



WASHBURN GALLERY, NEW YORK

"Paradox #9, in the Light" (1960), one of 13 paintings and 11 drawings included in an Alice Trumbull Mason retrospective at the Washburn Gallery that focuses on her earliest and latest works.

Alice Trumbull Mason

'A Retrospective'

Washburn Gallery
20 West 57th Street, Manhattan
Closes on Saturday

Alice Trumbull Mason (1904-1971) dedicated herself to abstract painting in 1929 and never looked back. Her canvases tended to be small; she was not interested in pictorial power based on size. Whether dark or infused with light, her palette was distinctive, because she ground her own pigments. She also never committed to a single style, although the calm assurance of being "just right" pervades nearly everything she did, shoring up its seeming delicacy. Over her 40-year career, Mason worked from a biomorphic style influenced by Arthur Dove and Arshile Gorky to an equally intuitive geometric one.

This Washburn Gallery exhibition of 13 paintings and 11 drawings concentrates on her earliest and last works. In four pieces made from 1929 to 1931, she takes the visionary organic forms of Dove beyond their nature references — sometimes with Cubism's help, sometimes Surrealism's, always with a hint of visionary light. The sharp

yellow and green areas of "Spring" (1931) flank a bridge of shadowy pink, with floating, almost cartoony, lines and squiggles in black, red and blue. "Spring" deserves a place in a major museum.

From there, the show jumps to the 1950s and '60s, when Mason, responding to Mondrian's influence, turned geometry into a flexible personal language. In "The Beehive" (1950), tiny squares in grays and golds ooze downward among larger ones.

Mason is at her best in the 1960s, with works like "Magnitude of Memory," in which a series of bars in muted colors subtly bend here and there, hinting at deeper mysteries. Even better are two small square paintings from 1960, one titled "Paradox #9, in the Light," the other untitled. In both, squares and oblongs of color — black, red, pink, gold, pale blue — float in white space, each with its own weight and its own depth, creating a contrapuntal energy of almost mystical proportion.

ROBERTA SMITH