

PEYTON WRIGHT

237 East Palace Avenue
Santa Fe, NM 87501

800 879-8898
505 989-9888
505 989-9889 Fax
fineart@peytonwright.com

Robert Natkin

(American Painter, 1930-2010)



Robert Natkin was an American abstract painter, who worked since the early 1950s to create lyrical paintings, which are represented in the permanent collections of major museums as well as in corporate and private collections and galleries in the USA, Europe and Japan.

In his book on art movements of the second half of the twentieth century, published in 1999 and entitled *Art Today*, Edward Lucie-

Smith describes Natkin's work as "the ultimate development" in that part of American Art Modernism that is referred to as color abstraction. He writes of Natkin's paintings that "sumptuous colour orchestration can probably be carried no further" and "as exercises of painterly virtuosity they are unsurpassed."

In a 1991 book entitled *The Many Masks of Modern Art*, Theodore F. Wolff notes that Natkin is far from being "a formal purist, a designer and architect of abstract compositions intended to stand strictly on their own." Wolff describes Natkin's paintings as "subtle evocations of the gentler, more ineffable levels and dimensions of our physical and spiritual universe" and sums up their impact by calling the artist "a visual poet whose apparently abstract images actually exist to enchant us with intimations and evocations of things we can sense but never quite see."

Natkin's style evolved through several series of paintings, sometimes revisited. As influences that have affected his work he names American jazz vocalists such as Nina Simone and Billie Holliday as well as Post-Impressionist, Cubist and Abstract Expressionist painters.

Born in Chicago in 1930, Natkin encountered Abstract Expressionism in 1949 through an article in *Life* magazine. At that time a student at the Art Institute of Chicago, he later lived briefly in New York, where he felt deeply influenced by Willem de Kooning's paintings.

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Returning to Chicago, he became closely associated with other Chicago artists, including his future wife, Judith Dolnick, and opened a gallery in which their work was exhibited in the late 1950s. These artists, including Natkin, were prominent in Chicago's 1957 Momentum exhibition; and in 1960 Natkin was included in the Young America exhibition at the Whitney Museum in New York.

Among the museums now holding his art in their collections are the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the Guggenheim, as well as the Art Institute of Chicago, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, NY, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the San Francisco Museum of Art, to name only a few in this country; plus the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, Australia.