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Beulah Stevenson

(American Painter, 1895-1965)

Beulah Stevenson was born in 1895 in Brooklyn Heights, New York, where she lived and worked until her death. She studied at Pratt Institute, then later at the Art Student's League with John Sloan, who exposed her to American Scene painting and social realism. Sloan encouraged her to visit Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she acquired a second residence in the late 1950s .

In the 1940s, Stevenson studied with German painter Hans Hofmann in Provincetown, Massachusetts, leading her to adopt modernism and a personal form of abstract expressionism.

Stevenson was a printmaker, painter, illustrator, teacher, as well as a curator at the Brooklyn Museum. She maintained active membership in a range of artist's organizations including the New York Society of Woman Artists (president), National Association of Women Artists (board member from 1949), Brooklyn Society of Artists (vice-president), Art Institute of Chicago, International Graphic Society Inc., Philadelphia Print Club, Provincetown Art Association and the Creative Artist's Association. She was a member of the American Artist Congress which endorsed government support of art unions and promoted the social-realist style of American scene painting. When the Congress' affiliation with the Communist Party increased, Stevenson left it to join the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors, established to promote avant-garde art.

Among the solo shows of Stevenson's career were exhibitions at the Fifteen Gallery, Morris Gallery, Laurel Gallery and Santa Fe Museum of Art, as well as abroad in Paris and London. She also participated in numerous group shows including the Art Institute of Chicago; Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Print Club of Philadelphia; National Arts Club, New York; and in Paris.

Stevenson's dynamic oeuvre embraced diverse subject matter including views of Manhattan and Brooklyn, the Santa Fe landscape, rural landscapes and genre scenes, as well as the abstract and modernist images of her later work.

According to the *New World Telegram* review of a 1938 Fifteen Gallery group show, Stevenson was "the liveliest and least conventional member of the group, contributing several prints and drawings marked by vivid almost busy angular patterns." *The Evening Post* commented on the lithographs in a 1931 solo show as "a medium in which the artist is at home and expresses a delightful version of the subjects which she depicts . . . There is a witty note in them all, a rich vein of personal expression which is pleasant to encounter."

Stevenson's fusion of realism and abstraction was progressively modernist for its time, causing critics to remark on her "objective abstraction" and the manner in which she "looks to nature for her impetus, but prefers to record its essence more than its actuality" (*Herald Tribune,* January 16, 1938). Although her work clearly presents a cubist vernacular in its dissolution and juxtaposition of forms, the underlying structure of her images retains a faithfulness to literal representation. The vitality of this union of styles and Stevenson's perpetually optimistic outlook brought her popular success as well as recognition from her peers; critics described her as "an experimenter in originality" and a "Happy Modernist."

She was the recipient of many awards for her work, notably from the Society of Women Artists, American Society of Contemporary Woman Artists, National Association of Woman Artists and the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Her work is included in numerous museum and public collections including the New York Public Library; the Brooklyn Museum; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D,C.; the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; Bates College Museum of Art ,Lewiston, Maine; the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts; the Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, Indianapolis, Indiana; and the Library of Congress, among others.