

PEYTON WRIGHT

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Eleanor de Laittre

(1911-1998)

Eleanor de Laittre was born in Minneapolis on April 3, 1911. She attended Northrop Collegiate School in Minneapolis, ca. 1925-1927 and the Madeira School. She entered Smith College in 1929, where she became interested in art after taking a course in art theory.

She left Smith to pursue her newfound interest and spent two years in life and drawing classes at the school of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. In 1932, she left Boston for

New York, first to study with George Luks, and after Luks's death, with John Sloan.

As a young artist in New York, De Laittre became friends with Fanny Hillsmith, who shared her growing fascination with modern art. Through illustrations and the paintings then to be seen in New York, De Laittre taught herself the principles of abstract art by working in the manner of European masters. An early painting explored form in the style of Modigliani, but, De Laittre explained, she discovered the laws of perspective after looking at Miró, while Klee's paintings inspired experimentation with textural richness. Soon De Laittre put aside the portraits and landscapes that had occupied her student years, and although not yet an abstract artist, her paintings took on a simplicity and a calligraphic clarity reminiscent of Raoul Dufy.

After her marriage in 1934, De Laittre moved to Chicago. Over the next several years, she exhibited regularly in annual exhibitions at the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1939, her work was shown both at the Golden Gate Exposition and the New York World's Fair.

Back in New York by 1940, she became active in the American Abstract Artists, with whom she exhibited annually from 1940 until 1946, and in the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors. Her work matured during her six years in Chicago, and by the 1940s, Cubism offered the most compelling problems of space and form. The spatial configuration De Laittre employed in the small Untitled painting of 1949 is an adaptation from Picasso's large Three Musicians in the Gallatin Collection. By juxtaposing background areas of white, blue, and bare brown canvas, however, De Laittre enhanced the flattened space inhabited by the abstract linear shapes.

Increasingly during the 1940s, De Laittre turned to sculpture. At Ibram Lassaw's studio she learned the technical processes of welding in steel. Her highly refined, welded sculpture of the 1940s evidences a growing awareness of Surrealism, and the intricate interweaving of steel and open space showed affinities with the work of David Hare.

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Although she never stopped painting, De Laittre in her later years preferred the challenges presented by articulating three-dimensional form and space. Yet, the lyrical balance of mass and openness in her current sculpture retained echoes of her earlier affection for Analytical Cubism.

Exhibitions:

1933 Group exhibition, Midtown Gallery, New York
1933 Group exhibition, Contemporary Arts Galleries, New York
1934 Group exhibition, Montross Gallery, New York
1934 Group exhibition, Uptown Gallery of the Continental Club, New York
1938 Group exhibition, Art Institute, Chicago
1939 Solo exhibition, Contemporary Arts Galleries, New York
1941 Group exhibition, American Abstract Artists, Riverside Museum, New York
1942 Group exhibition, American Abstract Artists, American Fine Arts Building, New York
1942 Solo exhibition, Paul Theobald Gallery, Chicago
1943 Solo exhibition, Puma Gallery, New York
1943 Group exhibition, Puma Gallery, New York
1943 Group exhibition, American-British Art Center, New York
1944 Group exhibition, American Abstract Artists, Mortimer Brandt Gallery, New York
1945 Group exhibition, American Abstract Artists, Riverside Museum, New York
1946 Group exhibition, American Abstract Artists, American-British Art Center, New York
1947 Group exhibition, American Abstract Artists, Riverside Museum, New York
1950 Group exhibition, Hacker Gallery and Bookshop, New York
1952 Group exhibition, American Abstract Artists, New Gallery, New York
1952 Group exhibition, Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors annual, National Arts Club, New York
1953 Group exhibition, American Abstract Artists Equity Association, New York
1954 Group exhibition, American Abstract Artists, Riverside Museum, New York
1956 Group exhibition, American Abstract Artists, Riverside Museum, New York
1982 Group exhibition, Diamond Gallery, New York
1984 Duo exhibition, Martin Diamond Fine Arts, New York
1989 Group exhibition, National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.
1999 Group exhibition, David Findlay Jr. Inc., New York

Biographical sources: Smithsonian; Askart; Wikipedia