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Breaking the Mold

Addison Rowe Gallery exhibits works of Beatrice Mandelman and Florence Miller Pierce, two contributors to abstract art in New Mexico

Through December 16

Addison Rowe Gallery

229 E. Marcy Street

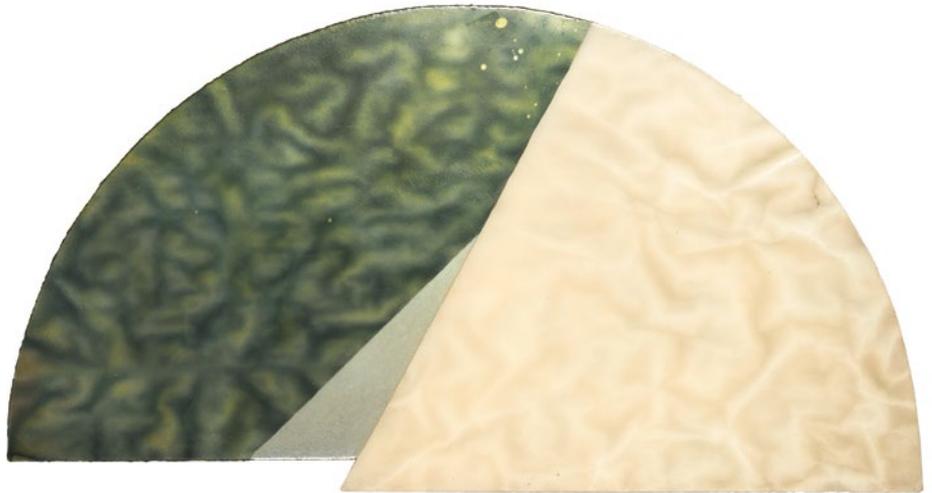
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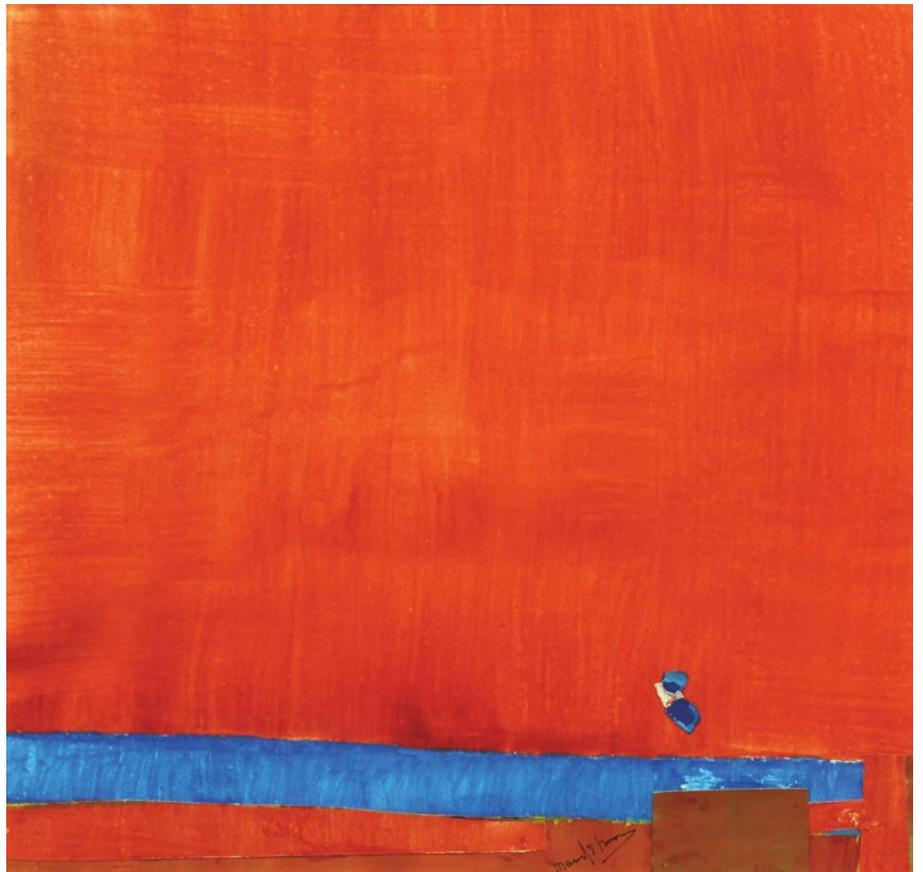
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The history of women in the development of modern and contemporary art in Northern New Mexico is a rich one. The visionary Mabel Dodge Luhan (1879–1962) had held salons in Florence and Greenwich Village and brought many of the artistic and literary luminaries of the time to her home in Taos. After forming art schools in Paris and Washington, D.C., Catherine Carter Critcher (1868–1964) moved to Taos and became the only woman in the Taos Society of Artists. Georgia O’Keeffe (1887–1986) arrived a little later and set out to discover the essential forms of nature. Agnes Martin (1912–2004) has been referred to as “the artist mystic who disappeared into the desert” where she created works she said were “about merging, about formlessness...A world without objects, without interruption.”

Beatrice Mandelman (1912–1998) and Florence Miller Pierce (1918–2007) brought different experiences and belonged to two different influential art groups. Pierce was the youngest member and only one of two women in the Transcendental Painting Group. Mandelman and her husband, Louis Ribak (1902–1979), founded the Taos Valley Art School and were key to the organization of a collective known as the Taos Moderns. Pierce moved



Florence Miller Pierce (1918–2007), *Untitled*, ca. 1986. Resin relief, 32 x 62 in.



Beatrice Mandelman (1912–1998), *Greece No. 12*, ca. 1965. Watercolor with collage on paper, 18¾ x 19¾ in., signed lower right.



Beatrice Mandelman (1912-1998), *Things That Happen at Night*, 1955. Casein with collage on cardboard, 28 x 40 in., signed lower right.

in and out of her painting career and Mandelman remained devoted to hers from the age of 12.

Their work is the subject of an exhibition *From the Transcendental Painting Group to the Taos Moderns: Florence Miller Pierce and Beatrice Mandelman*, at Addison Rowe Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico, through December 16.

Raymond Jonson (1891-1982) and Emil Bisttram (1895-1976) founded the Transcendental Painting Group in 1938 “to carry painting beyond the appearance of the physical world, through new

concepts of space, color, light, and design.” Pierce commented that Jonson not only promoted abstraction, but was “continuously working toward finding his own inner self in his painting.”

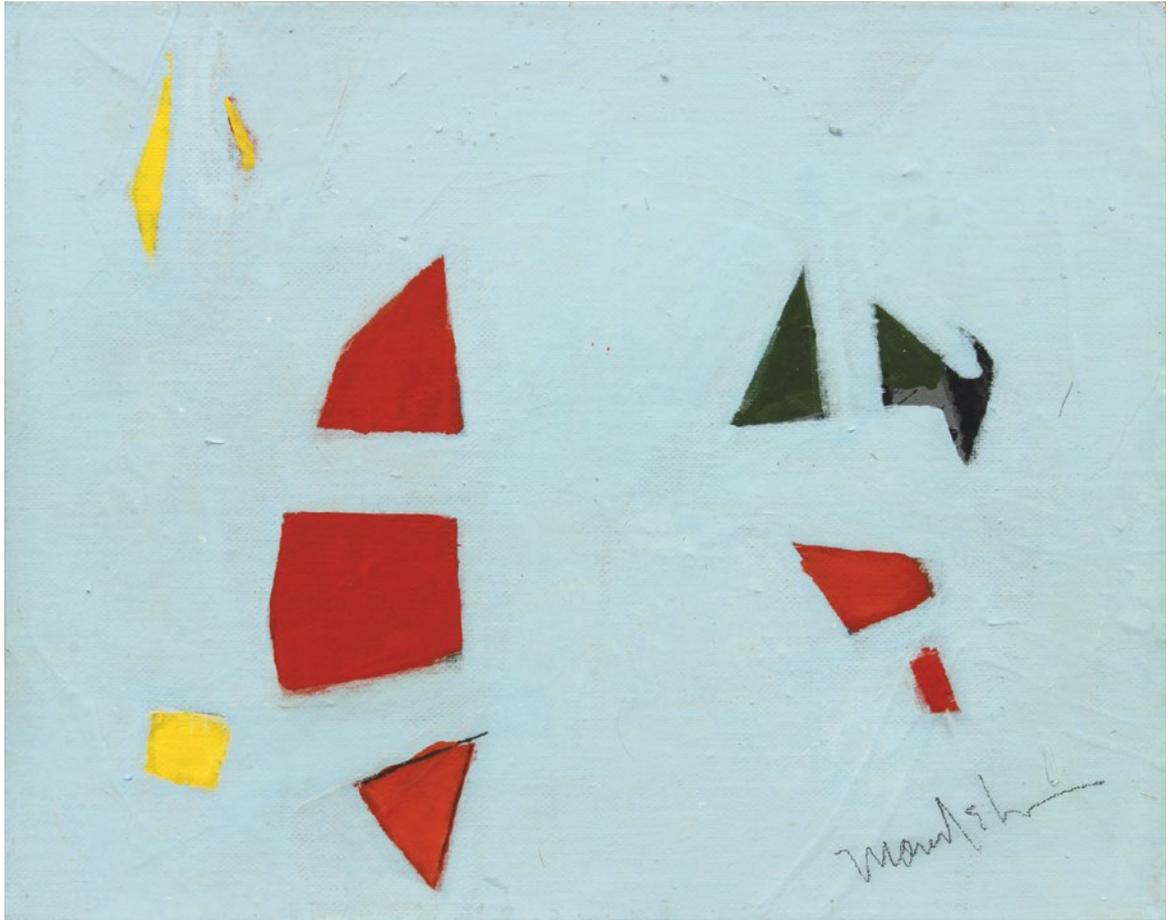
Jonson’s and Bisttram’s teachings followed her throughout her career and manifested in different ways. Bisttram’s basics geometric shapes began to reappear in her later work and in her resin on mirror paintings. She remarked, “This is about as pure ‘Florence’ as I can get. I was so pure, so naive then. I try to approach art again from that same

mysterious source.”

She had accidentally spilled resin on a sheet of aluminum and was fascinated by how it was translucent, sitting above the shiny metal surface. She began experimenting with resin on mirrors capturing shifting, ethereal light emanating from behind their minimalist surface.

Mandelman began painting abstractly in the '50s. She and the other artists of the Taos Moderns ruffled the feathers of the followers of the earlier and more traditional Taos Society. She had been

Beatrice Mandelman
(1912-1998), *Sky*,
ca. 1970s. Oil on
canvas panel,
8 x 10 in., signed
lower right.



Florence Miller Pierce (1918-2007), *Untitled 652 (Red)*, 2004. Resin relief, 16 x 16 in., signed, titled and dated verso.

a social realist and figurative painter. She commented on her and Ribak's move to the Southwest, "We had... to get acquainted with the forms, the light, the meaning, the whole sense of being here in the West." The experience changed their work dramatically.

The gallery notes the Taos Valley Art School "attracted many Abstract Expressionist artists from both the East and West Coast and served as a meeting place for many of the artists who would become part of the Taos Moderns; eventually this group would include Mandelman, Ribak, Ed Corbett, Andrew Dasburg, Agnes Martin, Oli Sihvonen, Clay Spohn, John Depuy, Cady Wells, Thomas Benrimo, Ted Egri, and Louise Ganthiers.

"Pierce and Mandelman were essential in creating a foundation for abstract artists to flourish in New Mexico. Without their contributions, the past seven decades of art would look very different." ■