

Remembering Geraldine King Tam

When I imagine the shape my Dalton experiences make, it is a spherical form with a three dimensional radial pattern of lines and flows from a clear center. Gerry Tam and her art room are that center. She was my teacher for thirteen years from a four year old through my graduation, the year she also retired. No other teacher accompanied me the whole spiraled distance.

...scraps of carpet, fabric, and string. Scissors. Glue. Papier mache and wire. Paint. Shellac. Boards and dowels. Saws, drills, hammers and nails. Chisels and sandpaper. Silver. Bezels. Soldering. Lapis lazuli. Clay. Centering. Stillness in motion. Fire. The process of transformation made tactile and visual.

Gerry's art room was a laboratory for exploring the materials, methods, and metaphors of making. In her classroom, the other languages were learned: the visual language; the language of materiality; the language of creative process and expression; the language of craft and design; the practice of concentration in the context of activity, a form of meditation. Accidents and failures were compost to enrich the creative endeavor, the loss never something over which to linger long. Her room was a place where my imagination and love of making things had enough space to unfold yet was tended to by her steady observation and perfectly timed interventions, like that of a gardener which, in fact, she was.

Art was a life long practice for Gerry – as a textile designer, a botanical painter, an art educator, and in her long marriage with the painter Reuben Tam with whom she shared the passion, trials, and quest of art making. Upon moving to Kauai after her retirement and overwhelmed with the exotic lushness of her surroundings, she delved into botanical painting. In 1995 she was honored as a Living Treasure by the Kauai Museum. In 1998, her book *Paradisus: Hawaiian Plant Watercolors* was published.

I corresponded with Gerry briefly after I graduated from Dalton. Then, in 1991, myself a studio artist and an art educator, we began a correspondence that lasted many years. We wrote about art, gardening, and our lives, her insights and reflections as illuminating and honest as ever. She is in me as a sculptor – indeed as a human - in ways I suddenly recognize when I trace the trajectory of a flow backwards. I no longer teach yet I am in touch with a few of my former students. I want to believe that the occasional glimpse I catch is indeed she in them, too.