



Ann Hawthorne

ARTIST  
TEACHER  
FRIEND  
DANCER

Friend, teacher, friend-teacher, teacher-friend, spirit-like, light hearted, alive (even still!). Play, explore, find, discover, uncover, reveal, draw, experiment, laugh, laugh some more. Dancing, dancing bodies, bodies, hands, feet, legs, arms, moving, flying, dancing, changing, whirling, whirling some more. Touch the ground as a point of reference, then go back to flying.

Color and texture and what she could do with a plain white surface. Where did the lines come from? How could she give so much life to a line? A thin, beautiful, liquid line out of a squeeze bottle. As if she put the person in the bottle first and then just squeezed them out again.

She did a drawing of people folding sheets and my relationship with sheets has never been the same. The sheet was dancing and so were the people and they were all there together. That sheet, that large piece of cloth. That drawing on a piece of cloth, of a piece of cloth. She showed us that cloth has magical power.

How many people did she teach? How many came to be her student again and again? How many were still her students long after the class was over? How many notebooks are filled with notes from her lectures? How many swatches of her cloth are sitting out there in how many studios? How many of her samples and pieces are scattered across the planet?

How many squeeze bottles lay at rest now? How many figures are waiting, arms here, legs there, to be filled with life? Life that Lenore was to give them. How many of us are filled with the life of Lenore? How much dancing will we do in her honor? She danced with so many of us. Thanks, Lenore, for that. ✽

—Bird Ross

*Lenore Davis, who died of cancer last July, taught in the Penland fibers program nearly every year from the mid-seventies through 1994. A gifted artist and teacher, she was one of the people most responsible for establishing surface design as part of the Penland program.*

*Although best known for her soft figure sculptures, she also made large flat pieces using direct dye, quilting, and block printing. Her husband, Bill Helwig, taught in the metals studio for fifteen summers. Speaking from their home in Newport, Kentucky, Bill described Lenore's work this way: "The dolls were her children, they were her fantasies, they were people she knew. Lenore loved movement, the circus, individual freedom. She loved everyday life—that is what she depicted. She loved the figure and the way it moves through space and life."*

*We received tributes from two of her former students, Caty Carlin and Bird Ross.*



Preparation for Celebration, silk, polyester stuffing, textile pigment, colored pencil, linen

It was the summer of 1983 and I had saved my money all year long to attend Penland. I had researched figuremaking in cloth for several years and was mesmerized by the gesture in motion that Lenore Davis created in her figures. I was there to meet her and soak in her presence for two weeks. I rounded the stairs and passed a woman with short blondish hair, glasses, and wild socks. "Are you going to the third floor?" she asked. I replied with a yes, and she extended her hand and said, "Hi, Lenore Davis, surface design."

I can still remember the firmness and clarity of that handshake. It was not unlike the way she stayed committed to her life, to her profession, and to the people she inspired. This commitment extended far beyond the end of the workshop as she stayed connected for years with students through cards and other forms of encouragement through the mail. Once, knowing that cloth hands were difficult for me, she sent a beautiful stuffed hand with the words, "the sound of one hand clapping for Caty."

For many years Lenore would gather the women around Penland for lunch at Helen's Restaurant in Bakersville. She would tap a spoon against her tea glass and we would go around the table sharing the news of our lives since the last gathering.

Lenore created joy around her wherever she was. She played fiddle on a river boat in Cincinnati. She made kites with Oscar and Sarah Bailey. One summer she had a student fly his airplane over the school and parachute figures from the sky.

But with Lenore the sky was never the limit. Her willingness to extend and reach outside herself and bring joy into form was a gift to us all. She taught me and many others that craft extends beyond the object into creating a life. Her life was a gift to so many of us. Thank you, Lenore, for your extraordinary time on earth. ✽

—Caty Carlin



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Lenore Davis during an impromptu flatfoot lesson from Penland neighbor Bill Plasson, summer of 1979.