

Marietta Patricia Leis

When artist Marietta Patricia Leis was a little girl in East Orange, New Jersey, she would stay with her Italian grandmother Ermalinda. Originally from Teora, Italy, Ermalinda had a beautiful garden in New Jersey (aka The Garden State) where she would take little Marietta to help pick flowers.



Grandmother Ermalinda.

Leis's memories of her grandmother's vibrant, colorful garden remain vivid to this day. "She would allow me to follow her into the garden and hold the basket while she picked the flowers and talked to me. All these incredibly beautiful flowers of every color. She would carefully choose what flowers would go with each other. Then she would arrange the flowers by colors, commenting on them, and smelling them. She did that with food as well. She would allow me in the kitchen. It was a romance."

Today when this celebrated contemporary artist works, she recalls the colors, smells and tactile experience of being with her grandmother.

"That is a huge influence in my life and in my work," she states. "My esthetic vision and love for color definitely came from her."

Leis is renowned for showing us how to appreciate color and its effects on us. She creates seemingly monochromatic paintings on architectural structures that recede to the wall to give the paintings the appearance of floating. Shadows created on the wall are deliberate and part of the staging that directs the eye and the attention to the pure color of the painting itself.

Sometimes she creates a series of paintings of what look like the same color. On closer inspection, the viewer finds different depths and shades, colors and intensities of color. Her works are multi-dimensional in this way because her premise is that colors are our visual references to places we have been, so emotions and moods are tied to different colors.

This goes for real life colors too. In New Mexico the unfiltered light creates a sky of brighter than average blue that Leis says acts like a tonic on everyone.

"It really does help to elevate us, it's a feeling of moving toward the

heavens," she says. "We have so much blue sky, it hydrates us in some way." Not unlike the colors of Grandmother Ermalinda's garden and their lasting effect on this intriguing artist.

While primarily a painter, Leis also works in mixed media, sculpture, drawing, photography and videography. Born in Newark, she lives in Albuquerque and exhibits extensively in the U.S. and overseas. She has a studio in Nob Hill where she offers tours by appointment.

—Author of the award-winning *"Tradiciones Nuevomexicanas: Hispano Arts and Culture of New Mexico"* (UNM Press), Mary Montañó has written for a variety of regional and national publications.



Leis's abstract color fields blur the edges between wall and artwork.