

# WASHBURN

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## Art in Review

### Alice Trumbull Mason

Washburn  
20 West 57th Street  
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There can't be many paintings by Alice Trumbull Mason (1904-71) still in circulation. She was not prolific; her active career was relatively brief. But you can see at a lingering glance how good an artist she was in this expansive little survey of mid- and late-career work.

Like most artists of lasting interest, she drew on many sources in her work, which meant that it changed, sometimes dramatically, and grew. Born in New England and descended from the 18th-century painter John Trumbull, she began as a figurative painter studying in New York with Charles Hawthorne, teacher of Franz Kline and many other abstractionists in the bud. Arshile Gorky introduced her to biomorphic abstract styles. Some etchings from the 1940s are indebted to him in the way they catch surrealistic what's-its in silken nets.

Travel had a big effect: the firsthand experience of Byzantine mosaics and Greek archaic sculpture was formative. So, almost instantly, was the arrival of Piet Mondrian in New York, where his mere presence had an elixirlike impact on artists working or debating working in geometric abstraction. Ms. Mason was one of them. As secretary and then president of American Abstract Artists, she played an evangelical role in proselytizing an unpopular mode while she demonstrated in her own work how rigorous, stimulating and accessible it could be.

Who could feel anything but welcomed by the cool, crisp, deli-

cate "Lines Take Shape" (1942), with its powder-blue and butter-yellow bands like ripples of light on a harbor? Or by the gently combustive scatter of marigold chips against a brick-red background in "Fire Festival" (1951)? Or the beige and green blocks like winter leaves on mulch-brown ground in "The Forest Floor" (1950)? And what about the 1954 etching called "Starry Firmament," with its fleet of blank white blocks floating on a field of gauzy black-and-white stippling? Mondrian meets Berkshire Shaker in outer space. How great. *HOLLAND COTTER*

Joan T. Washburn, Director

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