

## Art That Heals: Bonnie Ramsbottom

by Jacqueline Kennard

The artistic journey of Bonnie Ramsbottom is one of both tragedy and triumph: she came to art late in life literally by accident when she began painting as a means to recover from the removal of a brain tumor, the surgery of which she was not expected to survive. Fifteen years later, the artist is not only alive but thriving—and is a firm believer in the healing power of creativity.



**Tuscan Farm**  
2003, oil,  
36 x 48.  
Collection  
Jacqueline  
and Stephen  
Kennard.

It has been said that true art takes note not merely of form but also what lies behind. This sentiment insightfully portrays the work and life of Georgia artist Bonnie Ramsbottom, an award-winning painter whose incredible journey to discovering the artist within is not only about beating the odds but is also an inspiration to all of us who wish to live authentic, creative lives.

Passionate art and antiques collectors, my husband and I have amassed a considerable collection of French and Italian pieces over the years, some dating back to the 15th century. But finding contemporary art that can stand among such masterpieces, particularly those imbued with great meaning, has invariably been a challenge.

The moment I laid eyes upon Bonnie Ramsbottom's **Poppies in the Chianti** at an gallery exhibition, however, I was flooded with the emotions that I often experience when discovering a fine European collectible. I felt a connection to this painting—it had a story, it had poignancy. I was impressed with the technical foundation of the painting, which was based on classical elements of design, but was most moved by the way the work transcended both time and place to convey incredible emotion.



**Poppies in the Chianti**  
2003, oil, 24 x 30. Collection  
Jacqueline  
and Stephen  
Kennard.

I wasn't the only one in the gallery that night affected by Bonnie's art. But it wasn't until I met the artist in person and heard her story that I finally understood why her painting captivated my heart and soul: Bonnie's journey to becoming an artist began years before she was even aware of her desire to paint. A vice president of a national software firm for 17 years, she made the decision in 1988 to leave the corporate world to explore her love of art. She began by taking several art-history and art-appreciation courses at Wesleyan College, in Macon, Georgia, but soon realized that she longed to create art instead of just study it. Over the next several years she mastered advanced drawing and design techniques and was hopeful of her future as an artist.

But in 1992 she received devastating news: She was diagnosed with a meningioma tumor in the left hemisphere of her brain and her prognosis was that surgery would either bring death or loss of humanness. "My world fell apart," the artist remembers. Bonnie was forced to leave art school, and together with her husband Bill, they focused their energy on finding the specialist who would end up saving her life.



**Early Morning Light, Lake Como**  
2002, oil,  
24 x 30.  
Collection the  
artist.

Preparing for what was to come next was very traumatic for Bonnie, because she knew that her life—and everything that brought her joy, fulfillment, and passion, including her art—was at stake. The day before the procedure Bonnie, a Christian, found herself in a room alone and on her knees. "At this moment I decided that things were no longer in my hands," she explains. "I surrendered myself to God and was freed from fear. Suddenly everything became clear, and I was filled with a sense of calm that remained with me until the end of my surgeries. I actually believe that this was a moment of divine intervention that happened because I was willing to let go and leave my fate to a greater power. Later, I learned from my surgeon that he did not expect me to survive. After five long surgeries, he was amazed at the outcome and considered me a miracle!"

Bonnie reflects on the long years following her five surgeries with great optimism. "Oddly, going through all of this turned out to be a gift," she says. "It tested and validated my faith, and it opened a new door to art and to my unbelievable passion for it." With her newfound hope, Bonnie began painting on her own, teaching herself along the way. "Learning the basics was essential, but as I began to paint I realized that an artist invariably develops his or her own style, which simply cannot be taught."

Bonnie's numerous travels to Tuscany and the South of France during this period of recovery and growth renewed her spirit and had a tremendous influence upon her painting. Moved by the raw beauty, vivid colors, and distinctive features of these regions, Bonnie made mental and physical photographs of everything she saw. "I not only took home the imagery but also the feelings, sensations, and essence of the land," she says. "I have done *alla prima* plein

air painting but, for me, that diminishes the impressions that can occur only in retrospect. I prefer to reflect upon a place and allow my feelings and reactions to evolve. This is how I start my process--it is the only way I can execute my work with truth and beauty.”

When it comes to technique, Bonnie admits that she does not follow a specific formula because, according to the artist, each painting requires its own process. “I don't paint from photographs, but I will use them as valuable references in searching for a detail specific to a particular place, such as a tree or structure,” the artist says. “Regarding color, I have had years to experiment and free myself of any rules or recipes--I use any combination of colors in a painting, even cools and warm in the same hues to achieve a desired result. Essentially, my paintings are vibrant expressions of life seen through my own eyes. Each one is a result of a personal journey embarked upon from pure inspiration.”



**Wheat Fields  
in the  
Luberon**  
2002, oil, 18 x  
24. Collection  
Nancy and  
Larry Jones.

Bonnie looks back on all that she has been through and says without hesitation that she regrets nothing. As she explains, “I have a purpose in this life, and each day I fulfill it in my love for others and in each of my paintings. Painting for me is a very spiritual experience, and I do it for the fulfillment of my soul.”

**About the author:**

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