

## NANCY TOPPING BAZIN - shortened version of Who's Who in America® entry

NANCY TOPPING BAZIN was an innovator in the study of literature and an exceptionally creative and colorful professional artist. She earned her Ph.D. in British literature from Stanford University, her master's degree in French from the Middlebury Graduate School in Paris, and her Bachelor of Arts degree in English and French from Ohio Wesleyan University. In 1969, when she went to Stanford, only British literature, not even American literature was considered "great" enough to be one's primary field of study. But as a teacher, she introduced to the English Department curriculum such courses as Women Writers, Literature of the Developing World, and World Literature Written in English. As an artist, she used the unusual technique of painting one side of a sheet of aluminum foil with black gesso, placing that painted side of the foil on white watercolor paper, and then drawing blindly on the other side. To that drawing, she added a great deal of pattern and color as well as a story about her whimsical birds. As the Curator Emeritus of the Chrysler Museum, Dr. Jeff Harrison, said of her birds, she creates "a whimsical realm of fantastic, feathered creatures, a world of brilliant color and bold, semi-abstract patterns. It's a charmed place of pure imagination that offers hours of joyful contemplation." Dr. Bazin was repeatedly told by others that her paintings made them feel "happy." When one day she was asked why she painted birds, she had no answer, so she wrote a little book called Why I Love to Paint Birds (2016). In 2022, she became a Signature Member of the Virginia Watercolor Society.

In 1970, Nancy Topping Bazin began to teach at Rutgers College, the all-male college at Rutgers University. Under pressure as a state university in 1971 to become co-ed, the College added a few girls to the freshman class. Despite the lack of female students or faculty, Dr. Bazin encouraged male and female teachers to offer women studies courses. Without permission, she created a flyer with a list of those courses and the requirements for a Rutgers College Women's Studies Certificate. She started a speakers' series with feminists such as Toni Morrison, Doris Lessing, and Mary Daly and, a little later, helped create a university-wide Women's Research Institute of which she was the first Director. Nationally, she was Vice-President of the Women's Caucus of the Modern Language Association. Dr. Bazin left Rutgers in 1977 to spend a year directing a more developed Women's Studies Program at the University of Pittsburgh. Then she was offered an associate professorship in Norfolk at Old Dominion University. She would be the Director of the first Women's Studies Program in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Interdisciplinary courses were not common in the 1970s. At the University of Pittsburgh Nancy Topping Bazin taught only one—"Introduction to Women's Studies." However, at Old Dominion University, she created and taught five of them: "Women in a Changing World," "Women and Power," "Women's Spiritual Quest," "Mothers and Daughters," and "Women's Studies and the Search for Truth." She organized two interdisciplinary faculty workshops each year, as well as one for the whole History Department and one for the whole Biology Department. These were taught by experts from other universities.

Nancy Topping Bazin taught the works of Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing, and Nadine Gordimer long before these three women writers were well-known, or Lessing and Gordimer had won their Nobel Prizes. In 1973, Dr. Bazin had published a scholarly study,

*Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision*, and in 1990, she co-edited a book called *Conversations with Nadine Gordimer*. In addition, she published forty scholarly articles. Lessing (Rhodesian) and Gordimer (South African) were white Africans. Her interest in their novels led her to be one of the first scholars to write about and teach novels by the first black African women writers: Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa from Nigeria, Bessie Head from Botswana, Aminata Sow Fall and Mariama Ba from Senegal. In her course “World Literature Written in English,” Dr. Bazin taught not only English-speaking writers from Africa and the Caribbean but also writers from countries such as India, Canada, and Australia. During her lifetime, Dr. Bazin traveled to a total of sixty-two countries. Her love of traveling and her love of teaching helped internationalize the curriculum. In the beginning of her art career, before her subconscious sent her the whimsical birds, what she saw as she traveled also nourished her art.

Nancy Topping Bazin’s achievements gave her rewards. She received grants to do research in Bloomington, Charlottesville, and London. At home, in 1994, she won an Outstanding Faculty Award (mainly for teaching) from the State Council for Higher Education. In 1996, she was awarded the Charles and Elisabeth Burgess Faculty and Creativity Award. That same year she was promoted to Eminent Scholar, the highest achievement for faculty. Upon receiving this title, the provost wrote to her: “You have been a pioneer in gender studies, your scholarship has broadened literary analysis and fundamentally changed the discourse.” When she retired in the year 2000, a scholarship in women’s studies for graduate students was established in her name.

After twenty-two years of teaching at Old Dominion University, Nancy Topping Bazin returned to art for the next twenty-two years. She took classes and workshops, at first locally and then nationally. From 2007-2011, she was one of five Managing Artists and continuous exhibitors at the Pembroke 4 Art Gallery. Her “whimsical birds” appeared in ten art books. Her painting “Birdwatching” was one of forty-three selected out of 500 to be enlarged on commercial vinyl for a drive-through art gallery. Another bird painting, “The Kiss,” was recently one of several selected from a very competitive pool to hang in the Virginia Oncology Center for one year. She has won seventy-three awards in juried exhibits. Out of her forty-five whimsical bird paintings, she sold eighteen and then decided to keep the others as a collection to be placed in public spaces after she dies.

Throughout her career, Dr. Bazin’s achievements have been recognized by prestigious organizations, including inclusion in directories like the International Directory of Distinguished Leadership and Dictionary of International Biography. Her diverse interests and contributions to literature, women’s studies, and art underscore her status as a pioneering figure in her respective fields. Her ability to excel in both academia and art is a testament to her remarkable talents and unwavering commitment to making a positive impact.

[nancybazin@yahoo.com](mailto:nancybazin@yahoo.com)

Visit her website ([www.nancytoppingbazin.com](http://www.nancytoppingbazin.com)) to see her paintings and read many of her articles.