

Marilyn Bardet

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Down through the ages, the most potently expressive manifestations of human awareness are reflected in ritual spiritual practices, philosophic and scientific inquiry, and in the varieties of art-making—music, drama, poetry, literary and visual arts. By these penetrating means, consciousness of death in life may be heightened, the felt presence of "otherness" and "unity" in the interwoven relations of life and death illuminated.

By innate, sensate intelligences, the world's countless life forms are wired to attend to their surroundings upon which their existences depend. Similarly, human consciousness is capable of giving close empathic attention to the world, a capacity that survival of human communities depends. Today, however, encapsulated in vastly ramifying, destructive effects of "business as usual" energy and economic choices is an urgent message: the on-going Sixth Extinction of the global diversity of species and the accelerating rate of global warming are "with us", recognizable in the individual and collective choices we make. The paramount question of our time is whether we humans will engage our visionary imaginations and talents, challenge old assumptions and aim to "get things right" within ourselves and our communities, to repair the brokenness of our relations with each other and our surroundings where fierce beauties of living things compose reality.

My experiences of art began in childhood and continued through high school and university, with 15 years of studio practice in painting to follow. When I moved with my artist husband to Benicia for studio space, it seemed strangely "right", though I couldn't know then the effects on a small town of its having served as a military arsenal since 1850, and later, as host to a refinery. Within a few years, I found myself devoting more and more of my creative energies beyond the studio—giving close attention to local environmental issues and city planning. I became beagle-like, sniffing out with others the dangers inherent in massive industrial/commercial development proposals that augured greater amounts of pollution, safety threats to the community and/or wasteful uses of urban land. In my activist role I was both an advocate for better decision-making and a Cassandra raising the alarm. Looking back across 25+ years of activism, I see how the artist in me had exercised the freedoms of associative thinking against "siloed" thinking, and how my responses reflected the ethos of art-making— the desire to "get things right", to pull disparate things together to make better sense of conditions around me. As an activist and as an artist, I look carefully into things, remain curious, question appearances, listen and account for my own ignorance and learn from doing. My desire for harmony and beauty impels my thinking and my actions.

While I still work as an activist, I returned to the studio, not only because I love painting, but for the restorative energies stirred in my life by painting's processes. My paintings evolve from observation, memory and imagination. The images that arise interrogate me, just as things in life do when I pay close attention and discovery

begins. I trust that the constellations of forms that appear in any particular painting as a result of my choices will tell their own story, why and how they register existence. Mystery resides in slipping out of myself and into what compels attention—seeing through to a gathering set of relations on the surface of a canvas and/or outside my studio window, as an oil tanker slides out of port into the Strait's shipping lane.