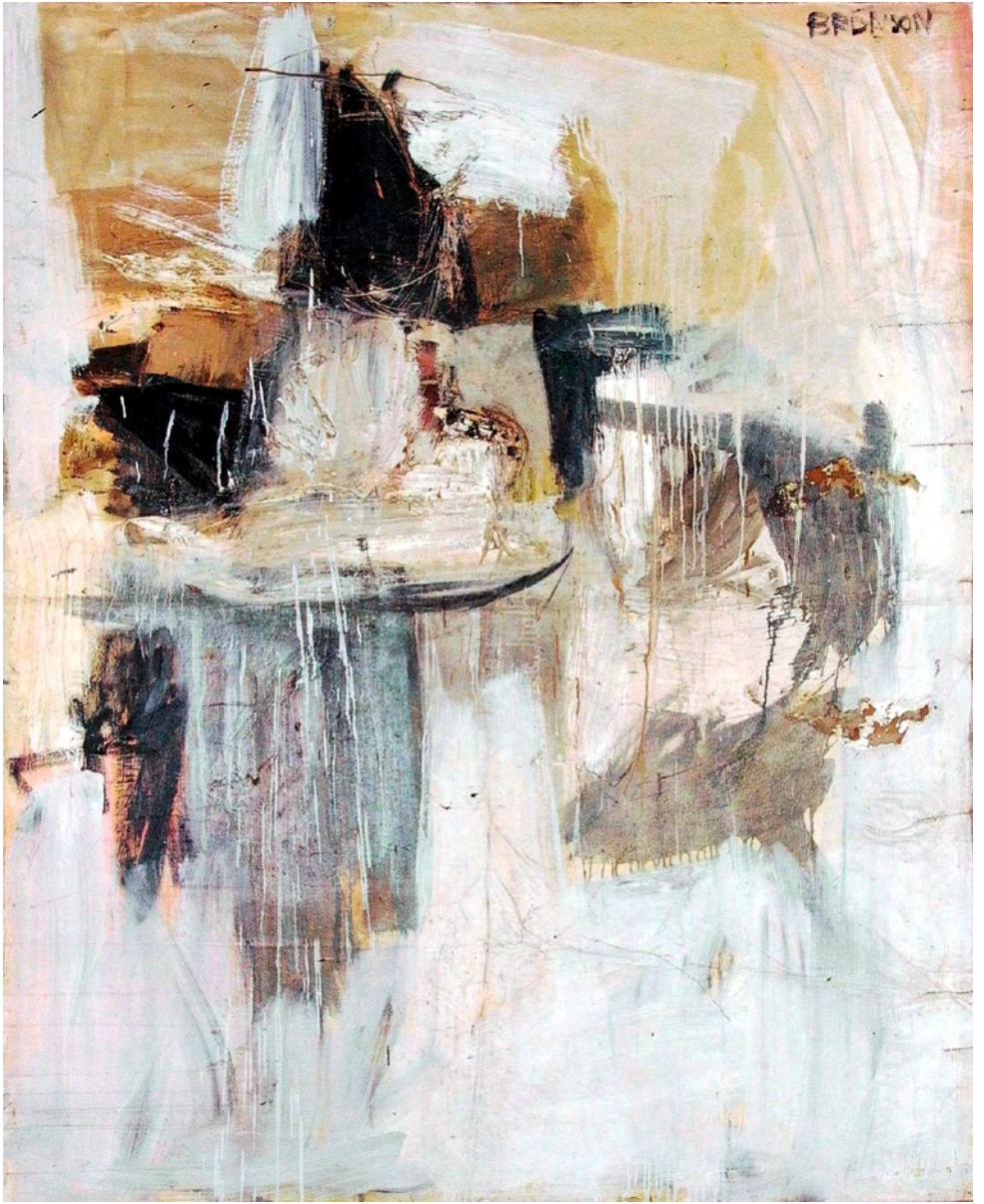


*Untitled (small black)* 1962-63  
Oil on board, 11.75 by 8 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson



*Untitled [gray & tan]* 1963  
Oil on canvas, 60 by 49.5 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson



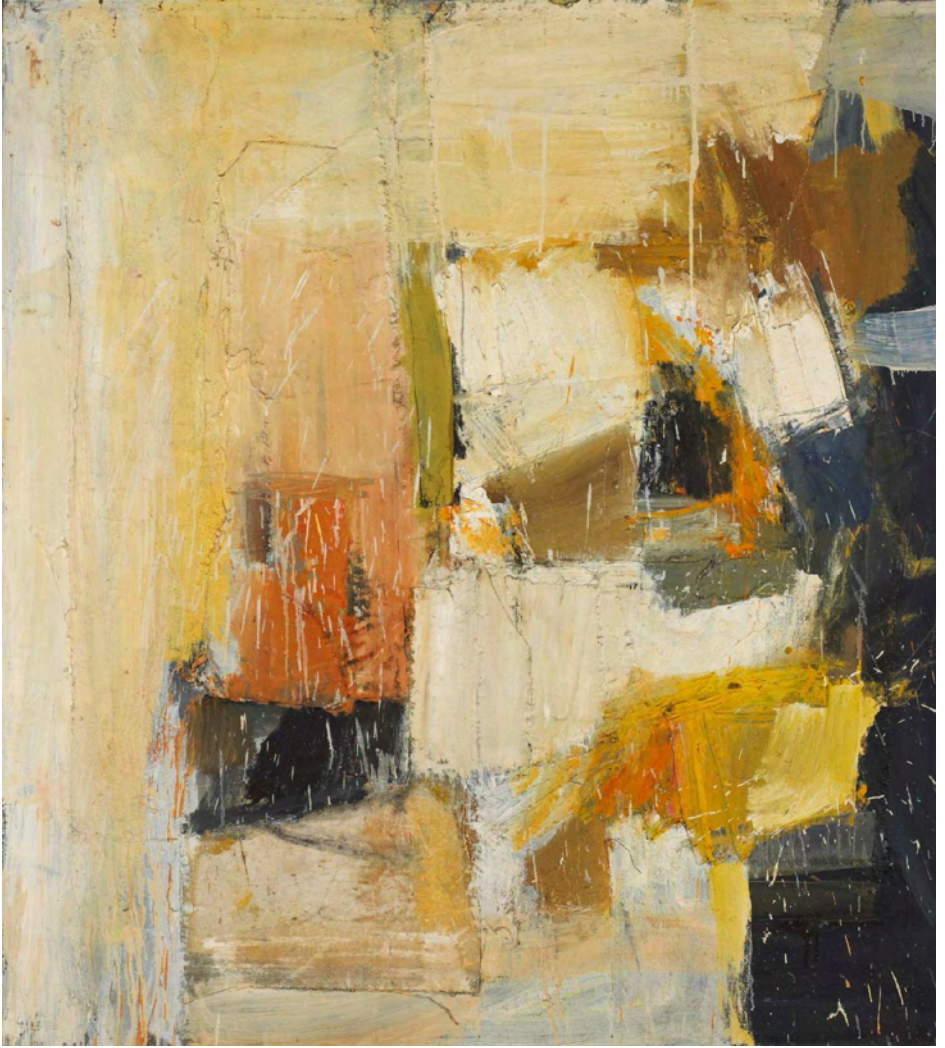


*Untitled [black]* 1963  
Oil on canvas, 62 by 52 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson





*Untitled [cream]* 1963  
Oil & canvas collage on masonite, 48.25 by 47 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson

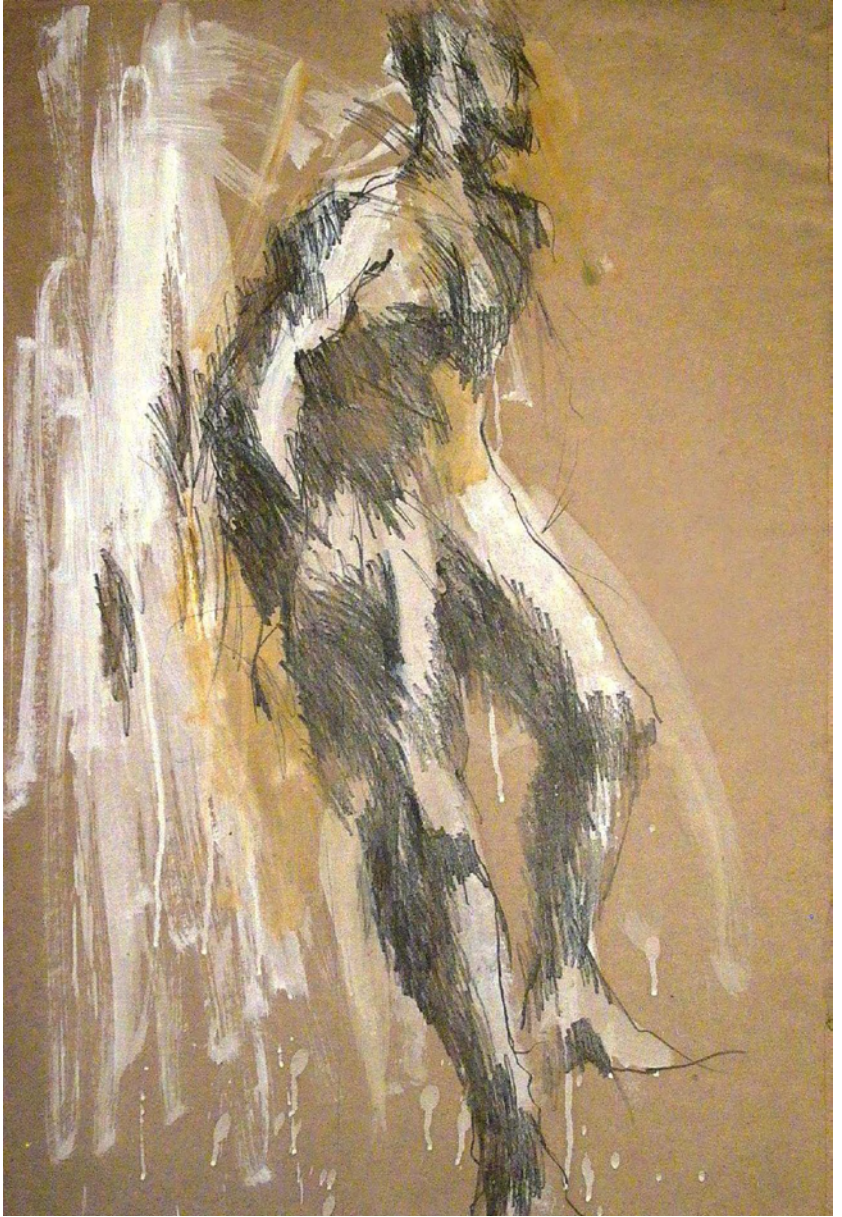




## Paintings on paper

*Untitled [figure study]* c. 1960  
Charcoal, graphite & oil on paper, 34 by 22 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson





*Untitled I [hand-made paper]* c. 1962  
Oil on handmade paper, 14 inches square  
Collection Cheryl Mansfield & John Failor

*Untitled I [hand-made paper]* c. 1962  
Oil on handmade paper, 14 inches square  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson





*Untitled [gray, black, brown]* 1962-63  
Oil on paper, 18 x 24 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson

*Untitled [gray, black, white]* 1962-63  
Oil on paper, 18 x 24 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson



*Untitled [green, gray, black, yellow] 1962-63*  
Oil on paper, 18 by 24 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson

*Untitled [turquoise, gray, black, yellow] 1962-63*  
Oil on paper, 18 by 24 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson







# Constructions

*Untitled [blue arc construction]* 1965  
Painted metal construction, 36 by 30 by 8 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson

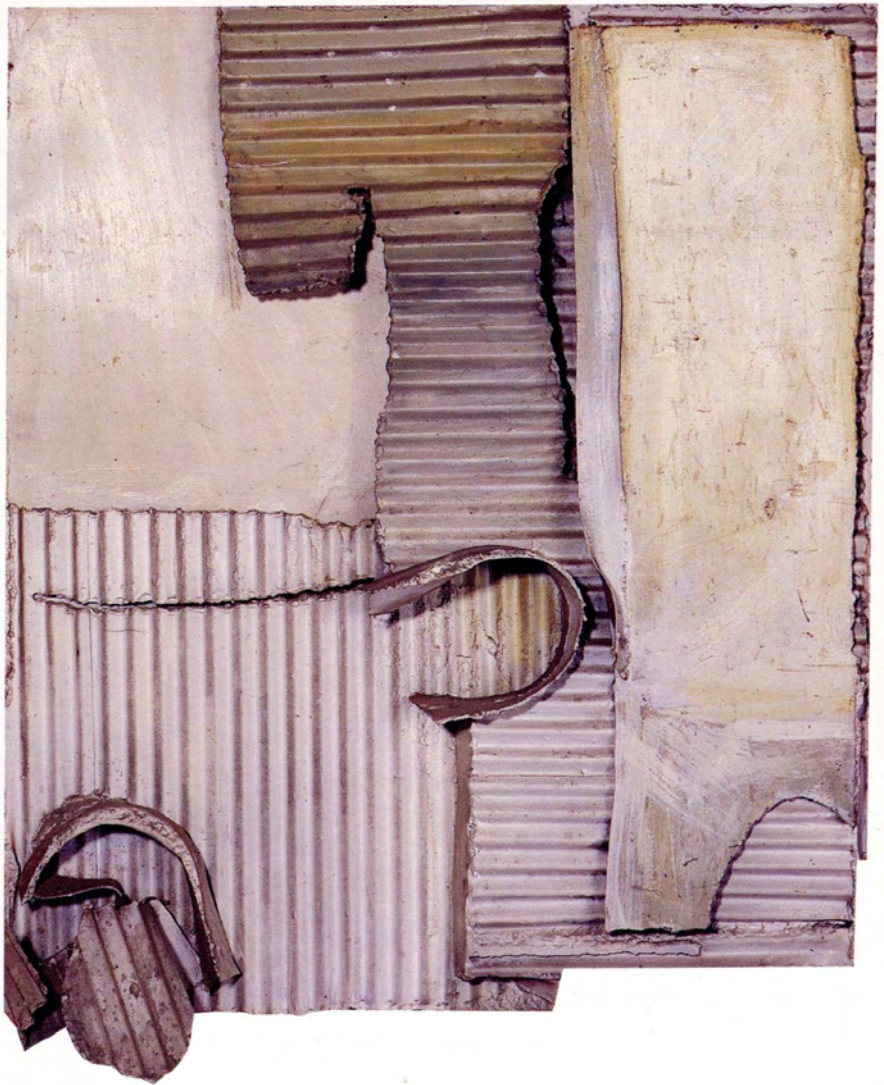




*Untitled [black construction]* 1965  
Painted metal construction, 37 by 37 by 10 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson

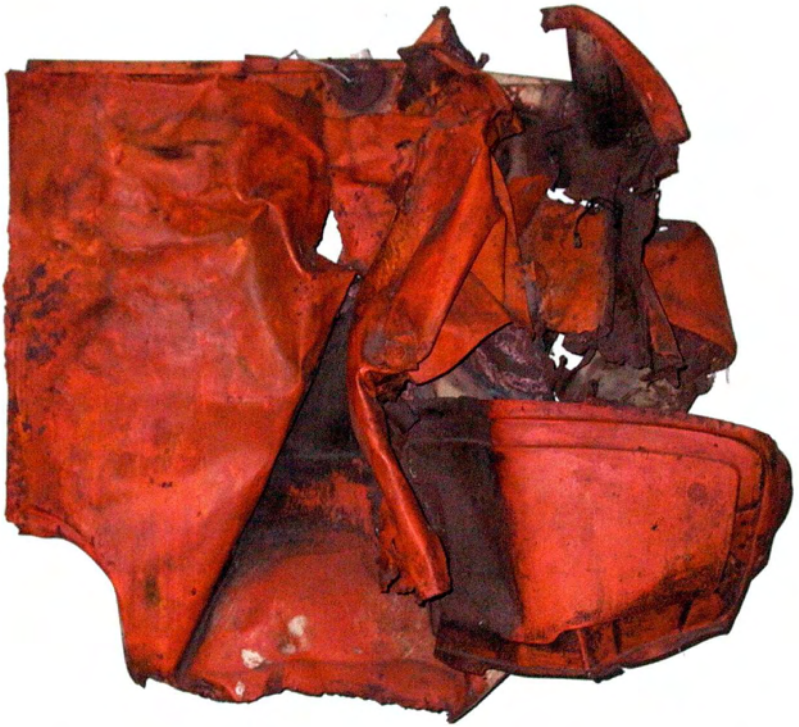


*Untitled (corrugated construction)* 1965  
Unpainted metal collage, 41.5 by 36 inches  
The Shipley Collection



*Untitled [orange construction]* 1965  
Painted metal construction, 27 by 32 by 20 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson





*Untitled [small construction I]* 1965  
Painted metal construction, 22 by 18.5 by 12 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson  
*Untitled [small construction II]* 1965  
Painted metal construction, 21.5 by 13 by 4 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson





*Untitled [large white construction]* 1965  
Painted metal construction, 48 by 40 by 5 inches  
Collection Portland Art Museum



*Untitled [blue construction]* 1965  
Painted metal construction, 33 by 23.5 by 9 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson



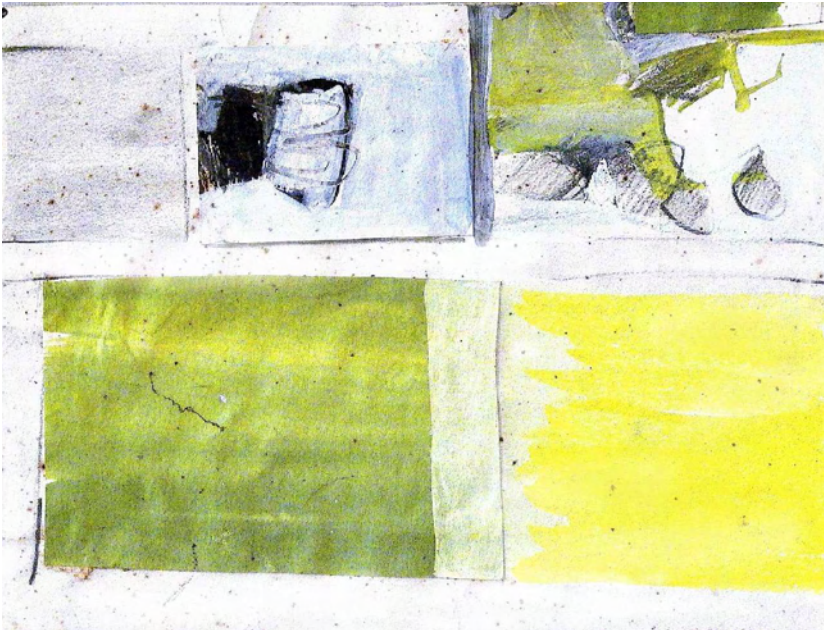
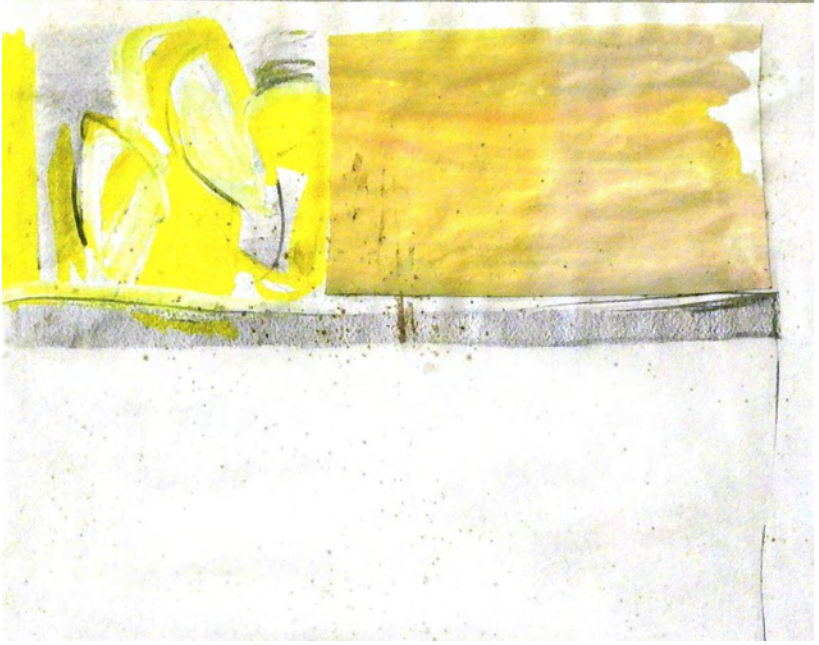


# Collages

*Untitled I [small abstract]* c. 1963-65  
Mixed media on cut paper, 4.75 by 5.75 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson

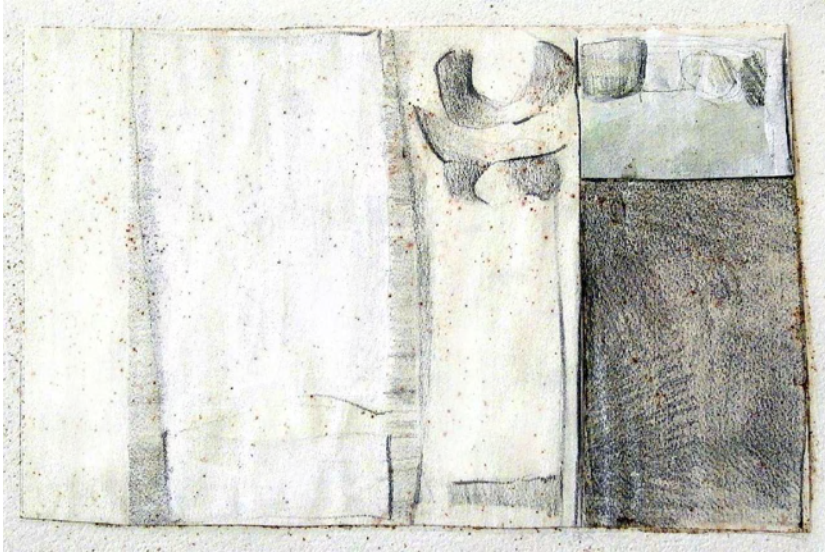
*Untitled III [small abstract]* c. 1963-65  
Mixed media on cut paper, 4.625 by 6 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson





*Untitled II [small abstract]* c. 1963-65  
Mixed media on cut paper, 4 by 6 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson

*Untitled IV [small abstract]* c. 1963-65  
Mixed media on cut paper, 5 by 6 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson



*Untitled V [small abstract]* c. 1963-65  
Mixed media on cut paper, 8.25 by 6 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson







# Sketchbook

*Untitled [sketchbook "B"]* c. 1962-63

Ink on paper, 14 by 11 inches

Estate of Bonnie Bronson

*Untitled [sketchbook "A"]* c. 1962-63

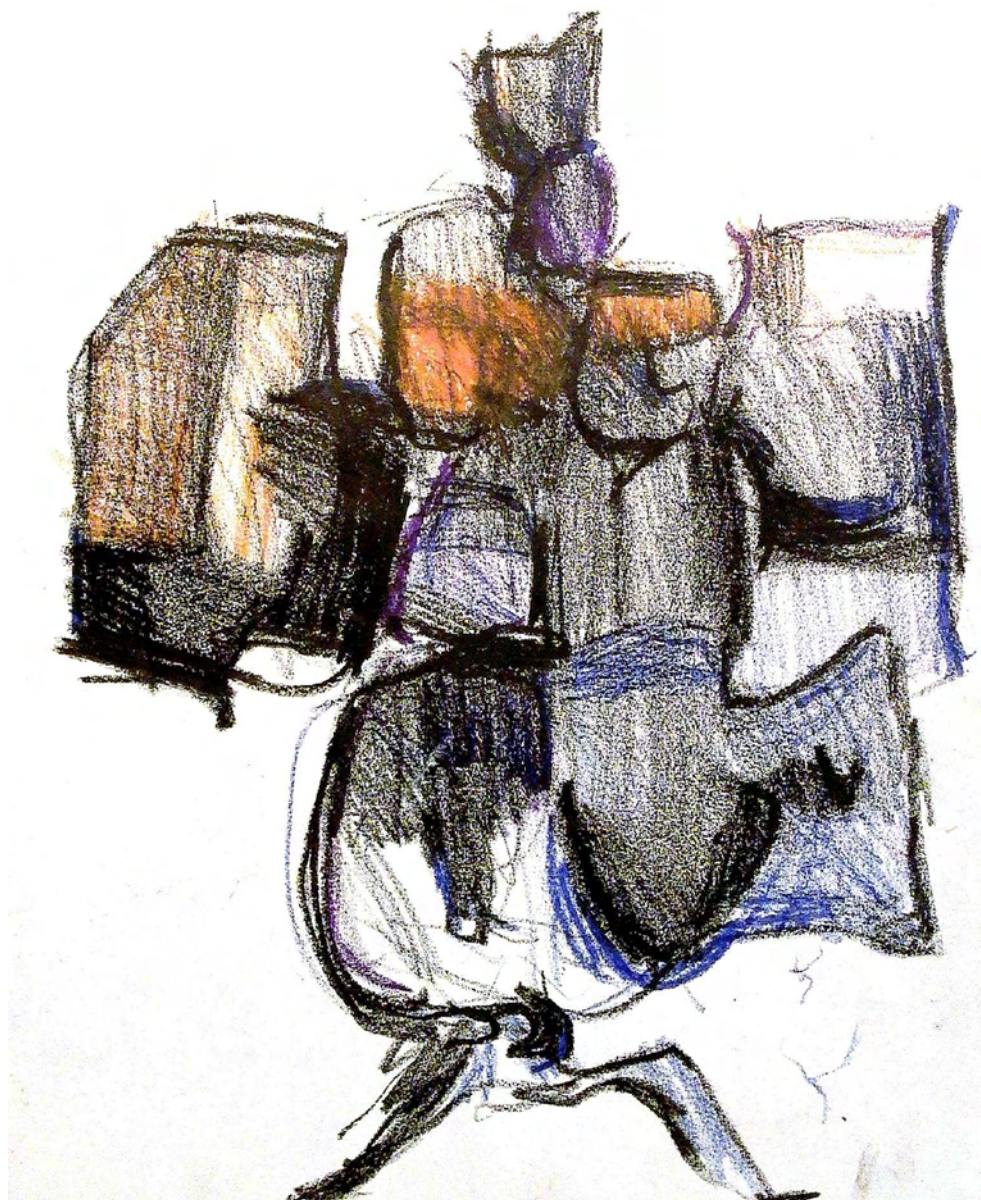
Graphite & crayon on paper, 14 x 11 inches

Estate of Bonnie Bronson





*Untitled [sculpture study after Lee Kelly] 1963*  
Colored pencil & crayon on paper, 14 by 11 inches  
Collection Lee Kelly



*Untitled [sketchbook "E"]* c. 1962-63  
Ink & crayon on paper, 14 by 11 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson





DROMON

*Untitled [sketchbook "F"]* c. 1962-63  
Ink & crayon on paper, 14 by 11 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson



BRUNSON

*Untitled [sketchbook "D"]* c. 1962-63  
Ink on paper, 14 by 11 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson  
*Untitled [sketchbook "C"]* c. 1962-63  
Ink on paper, 14 by 11 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson





*Untitled [study for sculpture] c. 1963-65*  
Graphite & crayon on paper, 14 by 11 inches  
Estate of Bonnie Bronson



Exhibition announcement for Bonnie Bronson  
one-person exhibition at Mt. Angel College,  
Mt. Angel, Oregon, February/March 1966.

# BONNIE BRONSON

An exhibition of the recent work of Bonnie Bronson will begin February 13, continuing through March 13, 1966, in the Mt. Angel College Gallery.

Gallery hours are 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily.

There will be a reception on Sunday, February 20, from 2-4 p.m.

# MT. ANGEL COLLEGE



Beth Fagan, "Artist's New Work at Mt. Angel,"  
*The Sunday Oregonian*, 20 February 1966

This article is one of the most detailed contemporary accounts of Bonnie Bronson's working methods at the time. It was originally accompanied by the photograph reproduced here on page 15.

# Artist's New Work At Mt. Angel

By BETH FAGAN

Staff Writer, The Oregonian

Seeing the one-man exhibition of recent work by Bonnie Bronson in Hall Gallery at Mt. Angel College, where a 2-4 p.m. public reception this Sunday will honor the artist, may surprise some people familiar with her painting.

Some undoubtedly will anticipate a whole gallery of canvases with beautiful, fresh color and brushwork given a serene, rather litting dynamism.

Young as the 26-year-old artist is, the spirited quality of her oil paintings on canvases already had become identifiable to many, despite relatively few opportunities to see her work.

Such opportunities had been provided at the juried Portland Art Museum annual in '63, the juried annual at Seattle Art Museum in '61, where she was awarded an honorable mention, group shows and a one-man show at Mt. Angel in '62.

Though certain qualities inherent in her paintings remain in her recent work now being shown at Mt. Angel, some will probably feel the show as a whole is like taking a hurdle from the familiar to the less-familiar.

And it is essentially what the artist herself has done.

The change can be traced to fresh explorations.

One began with her discovery of collage as a medium new to her work about three years ago.

The other originated in her feeling that work must evolve from previous work and that she had reached an impasse in painting on canvas.

From collage paintings with paper, she began introducing stronger edges and relief forms to the surface by tacking on metal shapes cut with a welding torch.

And spurred by having learned welding, then having helped her sculptor husband Lee Kelly with "miles of welding" required on a large reredos screen he had been commissioned to do for a church, she found herself working with "canvases" of steel.

And thus, the artist feels, *the freedom with which she can work has been enlarged.*

As opposed to the ready-made rectangular shape and quality of the canvas surface, she evolves a painting not only with paint itself, but from cutting, welding and constructing steel forms to work with the paint.

Collage-like layered forms play a role in some, structurally bringing cut steel edges and depth into the work.

In others, notably in one of the major works of the show, fluid curving relief forms counterpoint rectilinear, textured line within forms constructed to give the surface even further dimension.

In this major work, sober yet richly alive in coloring, color has come through oxidizing the steel, eliminating reflective qualities on it, and combining it with nickel silver.

In other works, elements which have come into the paintings through construction of forms to be painted include textured edges, dimension of forms behind as well as forward of the main surface, textured verticals arrived at with welding, the slightly convex quality achieved by pounding the surface out, and the quality given paint by steel rather than canvas.

In the work, she has also become concerned with doing individual works that can work either alone, contained, or with others in groupings.

Notable among these are two constructed rectangular steel forms installed side by side—one a luminous work predominantly of blue and white with her characteristically beautiful brushwork—the other somber black.

And still another, indicative of this approach, and a work still in progress, are two vertical black rectilinear steel shapes—a wider one with unbroken surface, the narrow one enriched with dimensional form and texture.

Though not apparently created to work together, though they do despite their independence, there is also a trio of relief paintings done as spontaneously as drawings, each framed within a white box.

And the drawings, many in color, and many with line playing a part, are not to be missed in this show. Rather than being preliminary drawings to other works in the show, most followed the individual paintings in metal.





## **Bonnie Bronson**

One of Portland's best known artists in the 1970s and 1980s, Bonnie Bronson (1940-1990) was recognized for her signature enameled steel relief sculptures and her collaborations on public art projects with husband, Lee Kelly. Her career lasted from 1964 to 1990, when she died in a mountaineering accident on Mt. Adams.

A Portland native, she attended the University of Kansas and the University of Oregon, before settling at the Portland Art Museum School (now PNCA) in 1959-61. She married sculptor Lee Kelly in 1961, living and working in the Portland area, primarily at their studio farm, Leland Iron Works, outside Oregon City.

Her work was shown in Portland and throughout the Pacific Northwest at, among others, Blackfish Gallery, the Fountain Gallery, the Art Gym at Marylhurst College and the Elizabeth Leach Gallery. Her work was the subject of solo exhibition at the Portland Art Museum in 1979 and a posthumous retrospective there in 1993. In the fall of 2011, her work was the subject of a major retrospective exhibition, *Bonnie Bronson: Works 1960–1990* at the Pacific Northwest College of Art and *Bonnie Bronson: The Early Years*, a selection of paintings and sculpture from the 1960's, at Elizabeth Leach Gallery.

For more information about the life and work of Bonnie Bronson:  
[www.bonniebronsonart.com](http://www.bonniebronsonart.com) (<http://www.bonniebronsonart.com>)





