

### Jennifer Bartlett (b. 1941)

Jennifer Bartlett became one of the most well-known artists of the 1970s and '80s when her enormous painting, *Rhapsody* (1975–76), was shown in a New York gallery. *Rhapsody* comprises 987 twelve-inch-square enamel plates that Bartlett specially prepared to look like graph paper. When installed as a grid, the plates cover more than one hundred-fifty feet of wall. *Rhapsody's* visual references to diverse nineteenth- and twentieth-century art historical styles, such as Impressionism, Expressionism, Abstraction, Pop Art, Minimalism, and Conceptualism, surprised and intrigued viewers—as did the work's grand scale.

Bartlett studied art at Mills College in Oakland, California, and at the Yale School of Art and Architecture, where she met other artists who, like her, developed styles that were independent of Minimalism, which was predominant at the time.

Early in her career, in the late 1960s, Bartlett decided to limit her materials and process for the next few years by painting only on steel plates and the graph-paper grid. She also followed strict rules for each work, using only dots of paint within the squares. The resulting works proved unpredictable and sometimes playful. After several years of painting in this style, she created *Rhapsody*, which broke many of her own rules—it was lushly painted and included recognizable objects. It set a direction for her new work.

In years following *Rhapsody*, Bartlett continued to paint using the grid on steel plates for which she had become known. She also worked with oil on canvas, printmaking, and sculpture. In her subject matter, she explored both abstraction and representation; some of her works portray houses, gardens, and water, while others are created solely of colorful dots painted on top of a grid.

In her most recent work, Bartlett incorporates text to create “word paintings,” in which she includes words and phrases on her signature steel plates. She builds up the words with multi-colored dots, making them hard to read. But once deciphered, the texts are personal, poetic, and witty.

#### Selected Bibliography

Katz, Vincent. “Bartlett Shows Her Colors.” *Art in America*, January 2007, 106–111.

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