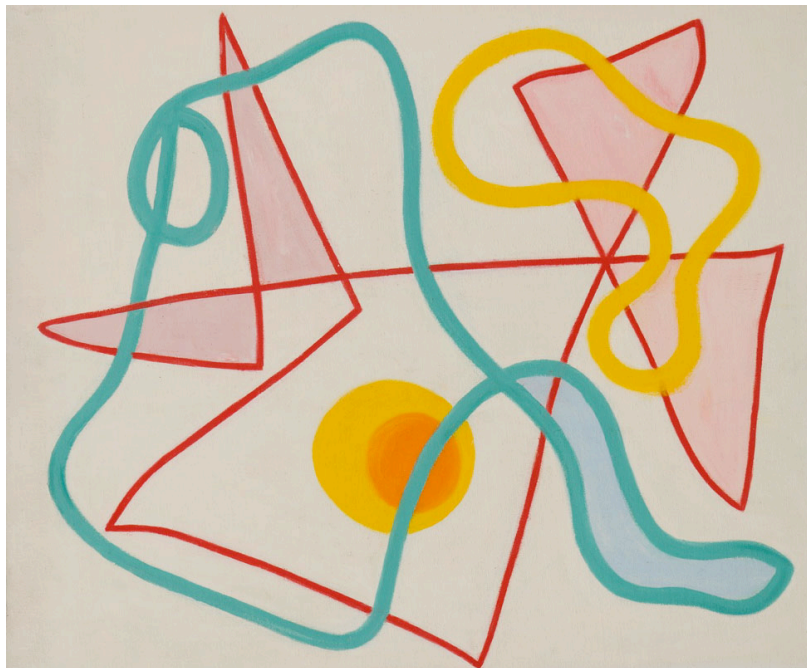


The New York Times

Review: Flora Crockett, a Forgotten Abstract Painter

A Forgotten Abstractionist Roars Back in Bright, Jangly Lines

by Roberta Smith - November 10, 2015



Flora Crockett (1892-1979), 5-69, Oil on canvas board, 20 x 24 inches

The paintings of the American abstractionist Flora Crockett have not been exhibited in New York since a group show at the Overseas Press Club of America in 1965. That was the year she turned 73 and began her most productive period as a painter.

After Ms. Crockett died in 1979, her canvases from 1965 to 1973 were inherited by a nephew, Austin Hart Emery, an engineer and great admirer of his aunt, who stored them in his barn outside Albany. He always meant to do something with them but never got around to it, and so the job fell to his daughter, Mary Emery Lacoursiere, an artist and designer living on Nantucket, in Massachusetts. She was introduced to Meredith Ward, whose New York gallery specializes in 20th-century American artists, especially forgotten ones. Ms. Ward saw photographs of the paintings and was immediately intrigued.

And so at the moment about two dozen of Ms. Crockett's sparkling late paintings, with their bright tangles of jazzy lines and shapes floating on pale, brushy backgrounds, form a surprising exhibition at Meredith Ward Fine Art. This is our first sighting of a body of work that could hold its own in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art or the Museum of Modern Art and in the history of American abstract painting.

They are accompanied by a catalog that contains the first published account of Ms. Crockett's life and speculates about her development, written by Ms. Ward. She used Ms. Crockett's papers, which are being organized by Isabella Rosner, a Columbia student, working with Ms. Lacoursiere.

Loosely geometric and modest in size, Ms. Crockett's paintings are elegant, knowing and at ease, made by a practiced hand. They indicate a familiarity with 20th-century abstraction: Mondrian's quietly robust brushwork, and the levitating compositions of Kandinsky, Miró and Léger. They also suggest exposure to American liberators of geometry like the painters Charles Green Shaw and Stuart Davis.

But the sharp colors and dynamic compositions feel hip, fresh and very much her own. Ms. Crockett's paintings are in step with their time, a moment after Pop Art and Color Field painting had given color new heat.

Ms. Crockett left very little imprint on the art world, perhaps because she always had to work to support herself. She seems to have had a total of three solo shows during her life. One was in 1937 in Paris, where she had lived since 1924, just before the impending World War drove her back to the United States. The second was in 1939 in the town library of Potsdam, N.Y., where the W.P.A. had sent her to run an art school. The third was in 1946 at the Bonestell Gallery in New York.

And yet despite Ms. Crockett's challenges, the paintings at Meredith Ward attest to an optimism that seems to have been backed by an inborn sense of determination unusual for women of her generation. Ms. Crockett was born in Grelton, Ohio, in 1892, to a family of farmers whose ancestors included Davy Crockett, which may have something to do with the independence gene. She graduated from Oberlin College in 1911 with a major in art and mathematics and headed for Detroit to study to become an art teacher.

In 1915 she landed a job as supervisor of art for the public schools of Roslyn, N.Y., where she married an Italian-born sculptor, Edmondo Quattrocchi (1889-1966). Next stop, Paris.

Ms. Crockett seems to have taken full advantage of this sojourn. She studied at the Sorbonne and the school of the Louvre while directing a school for war orphans in Poissy, outside Paris. In 1926 she enrolled as a student in Léger's Académie Moderne, eventually serving as its director until 1931. And then, in 1937, having divorced, she came home, settling in New York.

In 1940 she rented an apartment at 233 West 14th Street, almost directly opposite Duchamp's studio at 210, and lived there for the rest of her life. She supported herself with various jobs - in design, sales, engineering and also teaching - trying to save enough money so she could take time off for her art.

A belated and remarkable growth spurt ensued as her abstract vocabulary came into its own in a remarkably up-to-date way. Two canvases from 1967 have backgrounds of blocks of pale color,

as if painted over an earlier geometric style. Then come a series of works that seem based on energetic doodles of whose peregrinations create delicate amalgams of shapes that are then filled in with vibrant colors. These are wonderful works, but, except for their palette, they might date from the interwar period.

Over the next three years the lines thicken, take on color and come to dominate, flitting and flirting across the canvas while the shapes become fewer and almost disappear. The internal scale is bolder and the compositions have a graphic bounce. In "77-82," a blue line loops about the surface, while a red one zigzags through the center: Two very different signatures are competing, and they're both winning

Yet "66," from 1966, may be Ms. Crockett's masterpiece, with its band of yellow-orange snaking among pale wine-red islands, all on a kind of painting-within-a-painting of mint green. Little blocks of blue and pink pin things down and an undulant vertical of red claims the right edge - and its own space. How many more women like Flora Crockett await discovery?

The New York Times

The Best in Art of 2015

By **HOLLAND COTTER** and **ROBERTA SMITH** DEC. 9, 2015

The co-chief art critics for The New York Times
on the most notable themes of the year.

8. An Eye for History

Commercial galleries did their bit to excavate the past. The superb biomorphic paintings of Flora Crockett (1891-1979), a forgotten American abstractionist, surfaced at Meredith Ward Fine Art. Andrea Rosen reintroduced Stan VanDerBeek's 1960s forays into abstract film and language. Luxembourg & Dayan's look at the rambunctious art of the Italian Enrico Baj still fills its dinky uptown townhouse (through Jan. 30). And last summer, in a coup, Gavin Brown's Enterprise bid farewell to Greenwich Street by restaging Jannis Kounellis's legendary Arte Povera installation centering on a herd of cooperative horses.