

O K T P

MARY LEE BENDOLPH

07.01.2008

Mary Lee Bendolph's faith is powerful. So is her love. After meeting her, you feel that the two are inseparable. When you part, she gives you a big hug and says that she loves you. She means it. The impact of her work is powerful in large part because of her deep and personal faith. Faith is not only a Sunday thing for Mary Lee Bendolph or the women of Gee's Bend. They refer to their faith often in conversation. It sustained them as they struggled with the challenges of poverty and racism in an isolated hamlet at a bend in the Alabama River. But it has also helped

them more recently as they travel and meet new people all over the country.

In September of 2006, Mary Lee Bendolph made her second printmaking trip to Paulson Press. She had been traveling a lot in the months leading up to her second visit, and she had a lot of things on her mind. In August, the United States Postal Service had issued the sixth edition of its "American Treasures" series highlighting the quilts of Gee's Bend. Three exhibitions were concurrently traveling the country: "Gee's Bend: The Architecture of the Quilt" had recently opened at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; "The

Quilts of Gee's Bend" was on display at the de Young Museum in San Francisco; and another exhibition, "Mary Lee Bendolph, Gee's Bend Quilts, and Beyond," organized by the Austin Museum of Art and the Tinwood Alliance, had just premiered in Austin, Texas.

Additionally, Mary Lee's dear friend and one of her constant travel companions, Arlonzia Pettway, had suffered a stroke earlier in the summer. All of these things were weighing heavily on Mary Lee's mind when she arrived in Berkeley that fall. Matt Arnett interviewed her about the experience.

—Kenneth Caldwell



“I love colors. I do that with my quilts sometimes, too. I gather a lot of colors that might not look like they fit with each other and try to put them together and make them all work.”

—Mary Lee Bendolph

Get Ready, 2007

Color softground and spitbite aquatint etching;
Paper size: 36" x 43"; Edition of 50



Passing By, 2007


Color softground and spitbite aquatint etching w/chine colle Kozo;
Paper size: 39" x 43"; Edition of 50

MLB: I just started working with the material, cutting and piecing like I was at home, singing my songs and praying my prayer. And then it started coming together. I pieced the red and white one and felt great again. I called it "Passing By." I thought at the time that my second trip to Paulson would be my last, like I was just passing on

by. I was also just glad that I had gotten that burden lifted up off me and I felt so good. I felt light. The burden had passed me by, and I was under no more stress. A weight had been lifted off my shoulders.

I then started gathering up more pieces, using a lot of color. I love colors. I do that with my quilts some-

times, too. I gather a lot of colors that might not look like they fit with each other and try to put them together and make them all work. The next piece I made, called "Get Ready," used a lot of colors—red, green, black, yellow, purple, white, and others. It was time for me to get back to being myself. And I was feeling like, "Okay, get ready, let's go on now and work it out." And I thought I worked it out.

Sometimes when I'm working—at Paulson or at home—I just miss my friend Arlonzia, and she just stays on my mind. I had been traveling a lot, and my mind was on Arlonzia and not on making art. But after all that, I feel like she's saying, "Go on and don't worry about me." And I wanted to dedicate this print to her. She told me that she was going to keep on going as long as the Lord allowed her to go. When He stopped her, it just hurt. It could happen to me one day too, but until then I just have to get ready and go on. And that's just what I'm doing. 



Down the Road

Color softground aquatint etching;
Paper size: 34.5" x 32.5"; Edition of 50
Not For Sale



Mary Lee Bendolph working in the Paulson Press studio

Paulson Press is pleased to announce the inclusion of four of our artists, Louisiana Bendolph, Mary Lee Bendolph, Loretta Bennett and Loretta Pettway, into F.A.P.E.'s (Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies) Lee Kimche McGrath Original Print Collection. As part of the Collection, each year a distinguished American artist creates an edition of original prints for display in U.S. embassies. Chuck Close, Jasper Johns, Alex Katz, Ellsworth Kelly, Roy Lichtenstein, Elizabeth Murray, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, Susan Rothenberg, Ed Ruscha and Frank Stella are all past participants.