

Margo Hoff

1910-2008



Margo Hoff was born into a large family in Tulsa in 1910.

As a child she spent many hours playing outside, finding patterns in nature, a practice she pursued throughout her life, rendering them as bright, textural paintings.

Hoff graduated from Tulsa University in 1931. Three years later she moved to Chicago, enrolling in the National Academy of Art and later at SAIC. In 1939 she spent a few months in Europe traveling and looking at art, and during her lifetime she traveled and worked in over twenty-five countries, including Brazil, Ethiopia, and Lebanon.

Hoff's early paintings usually feature a stylized figure in a flat, patterned, and often perspectively skewed space, evoking a sense of mystery or a dreamlike quality. She included images of children, holidays, animals, and seashores, still emphasizing design and geometry. With the protagonist usually absorbed in an activity, the viewer is left to construct a narrative to accompany the scene.

Hoff's content is largely autobiographical, constantly changing with her environs and activities.

The human figure remained an important component in her work until two pivotal moments encouraged an interest in abstraction: watching Sputnik I fly over the Earth (1957) and viewing an object through an electron microscope. Hoff became increasingly aware of the space surrounding the figures, rather than just the figures themselves. The human form eventually disappeared from her work, leaving abstract shapes of color in kaleidoscopic arrangements.

After moving to New York in the 1960s, Hoff began making collages of painted paper. In 1962 UNICEF chose one of her designs for their Christmas cards. In 1970 Hoff switched from paper to canvas collages, using vibrant colors to conjure up such sensations as the experience of a crowd, the rhythm of jazz, or the wail of night sirens. She also created lithographs, sculpture, stained-glass windows, wood block prints, and book illustrations. She has painted murals and designed tapestries and rugs, as well as stage sets and costumes.

Hoff showed in exhibitions at Art Institute Chicago (1945, 1946, 1950, and 1953), winning several prizes. In addition to her long-standing association with Fairweather-Hardin Gallery, which began in 1955 with her first one-person exhibition in Chicago, Hoff's work has been shown often in New York, including Hadler-Rodriguez Galleries, Saidenberg Gallery, Babcock Gallery, Betty Parsons Gallery, and Banter Gallery; and in Paris at Wildenstein Gallery.

Her work can be found in the collections of major museums including The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Corcoran Gallery of Art and the National Museum of American Art, Washington, DC; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and Art Institute of Chicago.