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George Chann (1913-1995)

George Chann was born in the Chung-shan village of Canton, China in 1913 and at age twelve, he emigrated with his father to California.

He showed talent in painting and was invited to attend Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles, with a full scholarship, and later taught painting as an assistant teacher. In 1942 to 1946, he excelled in painting delicate Occidental landscapes and showed a special flair for portraits. He was said “to make the sitter’s nature an open book. He did not just apply color, he used it, as if it were a natural extension of his thoughts and feelings.”

He is best known for Chinese calligraphy-incorporated abstract expressionist paintings, which he began producing in the '50s. He also produced social-realism works, painting poor blacks, Chinese, and Mexicans, especially the aged and the orphaned.

Such American artists as Mark Tobey, Franz Kline, and Lee Krazner, who drew inspiration from Eastern calligraphy, were both drawn to and influenced by Chann’s unique style.

Drawing on both traditional aesthetics and the new European experimental abstractions, Chann developed fresh artistic interpretations that contributed significantly to the development of 20th Century Abstract Art. Combining his command of calligraphy with his mastery of modern painting theory, Chann boldly brought to his canvas the distant Chinese landscapes of his imagination.

His rich, complex, and detailed visual layers are dazzling to behold and reflect the artist’s unique painting style that fuses Chinese calligraphy and novel abstract experimentations in a distinctly Chinese fashion. George Chann has a special place in the history of American Abstract Expressionism as a quintessential Chinese-American artist.

Biographical sources: Otis.edu; artist website; Vincent Vallarino Gallery