

Benita Rauda Gowen

Benita was born in Riga, the capital of Latvia, before World War II. Then, as today, Riga was a thriving cultural center where Benita, at an early age, attended opera, theater, concerts and museums with her parents. "It instilled in me an appreciation of the creative and a desire to be part of that world. Even in grade school I took art and music classes."

Benita works in different mediums: watercolors and abstract collages that use a variety of materials - bright fabrics and materials from around the world. Her current work uses fluid acrylic on textured papers to produce landscapes inspired by the natural beauty of Rappahannock County. "I like to do a series of paintings that let me explore how changes in color affect the mood of the work. I have an emotional response to what I see, evoked by light, shape, spaces between things and above all color. Most of my paintings begin with the inspiration of color, the desire to see certain colors together, and the dynamic that they create."

When the Soviets again invaded Latvia in 1944, Benita fled with her family to wartime Germany in the fall of 1945, lived in refugee camps in Munich and in 1949 came to the U.S. These experiences fueled a sense of loss of cultural identity, fears of war and its atrocities, and a sense of disconnectedness that she is still exploring in her life and work.

Benita studied design at the University of Washington at Seattle. During years of marriage and child rearing she worked in ceramics, commercial art, and taught sewing and fashion design. She designed furniture and supervised its construction for homes in the Philippines, Ethiopia, and Algeria. Returning to school at Mt. Vernon College (now part of George Washington University) in the early 1980s Benita received a B.A. in interior design and worked briefly as a space planner before starting her own design and craft business.

Since 1990 she has devoted herself to painting, studying with noted artists in the Washington D.C. area. In 2000 she and her husband moved to Rappahannock County. Benita's work has been shown at the World Bank in Washington D.C. as well as galleries in Maryland, Virginia, the District and here in Rappahannock County. For fifteen years her studio and gallery have been featured in the "Artists of Rappahannock Studio & Gallery Tour" sponsored by the Rappahannock Association for the Arts and the Community, scheduled annually for the first weekend in November.