

Fay Jones



Rebecca Brown

We went to see Fay Jones's studio. It's behind the house she shares with her husband, the painter Bob Jones. In the kitchen the cabinets are painted over with great big squares and circles and triangles of red, green, yellow, blue - the poster paint colors you'd find a child's toy box. Fay Jones painted them with her granddaughter. Why not. Fay Jones' paintings are sad and suggestive enough to appeal to story-seeking, melancholic me, but also bright and goofy funny enough to make a child laugh.

Bob Jones goes to work in his studio in the house; Fay Jones walks us out back to hers.

It's sunny and there's a porch and a canopy of fig trees and you walk down a staircase in dappling shade then down a couple more steps next to a garden. The building is tall, like a box on its side. There's a window up high, and on the walls the paintings and stuff she's working on. There's white rectangles framed by smudgy lines of paint where paintings in progress used to hang but have been taken down. They sort of remind me of windows except to where.

Fay Jones' work is full of characters who reappear: dancers and sailors and gamblers and swimmers and couples and men in hats. There are people who are part-person and part-something else: a rabbit and girl; a monkey and child; a woman and a mouse. They tell beast fables without the fable; they're tales without a moral or an end.

Chris and I went to Westlake Station to see the Fay Jones mural which is bigger than a bus, it's bigger than a train car. We stood on the platform opposite it and watched it in the gaps between the buses and trains that arrived and departed, we watched as parents and kids with suitcases and teenagers with backpacks and women and men with briefcases and bags schlepped on and off or rushed. On the mural above and behind them, like a great, big brightly colored thought bubble in a comic book, a couple danced, a man stood upright in a boat, and fish flew in the sky.

It's like the mural is glimpses of half-remembered daydreams of these travelers. Wherever they are, they're somewhere else. Whatever they want they almost see, although not ever quite. They might not be thinking directly of -- uh-- whatever. But something in them hovers. Whoever they're always imagining.

Do not ask what these pictures "mean". Don't try to make them tell you. Whatever does red or circle mean? Or shadow or rabbit or man. There is something balanced and something not in them. There is remembering longing and something that tells you look.

FAY JONES dates*

- 1936: born, Boston. Mother Hester Fay: hotelier, homemaker
Father Robeson Bailey; writer, faculty at Bread Loaf Writers
Conference, Smith, U of Oregon, etc.
Parents' friends include writers like Robert Frost, John Ciardi,
Dorothy Parker, etc.
- 1947: given a watercolor set
- 1953: begins study at RISD
- 1955: sees Mark Rothko exhibit: "It made me want to be myself."
- 1957: marries painter Robert (Bob) C. Jones
- 1958: gives birth to son, the first of four children
- 1960: moves to Seattle where Bob teaches art at UW
- 1970: first solo exhibit, Francine Seders Gallery
- 1980s: public art commission for Seattle Downtown Bus Tunnel
- 1996: Fay Jones: A 20 year Retrospective at Boise Art Museum
- 1997: Fay Jones: A 20 year Retrospective at Seattle Art Museum
- 2000: begins repainting Goya
- 2015: Golden Handcuffs Review issue devoted to Fay Jones

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