

“When I start a picture I like to use the medium as directly as I can . . . [this] puts me in a state of mind which avoids pictorial constraints. I try to use paint for its brilliance, transparency, opacity, liquidity, weight, warmth and coolness. These qualities guide me in a process which will determine the climate of the picture. All the while I work to define spatial relationships, resulting in certain kinds of places. I cannot name them but know intuitively when they appear.”

— **EMILY MASON** (1932-2019)

Born and raised in New York City, Emily Mason’s art education began in the studio with her mother Alice Trumbull Mason, a founding member of the American Abstract Artists. A graduate of New York City’s High School of Music and Art, she attended Bennington College and The Cooper Union. In 1956, she was awarded a two-year Fulbright Grant to paint in Venice, Italy. There, she studied at the Accademia di Belle Arti where she first experimented with blotting and transferring paint onto the surface of the canvas. In 1957, at the Ponte de Rialto, Mason married painter Wolf Kahn (1927-2020), with whom she had two daughters.

Since she emerged on the 10th Street gallery scene in 1960 with Area Gallery, Mason has exhibited regularly in New York City. In 1979 she was awarded the Ranger Fund Purchase Prize by the National Academy of Design. For more than 30 years, Mason taught painting at Hunter College. Her work is included in numerous public and private collections.

In 2006, George Braziller published *Emily Mason: The Fifth Element*, a comprehensive treatment of her work by David Ebony and Robert Berling. In 2015, University Press of New England released her second monograph, *Emily Mason: The Light in Spring*, featuring prints and paintings since 2005, edited by Ani Boyajian with text by David Ebony and Christina Weyl. In 2025, Rizzoli Electra published *Emily Mason: Unknown to Possibility*, edited by Elisa Wouk Almino, with texts and contributions by Barbara Stehle, Naz Cuguoglu, David Ebony, Morgan English, Carrie Moyer, Steven R. Rose, Jenni Sorkin, and Nari Ward, offering a long-overdue look at Mason’s contribution to New York abstraction.

Mason passed away on 10 December 2019, the birthdate of her namesake, Emily Dickinson.

CHRONOLOGY

1932

Emily Mason is born in New York City on 12 January to the artist Alice Trumbull Mason and Warwood Edwin Mason, a sea captain for American Export Lines.

1933

Mason's brother Jonathan ("Jo") Trumbull Mason is born on 16 November.

1934–1937

Mason attends the Little Red School House in Greenwich Village.

1938

In 1938, Mason's mother moves the family from Horatio Street in Greenwich Village to Knickerbocker Village, located between the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges.

1942

Mason's mother rents the family a bungalow near Fishkill, New York for the summer of 1942. She and the children plant what was known during the war years as a Victory Garden, or a vegetable garden. Later, Mason would fondly recall her mother teaching her to make ketchup from their tomatoes: "To this day, I cannot stand commercially made ketchup."

1942–1945

Mason spends part of her childhood summers in Friendship, Maine, with her aunt Mary McGarvey. Due to a circulatory condition, Mason's father becomes the port captain for the American Export Line, allowing him to be home with the family and no longer away at sea. The family moves to West 85th Street near Riverside Drive, and Mason is enrolled in Public School No. 9.

1946–1950

Mason attends the High School of Music and Art. In June 1950, she graduates from the High School of Music and Art and enrolls in Bennington College in Bennington, Vermont.

1951–1952

Mason transfers from Bennington College to The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York. In the summer, Mason attends the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine, where she is particularly influenced by Jack Lenor Larsen's lecture on analogous color.

1954–1955

In the summer of 1954, Mason travels throughout Europe. The trip has an enormous impact on Mason and shapes much of her understanding of Western art. In France, she sees the recently discovered Lascaux Caves. In Italy, she sees Giotto's frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, the mosaics in Ravenna, and the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.

Mason graduates from Cooper Union in 1955. In the summer of that year, she attends the summer program at the Yale Norfolk School of Art in New Haven, Connecticut.

1956

Mason is awarded a Fulbright grant to study in Venice.

In April, at a meeting of the Artist's Club, she meets the artist Wolf Kahn. Mason spends the summer with him in Provincetown, Massachusetts, where she observes a critique given by Hans Hofmann at his school.

The following fall, Mason sets sail for Venice along with other Fulbright scholars. The group studies Italian for a month in Perugia, where Mason's roommate is Lee Bontecou. When the course is over, Mason travels to Venice and enrolls in the Accademia di Belle Arti, where she studies with Bruno Saetti. In December, Mason meets Kahn in Le Havre, France, and they stop briefly in Paris before returning to Venice together.

1957

In Venice, Mason and Kahn rent the large central room of a palazzo on the Giudecca. During the winter they live and paint in a small room.

Mason and Kahn marry in March at the municipal building near the Rialto Bridge. In the spring, the couple travels to Rome to visit friends Gretna Campbell, Louis Finkelstein in Frascati, and Lee Bontecou in Trastevere. Mason's paintings earn her a second year of the Fulbright Grant.

1958

Mason and Kahn spend April in Greece before spending another summer in Venice.

In November, Mason and Kahn set off for the United States, stopping first in Paris and then in Spain. In Madrid, they visit the Prado Museum. After a brief stay in Granada, they depart for New York City from Gibraltar.

Mason's brother Jonathan disappears in Portland, Oregon, and after many months his body is found in the Puget Sound.

1959

Back in New York, Mason and Kahn live in a loft on Broadway and 12th Street. In September, Mason gives birth to their first daughter, Cecily. At the end of the year, Mason joins the Area Gallery on Tenth Street, an artist-run space.

1960–1962

Mason's first solo exhibition opens at the Area Gallery in 1960, featuring the work made in Venice. Another two shows follow in 1961 and 1962. In the fall of 1962, Mason returns to Italy with her family, where they settle in Milan for the winter.

1964

In March, Mason gives birth to her second daughter, Melany, in Rome.

1965

The family returns to New York, living and sharing studio space at their Broadway loft.

1967

Mason and Kahn move to a new apartment on East 15th Street. Their Broadway loft is now used only as a shared studio.

1968

In the spring, Mason and Kahn purchase a farm in West Brattleboro, Vermont. Mason uses the property's combined blacksmith shop and chicken coop as a studio.

1971

Emily's mother, Alice Trumbull Mason, passes away on 28 June, succumbing to alcohol-related complications.

1973

In April, Mason and her family travel to Kenya. They visit Nairobi, the Samburu National Reserve, Lake Naivasha, Malindi, Lamu Island, Masai Mara National Reserve, and Marsabit.

1974

Mason's father, Warwood Edwin Mason, dies in February.

1977

An exhibition of Mason's work opens at the Landmark Gallery in New York. Two more exhibitions follow in 1978 and 1981.

1979

Mason moves into a studio of her own at West 20th Street.

In the fall, Mason begins teaching at Hunter College, where she continues to teach for more than 30 years.

Mason is awarded the Ranger Fund Purchase Prize by the National Academy of Design.

1984

A solo exhibition of Mason's work opens at the Grace Borgenicht Gallery in New York. Mason exhibits with Borgenicht in 1987, 1990, and 1992.

1985

The Associated American Artists gallery commissions a print edition from Mason. She employs a technique suggested by the printmaker Anthony Kirk, using carborundum to establish an image from which to print.

Mason and Kahn travel to Albuquerque, New Mexico to work at the renowned Tamarind Institute where she creates an edition and a portfolio of monoprints and monotypes.

1987

Mason continues her experiments in printmaking, creating two portfolios of monotypes at the Garner Tullis Workshop in Santa Barbara, California.

1997

Mason begins to show at the MB Modern Gallery in New York. She exhibits there in 1998, 1999, and 2001.

2001

Mason begins exhibiting at David Findlay Jr. Gallery, New York, where she shows regularly through 2015.

2004

A solo exhibition of Mason's paintings opens at the LewAllen Galleries in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she shows regularly through 2020. An exhibition of Mason's prints opens at the Scuola Internazionale di Grafica in Venice, Italy.

2005

Mason's first monograph, *Emily Mason: The Fifth Element*, is published by George Braziller Press, featuring a comprehensive presentation of her career.

A solo exhibition of Mason's prints opens at the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center in Vermont.

A solo exhibition of Mason's paintings opens at the Ogunquit Museum of American Art in Maine.

2008

Contemplating Color, a traveling exhibition of Mason's paintings organized by LewAllen Galleries, is shown at LewAllen Galleries in Santa Fe and at the Art Museum of South Texas in Corpus Christi.

2015

Mason's second monograph, *Emily Mason: The Light in Spring*, is released by University Press of New England, featuring prints and paintings since 2005.

2016

Mason begins exhibiting at Ameringer | McEnery | Yohe in New York.

Miles McEnery Gallery

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2017

Inventing Downtown: Artist-Run Galleries in New York City 1952-1965 opens at the Grey Art Gallery at New York University featuring work Mason had shown with the Area Gallery in the 1960s.

2018

Emily Mason: To Another Place, a retrospective of Mason's career opens at the Brattleboro Museum of Art in Vermont.

2019

Mason has her second exhibition at Miles McEnery Gallery in New York.

Mason and Kahn are each awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Arts from Marlboro College in Vermont.

Color/Gesture: Early Work by Emily Mason, an exhibition featuring Mason's early paintings on paper, opens at the Bennington Museum.

Mason passes away in Brattleboro, Vermont on 10 December and is laid to rest on the hill behind her house.

2020

Mason is honored as a Centurion Master by the Century Association by the Century Association and is celebrated with a survey of her canvases and works on paper.

She Sweeps with Many-Colored Brooms: Paintings and Prints by Emily Mason opens at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Connecticut.

2021

Chelsea Paintings, a post-humous, historical exhibition featuring work made by Mason in her loft studio opens at Miles McEnery Gallery, New York. Mason's work and legacy is represented by Miles McEnery Gallery to the present day.

2023

A New Surface, a New Problem: Paintings on Paper by Emily Mason, an exhibition featuring Mason's last decade of paintings on paper, opens at Weber Fine Art in Greenwich, Connecticut.

The Thunder Hurried Slow, an in-depth, historical exhibition featuring Mason's canvases from the 1970s, opens at Miles McEnery Gallery in New York.

2025

Emily Mason: Unknown to Possibility, the first comprehensive survey of Mason's life and work, is published by Rizzoli Electa, reaffirming her place among the most significant abstract painters of her generation.

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