

## Paul Burlin (1886-1969): Abstract Expressionist Paintings, 1950-1960

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Peyton Wright Gallery is proud to announce “Paul Burlin (1886-1969): Abstract Expressionist Paintings, 1950-1960”, a preview of 1950s paintings and works on paper from the Paul Burlin Art Trust. The exhibition will commence with an **Opening Reception on Friday July 11th, 2008 from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m.** with a musical performance by Kelvin McNeal. The exhibition continues through August 1st, 2008.

Paul Burlin was born in New York in 1886 and achieved a great deal of early artistic success there. He visited the Southwest for the first time in 1910 and his paintings from this visit were received warmly in New York and exhibited in a 1911 exhibition. As a result of his early success, he was the youngest artist (at twenty-six years of age) to participate in the 1913 Armory Show - the revolutionary exhibition of avant-garde European artists that can be credited with introducing modern art to the United States and stimulating the development of modernism in America. There, Burlin's work was exhibited alongside works by such artists as Picasso, Monet, Cézanne, and Duchamp.



Paul Burlin  
*Inner Space*  
Oil on Canvas, 1955

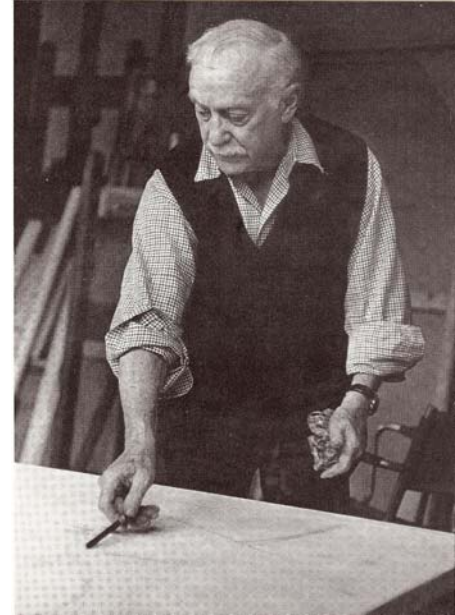
Later that year, Burlin returned to Santa Fe to live. With the images and ideas of the Armory Show still prominent in his mind, Burlin was impressed and moved by what he described as the ‘primeval, erosive, forbidding character of the landscape’ (Udall, Sharyn. *Modernist Painting in New Mexico 1913-1935*. University of New Mexico Press, 1984). In 1917, he met and married Natalie Curtis, a prominent ethnomusicologist specializing in the songs and chants of the Hopi, whose 1907 *The Indians' Book* is still a classic study of music and poetry. Like many other modernists of his time, Burlin was fascinated by “primitive” art. In Santa Fe, Natalie introduced Burlin to Pueblo art and culture, with which he became intensely interested. Visually, Burlin was drawn to the color and abstract geometry of Native American designs. Contemplating the abstract decoration of Indian pottery, he observed that “by contrast all other picture-making seemed like story telling trivia. These disturbing factors - none of which had anything to do with ‘representation’ were the vague beginnings of an esthetic credo...” Emotionally and intellectually, Burlin was influenced by the spirituality of the Southwestern Indian cultures, which inspired a preoccupation with symbols and myth that remained with him throughout his career.

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Burlin's time in New Mexico had a profound impact, not only on his own work, but on the development of modernism throughout the Southwest. According to University of New Mexico art historian Sharyn Udall, Burlin 'was the first Armory Show participant to reach New Mexico, and that fact, coupled with his confident handling of local subject matter, made a definite impression on newcomers [Marsden] Hartley and B.J.O. Nordfeldt...It is clear, moreover, that Burlin's stature as the first modernist painter in New Mexico was unquestioned; his was the pivotal role in introducing fauve and expressionist modes to the art of New Mexico" (Udall, 1984).

In 1921, Burlin and his wife, Natalie Curtis, moved to Paris as part of an exodus of expatriate artists responding to what Burlin called a 'palsy of the spirit' in America after World War I. In Paris, Burlin arrived at the geographical locus of modern art. He studied European abstract artists and further developed some of the intellectual and symbolic elements that he began in the Southwest. Later that year, Natalie was killed in an automobile accident, setting Burlin 'emotionally adrift'. He continued to live in Paris until 1932, when he moved back to the United States in the midst of the Great Depression to work for the WPA.



Paul Burlin



Paul Burlin  
*The Pigeon Does Not Fly*  
Oil on Canvas, 1957

Throughout the 1940s, Burlin's work became less dependent on subject matter and more and more preoccupied with the expressive possibilities of shape and color. During this time, he began to develop his characteristic style of merging abstract expressionistic forms, developed during his time in Europe, with the metaphysical subjects, ideas, and symbols that he first discovered in the Southwest. By the 1950s, he had moved almost entirely into abstract expressionistic work. His works were increasingly focused on mythological themes. They also became increasingly autobiographical. It was at this time that Burlin began to lose his eyesight, a theme that recurred prominently in his work for the rest of his life.

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Burlin's paintings from the 1950s are filled with energy and movement, restlessness and cacophony, balanced with technical mastery and clarity of vision. In these works, according to Burlin 'All of the old realities have dissolved...all rigidities of form disappear and enter into a new metamorphosis' (Sandler, Irving, *Paul Burlin*, The American Federation of Arts, New York, 1962).

Wherever he happened to be living, Burlin maintained close contact with his colleagues in New York City. He exhibited prominently throughout his career, including the 1930 'Painting and Sculpture by Living Americans' exhibition and the 1944 'Art in Progress' show, both at New York's Museum of Modern Art. He was represented by several prestigious New York galleries during his lifetime, including Edith Halpert's Downtown Gallery and the Grace Borgenicht Gallery. A significant retrospective of his work was sponsored by the American Federation of the Arts at the Philadelphia Art Alliance and the Whitney Museum in 1962, and his work is included in the collections of museums such as the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Museum of New Mexico.

Peyton Wright Gallery is the exclusive representative of the Paul Burlin Art Trust.

*Photographs courtesy of the Paul Burlin Art Trust.*

**For more information, please contact:**  
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