

About: **Early Work 1960-73**

My *Early Work 1960-73* forms the first cohesive body of art produced by me; prior works from my time at the High School of Music & Art or from my Cornell and NYU days feel as a visual analog of the musical term staccato—each piece separate and distinct from one another.

I arrived in Arizona in 1959 already “out-of-place.” The youngest of three children, I was the right-brained, emotive persona in a family of left-brained intellectuals. My view of myself captured by a 1963 work entitled *Odd One Out* depicting me in the womb, then as one of three siblings, and, finally, possessing different coloration leading to ejection outside familial boundaries.



Beth Ames Swartz, **Odd One Out**, ID #998  
pastel on rice paper, 17.25" x 12", 1963

Initially, I felt out of place in Arizona too; desert rocks, prickly vegetation and open spaces contrasted with the then more familiar urban settings of my youth. I evolved a style that I label *Abstracted Landscape* in an attempt to resolve my feelings of alienation and displacement.

In 1970, I took my first rafting trip down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon; it changed my life.

Jostled and jarred by rapids, rafting through rifts eons old, my soul roused. No longer estranged from the natural world, I saw women's heads and bodies emerging from the bondage of Canyon rock, disgorged outward from mother Earth.

I bonded with the earth in a way I had not bonded with my mother. My paints were with me; feeling energized and inspired by this visceral breakthrough, I painted a series of works that I called *She is Joined to the Soul of Stone*.

Reading also changed my life. I devoured Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* when it was published in 1967; it spawned my life-long Feminism. My encounter with Carl Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* stands as a seminal insight into the inter-connectedness of human experience that was enlarged upon and made more accessible in 1968 by Amelia Jaffe (the co-author of Jung's book) in *The Myth of Meaning in the Work of C.G. Jung*. By 1969, I had absorbed Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* and Alan Watts's *The Wisdom of Insecurity*. For me, both now and in the past, creating art is a spiritual and intellectual practice—heart and head.

Watts and Zen led me to my *Meditation* series (1972-3) whose abstract images may be coalesced by the mind into mirages of land or water.

From the peace of meditation I erupted into a *Projected Power* series wherein the seemingly god-like freedom granted an artistic creator helped me escape any societal and personal preconceptions imposed by gender.

As I entered the mid-1970s, I was more convinced than ever that my art had to be about something, about things relevant to people and my devotion to the earth.