

Raymond Jonson (1891-1982): Paintings; 1940-1970

For immediate release: *9 September 2008*

Peyton Wright Gallery is pleased to announce “**Raymond Jonson (1891-1982): Paintings; 1940-1970**”. This exhibition will feature the works of Raymond Jonson, commencing with an **Opening Reception on Friday October 3rd, 2008 from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m.** and continues through October 31st, 2008.

In 1910, Iowa-born artist Raymond Jonson moved to Chicago to begin his formal art education at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. There, he studied under B.J.O. Nordfeldt, whose work and teaching had a profound effect on Jonson’s artistic and intellectual development. He went on to study at the Art Institute of Chicago. Though Jonson moved to Chicago with the intention to pursue art commercially, he soon renounced commercial endeavors and devoted himself fully to the spiritual and philosophical possibilities of artistic expression.

When the 1913 Armory Show came to Chicago, Jonson was fascinated with the new trends and ideas in modern art that he saw exhibited there. His interest in modernism was further heightened by his discovery of Kandinsky’s *The Art of Spiritual Harmony* in 1921.

After leaving the Art Institute, Jonson worked for several years at the Chicago Little Theater as a set and lighting designer. He spent two summers, in 1919 and 1920, at the MacDowell Art Colony. In 1922, he paid his first extended visit to Santa Fe where, like so many of his modernist colleagues, he was profoundly influenced by the shapes and colors of the Southwestern desert landscape. He settled in Santa Fe permanently in 1924.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Jonson exhibited regularly in New York and Chicago. In 1934, he began teaching at the University of New Mexico, where he remained until 1954.

Throughout his life, Jonson was a powerful force for the development of modernism in the Southwest. According to his friend and colleague, Ed Garman, Jonson was never simply interested in his own work, but was always devoted to the development and preservation of art as a benefit to the entire community of his friends, colleagues, and students. At the University, he taught and influenced such prominent artists as Richard Diebenkorn and Agnes Martin. In 1938, along with Emil Bistram, he co-founded the



Oil No. 16
Oil on canvas, 1953

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Transcendental Painting Group, a group of artists whose shared vision was to transcend material reality and advance the expression of spirituality in art through the creation of non-representational work. Jonson was also constantly devoted to exhibiting modern work and sharing it with the community. From



Oil No. 10
Oil on board, 1960

1927-1931, Jonson oversaw the creation of a “Modern Wing’ at the Museum of New Mexico. In 1950, he founded the Jonson Gallery at UNM – the only space in the southwest where abstract and non-representational work was being exhibited at that time. There, Jonson was able to support the careers of many young modern artists by providing them with a space for their first exhibitions.

Though Jonson did not begin his career as an abstract artist, he was always fascinated as much by the expressive possibilities of painting as by the representation of material reality. He began to turn entirely to abstraction in the late 1920s. His goal was to create ‘pure abstractions’, in which he could be free of the constraints of subject matter and focus purely on composition and color. To Jonson, the ultimate goal of painting, which he pursued throughout his career with rigorous, single-minded devotion, was to portray the sacred rather than the earthly. “Jonson did not believe the sacred to be ‘beyond all reach’ nor did he believe it to be ‘the hopeless quest.’ He

believed that art is precisely the vehicle by which is expressed the otherwise inexpressible” (Garman, Ed. *The Art of Raymond Jonson, Painter*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976: 106).

Jonson exhibited throughout his career in Chicago, New York, and New Mexico. His work is included in the public collections of such museums as the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Museum of New Mexico.

Peyton Wright Gallery is the exclusive representative of the Raymond Jonson Estate.



View the permanent collection of Raymond Jonson's works at
The Jonson Gallery of the University of New Mexico Art Museum
1909 Las Lomas NE, Albuquerque, NM, 87131
(505) 277-4967 <http://www.unm.edu/~jonsong>

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