

Kile Brewer, staff photographer

At 93, artist just keeps going

# T I M E L E S S

**By Wade Rupard**  
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**GRAND FORKS** — Time will eventually catch up to everyone. But for 93-year-old painter Mary Bonkemeyer, time has been no match.

The painter from Santa Fe, N.M., has painted almost her entire life, and last night, the North Dakota Museum of Art opened an exhibit showcasing the artist's paintings.

After decades of painting, this is Bonkemeyer's first museum exhibit.

"She is one of those rare artists who just kept working," said Laurel Reuter, director of the North Dakota Museum of Art. "She never sought attention or set out to be a well-known artist."

Bonkemeyer is considered a second generation abstract expressionist, an art form that emphasizes expressing emotion in paintings.

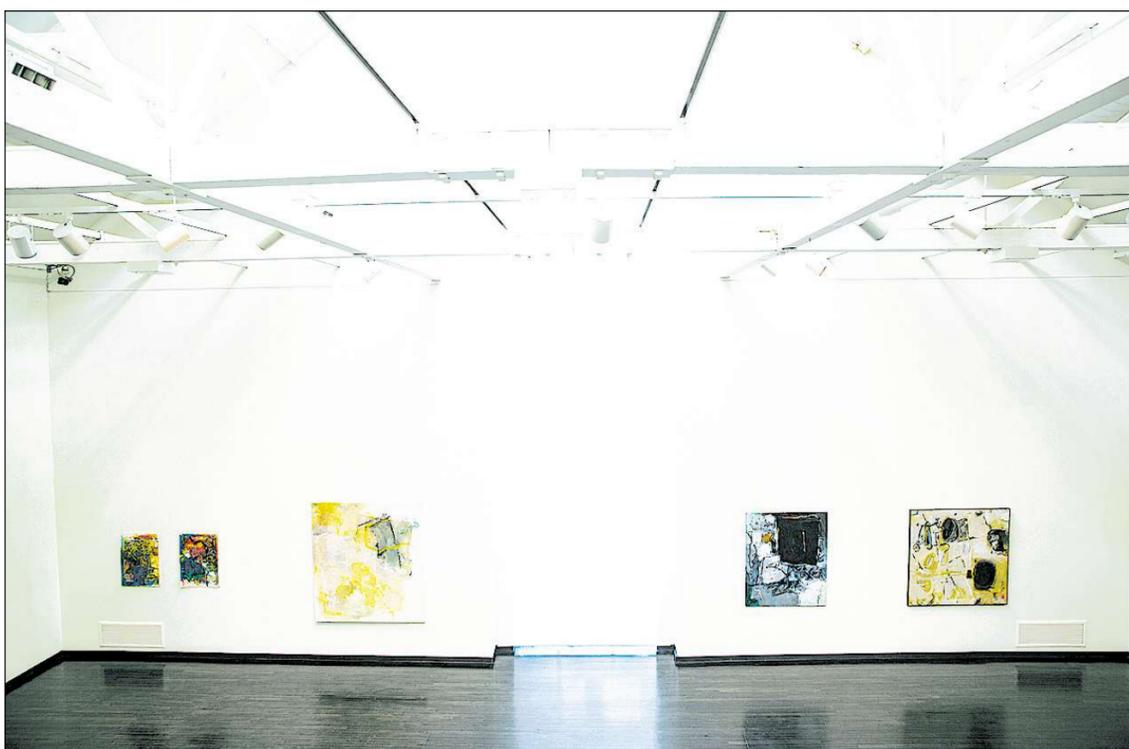
"Her skill and complexity is of more interest to me than most abstract paintings today," Reuter said.

The exhibit, "Mary Bonkemeyer: Decades of Paint," will be on display at the museum until July 27.

## Longevity

Born in North Carolina, Bonkemeyer began painting at a young age and immediately fell in love with it, her daughter Kristin Bonkemeyer said.

The painter earned a master's degree in fine arts from the University of Iowa in the mid-1940s. At Iowa, Bonkemeyer



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studied under legendary abstract painter Philip Guston, who went on to become one of the most well-known painters of the genre. Bonkemeyer also studied with artists such as Richard Diebenkorn and Nancy Graves.

Painting was a constant throughout her life, and

something she spent most of her free time exploring the craft. Also a skilled poet, Bonkemeyer shared her knowledge in both writing and painting by teaching classes.

"She has so much skill to share with the world," Kristin Bonkemeyer said. Bonkemeyer continued to paint and had some of

**Mary Bonkemeyer's paintings hang in the North Dakota Museum of Art** before the opening of her show "Decades of Paint" on Thursday evening. The 93-year-old artist's family will be present at the opening to speak about her life and artwork. Bonkemeyer (photographed earlier with her art) will not be at the opening.

her paintings on display at local exhibits around her home. But it wasn't until a chance encounter with Reuter that Bonkemeyer was finally able to get her first museum exhibit.

Bonkemeyer did not attend the exhibit's opening in order to work on a new series of paintings at her New Mexico home.

Bonkemeyer's longevity, and the fact that she still continues to paint, is no surprise to her daughter. Kristin Bonke-

meyer, who represented her mother at the exhibit's opening last night, said her mother has remained active, even in her older years.

"She's in great shape," Kristin Bonkemeyer said. "Her father lived a long time. Part of her heritage is longevity. She doesn't know any other way."

Reuter said Bonkemeyer's longevity is what has made her such a great painter. She's able to continue to show depth and meaning in her paintings

that few can. Reuter said she found Bonkemeyer's story remarkable, and she thinks it will connect with the North Dakota audience.

"She has studied under the best of them and continues to paint," Reuter said. "The paint just flows from her hands with so much ease, and beauty on top of it."

## Painting style

Being an abstract expressionist, Bonkemeyer's work expresses her sense of the visual world, Kristin Bonkemeyer said.

"You can see so much different information in her paintings," Reuter said. "You see more information than most abstract painters have. You're able to see her struggle with different things in her work."

On display at the museum are paintings stretching from the mid-1960s to the present. With such a wide spectrum of work, visitors to the exhibit will be able to see how particular parts of her life impacted her painting.

"You can really interpret what she's saying through her paintings."

Throughout her entire lifetime, Bonkemeyer has been able to express herself through her artwork.

"I think the paintings really speak for themselves," Kristin Bonkemeyer said. "Her paintings all look kind of magical."

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