

Relationships

To Toni, with Love

The sound of color, the lyric of line, what better words can be written to describe the flow of works on paper, canvas, and cloth that Toni Tully (1939-2010) gave to art, even as she shared her exuberance, her sense of caring, and above all her love for living with not only her family and friends but also those artists who were so intrinsically part of her “relationships.”

With this exhibition, Space One Eleven honors Toni Tully as well as works by her daughter, Rebecca Tully Fulmer, along with Sara Garden Armstrong, Catherine Cabaniss, Carol Cooper, Carolyn Goldsmith, Beverly Erdreich, Scott Fuller, Betty Kent (deceased), Scott Stephens, Cumbee Tyndal, Ellen de Mello Weiland (deceased), and Maralyn Wilson.

Playing with fabric scraps from her mothers’ sewing and pencils and paints from her father’s advertising agency, early on Toni could make something from nothing. Beginning with abstract paintings, her gestures on firm surfaces morphed into soft swirls on textiles. To expand upon her training and acquired knowledge of painting, Toni began attending conferences on textile arts, especially those that concentrated on the processes similar to those used for centuries by Japanese artists. In addition, she studied the designs of Poiret and Fortuny, the writings of Proust, and the paintings of Whistler to specifically look at their focus on clothing as art.

Relationships presents an overall look at her oeuvre, responding to the 2003 SOE presentation “Color into Cloth” that represented Tully’s continuing exploration of techniques, materials, and equipment in the making of textile art. While still pursuing “easel art,” she also began painting on silk, inspired by her time spent with three Japanese artists, Junich Arai, a developer of new polyester fibers, Yoshiko Wade, an international Shibori artist advocating ancient Japanese tradition, and Sato Pollack, a master of printing on polyester using a heat sublimation process. Working in her downtown loft studio with enough light and space to manage voluminous fabric, she turned to polyester and this new process, transferring to the fabric her mixed dyes painted onto paper, using a high heat press, and then using heat to melt the polyester fibers, creating permanent pleats and shapes that resonated within this surround of color and line. **This exhibition of her works in all its mediums exudes that same glow of Toni’s essence embedded within them.**

In addition, Relationships presents some of the work of the artists who were close to Toni, starting to paint during a time in Birmingham and some of the surrounding southeast when contemporary art was poorly understood, outside the mainstream and largely dismissed. Enhancing the exhibition are words from these artists who were asked to complete the sentence “I remember when we . . . “

I remember when we . . .

I remember when Toni, Maralyn Wilson, and I went to New York City together in the mid 1970's with Toni as our planner and leader! It was a very special time for the three of us, a first trip to New York for Maralyn and me, staying at the Stanhope Hotel across from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and that first taste of New York City making such a huge impression on me – wanting to live here, just not knowing how.

Sara Garden Armstrong

I remember when Bill and I were with Toni and Albert on several trips with the Collector's Circle for Contemporary Art, a support group of the Birmingham Museum of Art, and how we enjoyed looking at art with them, enjoying meals, and laughing a lot."

Catherine Cabaniss

I remember when where ever we went, Toni always knew someone. She had a remarkable way with all people, and her charisma and genuine interest made her a friend to so many.

Carol Cooper

I remember when we shared a studio on 2nd Ave. North in the mid eighties. There was no heat and we had to go up a flight of stairs to get water. Of course we could not go to our studios after dark or on the weekends, but we had all the space in the world and could not have been happier had we been in a loft in NYC. I had recently come to Birmingham and knew no one in the "art scene". Toni, on the other hand, knew everyone and there was a steady stream of her friends and colleagues coming to visit. She introduced me to everyone and we all had many lively discussions. I'm not sure we solved all the problems of the world and the art world, but we had a delightful time trying.

Carolyn Goldsmith

I remember when I first was introduced to Toni, shortly after Stanley and I married and I moved to Birmingham in the 60's. She was so beautiful and so delightfully feminine; it was hard to realize how smart she was! We were both eager to learn more about art, meet artists, and become involved in the local art community, never dawning on us that there were opportunities for artists *beyond* Birmingham! As the years went by we became closer, sharing philosophies about art, information on materials and techniques, sources, etc. Toni was always two steps ahead of everyone else, inquisitive, full of adventure, with a soul filled with beauty. Our friendship enlarged into knowing her family and loving Albert and their kids as well. One of the most memorable moments we shared was attending an encaustic workshop in Kingston, NY, spending four days together trying to meet the new challenge of the medium and the

unusual mix of people in the class. We laughed our way through and managed to learn something along the way. Toni was the most generous artist in Birmingham. No one ever came to her whom she did not graciously help, with no effect too large if she believed in the cause. She once did the sets for a local production and afterwards allowed them to cut up the canvases and sell it by the inch for a fundraiser! No box was large enough to suppress her creative mind.

Beverly Erdreich

I remember when Toni and I agreed to co-chair the annual Art Auction for the Birmingham Art Association in 1980. The event was held outside (for the first and only time) in the courtyard of (what was then called) the Brookwood Metroplex (above what will soon be a Target). Since it took place 30+ years ago, specifics about the event are a bit vague ... BUT I don't think it rained. What I DO remember about Toni were the great conversations ... on all kinds of subjects ... that would take place about 20 years later, when she would call requesting help with her Mac. As today, I was working at that point primarily as a graphic designer, and Toni was interested in using the latest technology with regards to printing to silk, but she and her computer didn't see "eye-to-eye" ... and she would call to see if I might be able to figure out what was going on. I will always remember her as a great lady ... a great artist ... and a dear friend.

Scott Fuller

"I remember when Mamma and Toni traveled to New York on fabulous art trips, and they were roommates She said "You never know someone until you travel with them." Fun memories were made and discussed for years to come. I remember that on one of the trips to New York Mamma had her wallet stolen and Toni had to give her some money until she could get some; this is where she got the idea to make the purses that were so wonderful! She wanted to reveal all that could be found in a woman's purse!

Katherine deBuys, Betty Kent's daughter

I remember when we saw each other at an art opening in 2000, catching-up on our recent art activities. Toni mentioned she had been to several fabric arts workshops, but none in Alabama . . . that there didn't seem to be much opportunity for fabric work in the state. I told her the University of Montevallo had just received a gift of a professional fabric studio from alumnae Betty Grisham of Huntsville. That night Toni agreed to teach fabric painting for us, and that is how many students and I learned from Toni her craft and art.

Scott Stephens

I remember when I first met Toni Tully in the mid-80s when I was working at the Birmingham Museum of Art and the Maralyn Wilson Gallery. After three years in Birmingham, I decided to pursue graduate studies in Art Criticism at the State University of New York in Stony Brook, Long Island. With an award from the Alabama State Council grant via Space One Eleven to curate and present a series of lectures in the gallery based upon my graduate work, Toni offered to let me

stay over the summer in her downtown studio. It was then that I saw her easels, which were literally benches that ran the full course of the loft with gutters attached to their outer edge, devised to allow the large quantities of fluid created by Tully's layers of painted glazes to drain off the easel. This process is also what produced Toni's signature color transparencies. I am forever indebted to her sense of openness—in her approach to her work, in her method, and in her genuine support of artists throughout our community. Toni's process-based approach is apparent in my current painting, pairing a geometric substructure with layers of poured paint and mineral spirits, allowing the paint to be itself in large passages. This chaos of splatter, the paint's independence, is braced by the grid and by areas of controlled painting, realizing, as she did, the joy in the dialogue created by employing both methods.

Cumbee Tyndal

I remember when they were best girlfriends, oblivious of the generation that separated them in age, not attitude

Wendy Weiland Burns, daughter of Ellen de Mello Weiland

I remember when Toni and I participated at our first outdoor show at the Botanical Gardens, the predecessor to the Magic City Art Connection. Totally different but so much fun. The spaces were on a first come basis, so everyone lined up in their cars at the entrance to the gardens and spent the night! All night you would go from car to car visiting. No one had a tent or fancy walls to hang artwork on, so we would go to the cemetery to get used flower easels on which to display our paintings. We were young and energetic and could do anything!

Maralyn Wilson