

# MARIETTA PATRICIA LEIS

## Biography:

From a young age art has been a way for me to express myself. Whether it was dancing, acting, or visual art it was a safe container for my feelings. The arts have given me license to explore my avid curiosity and to follow the multidimensional path that has informed and seasoned my life and current studio practice.

I grew up in East Orange, New Jersey, a Big Apple commuter city. My extended Italian family provided the rich though chaotic background of my childhood with original art, a library of books and opera on the radio. My grandmother gave me the rich sensual memories that I cherish in my life and work to this day. I still vividly recall her gardens of intense colors, the smells of her kitchen and the grace and details of her home.

From the age of seven I studied ballet with a passion. Looking back I recognize that my classes were the seed for the discipline that has served me ever since. The repetitive barre exercises that I performed each day for self-improvement gave me a deep understanding of the value of hard work. I witnessed in wonder George Balanchine's elegant choreography for the NY City Ballet Company—with its clean lines and spare movement—forging my admiration for the minimal aesthetic.

While in high school I worked as an actress and dancer in summer stock repertory companies. I soon boarded the commuter bus one last time and moved to New York City and began a bohemian life. New York City was in many ways my wise and colorful teacher and mentor. I studied dance and method acting, went to the Met Museum almost every day, painted, auditioned, worked at a myriad of temporary jobs while simultaneously landing work as an actress and dancer Off-Broadway and in experimental film, television and movies. I played the student in Ionesco's *The Lesson* while my paintings exhibited in East Village galleries. And then there were all those mandatory coffee house discussions on 'the meaning of life.'

Acting opportunities, a need for sunshine, the chance to explore the new and unfamiliar and break traditions and molds precipitated my move to Los Angeles. Many of my friends there were steeped in the performing arts, but the lure of performing was becoming less attractive to me. Looking inward, being quiet and working alone were becoming more meaningful objectives and I began to focus and define myself solely as a visual artist.

In 1982 I moved to New Mexico to pursue an MFA degree in studio art at the University of New Mexico while actively continuing to engage in my art career. Not surprisingly, this juggling act was an extraordinarily busy time for me so it's no wonder that my oil paintings during this period were fragments of real and imaginary elements incorporated into abstract landscapes. Drawings, constructions and altered photographs also became an integral part of my vocabulary as well as public art projects. When I completed my degree I taught art for 10 years in Albuquerque which has continued to be my home, providing me with the right mix of solitude, stimulus and nature.

In 2001 a very deliberate decision to simplify my life coincided with an Artist in Residence experience at Crater Lake, OR. There I awoke each day to see the deepest, bluest lake in North America with its stillness and quietness. It brought to mind my profound experience of Maya Lin's Viet Nam Memorial where I felt I became part of the sculpture as I descended down its walkway. Crater Lake helped me to understand viscerally how to make paintings that would dissolve the boundaries between the viewer and the painting so that people could "enter" my work. It is antithetical in our everyday life to slow down, but I am committed to this process in creating my art. My paintings have since grown progressively reductive and more monochromatic as I pare down the concerns in my work to their essence.

Restraint is a key factor in my work as I include only what is essential for the optimal taste and visual experience. I love Jane Austen's characters in this regard, who speak and behave with civility while carefully measuring how much and what they say and do—the admirable and welcomed opposite of "spilling our guts."

Capturing the colors of 'place' is a pivotal focus of my work. As I travel I see how the colors of an environment impact people, their worldview and entire cultures. A single hue—a monochromatic painting—can elicit a lot of feelings. A powerful influence in my own life; the reds of my grandmother's roses, the intense blue skies of sunny New Mexico where I live, taking in the mysterious grays of Scotland or the vibrant greens of Thailand, etc...these shades all find expression in my art.

Traveling and frequently immersing myself in different locations deepens my concern and love of our Earth, all of which substantially informs my work. I worry about our incredible blue and green planet's survival. The expression of these concerns frequently expands my work to installations that include other mediums such as woodcut, painting, video, photography, sculpture, drawing and poetry. I want to reach people by repeating my theme over and over appealing to their different learning styles.

It is gratifying that such a large part of my life has been devoted to a practice that teaches and informs me every day. My work continues not to be about the reality before me but rather about what my experience of that reality is. I like that I don't know all the answers but that I keep asking the questions. My work is an endless resource and gift for which I am grateful.