

Dorothea Rockburne was born in Montréal, Canada, the youngest of three children. While in elementary school, she attended Saturday classes at the École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal and also studied dance. Her mother's books on the art of ancient Egypt enthralled her even as a young child and her father's love of the outdoors instilled in her an appreciation of nature. After a period of study at the Montréal Museum School, she was encouraged to apply to the radically innovative Black Mountain College in North Carolina. In 1950, she received a Merit Scholarship to attend Black Mountain where she studied painting with Franz Kline, Philip Guston, and Jack Tworkov, among others, music with John Cage, and dance with Merce Cunningham. She also studied mathematics with topologist Max Dehn, who stimulated her abiding interest in the subject. Her older classmates included Cy Twombly, John Chamberlain, and Robert Rauschenberg, with whom she remained close. She married in 1951 while still a student and her daughter Christine was born in 1952. That same year at Black Mountain, she participated in the first "Happening" event, along with John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Rauschenberg, and others.

In 1955 Rockburne moved with her family to New York City, home to the post-war artistic vanguard. During the years after her marriage ended in 1956, she balanced childrearing and painting, continued her study of math, and spent summers on Cape Cod as part of the New York art community that summered there. She supported herself and daughter through various jobs and by a bookkeeping position at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She also helped catalogue the Museum's collection of Egyptian antiquities, and soon began frequenting the Brooklyn Museum to study its extensive collection of 18th Dynasty Egyptian objects from Tel el Amarna. Her love of Egyptian art would later manifest itself in the Egyptian Paintings series of 1979-80. A United States citizen since 1991, Rockburne has distinguished herself as one of the nation's preeminent contemporary artists. In 1957 she received the Walter Gutman Emerging Artist Award. During the first half of the 1960s she was also involved in dance and performance art, participating with Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenburg and others at the Judson Dance Theatre. In 1965 she performed in Oldenburg's Washes at Al Roon's Health Club in New York. Beginning in 1966, with the exhibition "E.A.T." at the Leo Castelli Gallery, she has shown extensively in New York.

Rockburne has had solo exhibitions at some of New York City's most prestigious venues: the Bykert Gallery (Group/And, and Disjunction/Or, 1970); the John Weber Gallery (the Copal series of drawings, 1975); the Museum of Modern Art (the Locus Etchings, 1981); Xavier Fourcade (Egyptian Paintings 1981, and "Dorothea Rockburne, Painting and Drawing, 1982-85," 1985); the André Emmerich Gallery ("Pascal and Other Concerns," 1988, Cut-Ins and Memories of the Light in Egypt, 1990, Circle in the Square works, 1991, "Roman Wall Painting," 1992, and "Painting from Nature," 1994); and Lawrence Rubin, Greenberg Van Doren Fine Art ("Ten Years of Astronomy Drawings," 2000). She had a painting retrospective at the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University in 1989; a solo exhibition at D.P. Fong & Spratt Gallery, San Jose, California in 1991; and a second retrospective "The Transcendent Light of Geometry" at the Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, New York in 1995. She has also executed large wall commissions in the Hilton Hotel, San Jose (1991); the SONY headquarters, New York City (1992-93); the Edward T. Gignoux Courthouse, Portland, Maine (1996); and the Media Union, University of Michigan (1997). She is represented by Lawrence Rubin, Greenberg Van Doren Fine Art in New York.

Rockburne's work has been featured in group exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art (1970, 1971, 1972, 1974, 1976, 1984, 1989, 1992, 2007, 2008); the Paula Cooper Gallery (1970); the

Bykert Gallery (1970, 1971); the Whitney Annual (1973), and the Whitney Biennial (1977, 1979); and in California at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (2001). She has also exhibited in group and solo exhibitions abroad, and participated in "Documenta V", Kassel, Germany (1972), and the Venice Biennale (1973, 1980).

Over the course of her career, Rockburne has amassed numerous honors: a Guggenheim Fellowship (1972); a National Endowment for the Arts grant (1974); the Witowsky Prize for painting at the 72nd American Exhibition, Art Institute of Chicago (1976); the Brandeis University Creative Arts Award (1985); the Bard College Milton and Sally Avery Distinguished Professor Award (1986); the Artist in Residence award at the American Academy in Rome (1991); the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers award (1997); and the American Academy of Arts and Letters Jimmy Ernst Lifetime Achievement Award in Art (1999). She was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Department of Art, in 2001.

Many sources have informed Rockburne's work since the mid-1960s. Among them are topology, set theory, the golden section, chaos theory, ancient Egyptian art, early Renaissance and Mannerist painting, the philosophy of Blaise Pascal, Romanesque and Baroque architecture, and Robert Lawlor's book Sacred Geometry. Around 1990, she began to explore concepts of time and deep space and to study astronomy. During a four-month residency at the American Academy in Rome in 1991 these interests converged with her close study of a 17th century frescoed ceiling sky chart, which provided a foundation for her ongoing series of Astronomy Drawings as well as her secco fresco wall murals for public spaces.