



## ***“She Sweeps with Many-Colored Brooms”: Paintings and Prints by Emily Mason***

November 22, 2020 - March 21, 2021

Bruce Museum, Greenwich, Connecticut



Emily Mason (American, 1932-2019). *Ask the East*, 1968. Oil on paper.  
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**GREENWICH, CT, November 9, 2020** – Named for one of the artist’s favorite Emily Dickinson poems, the new Bruce Museum exhibition ***“She Sweeps with Many-Colored Brooms”:  
Paintings and Prints by Emily Mason*** showcases the vibrant work of Emily Mason (1932-2019). Characterized by brilliant hues laid down in thin layers of varying transparency, often superimposed in surprising color combinations, Mason’s work is the result of a rare alliance between spontaneity and premeditation.

On view in the Bruce Museum’s recently renovated main art gallery from November 22, 2020 through March 21, 2021, this major new art exhibition highlights Mason’s earliest experiments in oil on paper and in printmaking from two decades of intense innovation in her career: paintings from 1958 to 1968 and prints from 1985 to 1996.

Born into a family with an artistic legacy that stretched back to early American history painter John Trumbull (1756-1843) and included her mother, the noted abstract painter Alice Trumbull Mason (1904-1971), Emily Mason carved out a nuanced artistic path of her own.

Mason first engaged materials and techniques in her mother’s studio, and came to maturity in the fevered context of the New York art world of the 1940s and ‘50s. As a teenager, she



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attended meetings of “The Club” of Abstract Expressionists alongside her mother, rubbing shoulders with Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Elaine and Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko, and their circle. Mason’s mother was very close to the sculptor Ibram Lassaw, who was one of the group’s founders. The composer John Cage frequented the Club, and also the painter Joan Mitchell, who was to become a particular inspiration to Emily Mason during her formative years. By the late 1950s, Mason was fully engaged in the new movement defined by gesture, power, and spontaneity.

Reflecting her exposure to innumerable artistic influences, Mason’s work is often described as lying at the intersection of Abstract Expressionism and Color Field painting. During the decade that is one focus of this exhibition, 1958 to 1968, she moved beyond Abstract Expressionism, first forging a style of gestural abstraction grounded in pure color, creating a highly personal style that depends on complex effects of transparency and opacity, of layering, dripping, and bleeding oil paints on paper, to produce dynamic contrasts of color and texture. She explored ways to manipulate oil paint in order to produce these various effects and gain mastery of her medium, while also searching for and finding her unique artistic voice. Often, she pushed these experiments forward using the intimate medium of oil on paper. Paper was also expedient – she could work on many surfaces at once and then put them out of reach of babies’ hands!



Emily Mason working in her New York studio. 1996. Photographed by Rolf Gibbs.

“Emily Mason’s greatest achievement is to have translated the language of Abstract Expressionism, which was always one of gesture and movement, into an abstraction of pure color composed in delicate veils and washes,” says Robert Wolterstorff, The Susan E. Lynch Executive Director and one of the organizers of the exhibition. “These works on paper, created within a single decade near the beginning of her career, are central to that achievement. Hard fought, improvisatory, and experimental, they are not only a record of that achievement – they are where she worked it out.”

Years later, in the 1980s, when Mason began creating prints, she was faced with a new challenge: how to adapt her artistic method, rooted in painterly spontaneity, to printmaking, an art form that requires a highly controlled and collaborative approach.

Mason embarked on a new period of intense experimentation with printmaking from 1985 to 1996. A significant moment in her printmaking career came when master printer Anthony Kirk suggested using carborundum to make her plates, a technique employed by the Surrealist artist Joan Miró during the 1960s. Mason would subsequently adapt the technique to suit her own creative needs. The result was what she called “printed painting” – prints that translated the layered, intuitive, and spontaneous aesthetic of her oils into the print medium.



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Although initially doubtful that she could preserve the sense of excitement and surprise she associated with painting, Mason came to understand printmaking's special ability to produce unexpected results. "With print," she told an audience in Brattleboro, Vermont, in 2017, "it's magical. Something happens once it's in the press, and you absolutely don't know what it's going to look like 'til it comes out."

*"She Sweeps with Many-Colored Brooms": Paintings and Prints by Emily Mason* focuses on two intensely experimental bodies of work, both of which capture Mason mastering a new medium. Mason's early paintings in oil on paper and early prints illuminate a lifetime devoted to creative spontaneity, and richly demonstrate the subtle, complex, and beautiful aesthetic that was distinctly Mason's own.

The exhibition is organized by Robert Wolterstorff, The Susan E. Lynch Executive Director, Kenneth E. Silver, Adjunct Curator of Art, and 2020-2021 Bruce Museum Resident Fellow H.S. Miller. The exhibition will be accompanied by a virtual lecture series and other special events.

The Bruce Museum is hosting a Member Appreciation Weekend, Friday, November 20 – Sunday, November 22, with a members-only preview of the new exhibition on Friday and Saturday, November 20-21. To make a reservation for time-ticketed admission to this limited-capacity preview, or to join as a member, visit [brucemuseum.org](http://brucemuseum.org) or call 203-869-0376, ext. 311. Members can also enjoy a Double Discount (20%) in the Museum Store during Member Appreciation Weekend (the new official Greenwich Monopoly game not included).

*"She Sweeps with Many-Colored Brooms": Paintings and Prints by Emily Mason* is supported by a Committee of Honor Chaired by Lily Downing and David Yudain, Mr. and Mrs. William Fitzgerald, Ellen Flanagan, Felicity Kostakis, Gale and Bob Lawrence, Cricket and Jim Lockhart, and Nicole Reynolds. The Bruce Museum is grateful for exhibition support from Rockefeller Capital Management, Greenwich, and the Connecticut Office of the Arts.

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### **About the Bruce Museum**

The Bruce Museum is a community-based, world-class institution highlighting art and science. Accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, the Bruce has been voted the best museum in Fairfield County by area media in recent years. Located in a park setting just off I-95, exit 3, at 1 Museum Drive in Greenwich, Connecticut, the Bruce Museum is a 5-minute walk from the Metro-North Greenwich Station. The Bruce Museum is open in accordance with current state and local guidelines and with advance reservations for timed ticketed entry. To make a reservation or for additional information, call the Bruce Museum at 203-869-0376 or visit [brucemuseum.org](http://brucemuseum.org).

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