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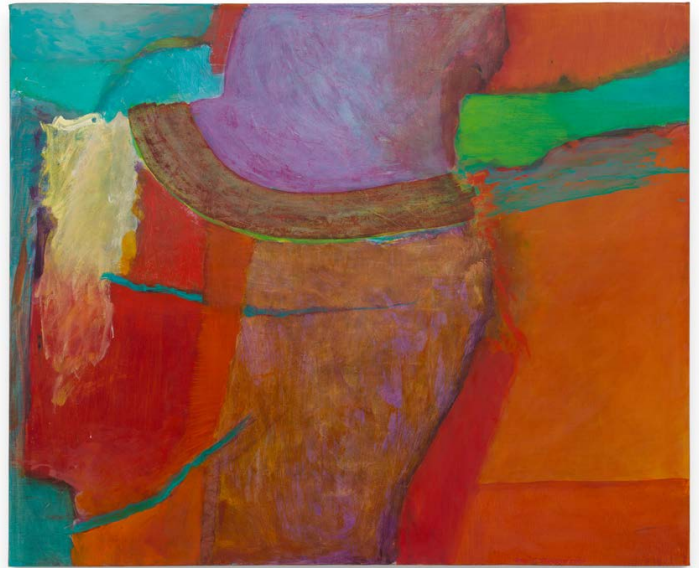
# EMILY MASON

## FRIEZE MASTERS

THE REGENT'S PARK, LONDON  
9 – 13 OCTOBER 2024  
STAND S19

MILES McENERY GALLERY is delighted to share a solo presentation of works by Emily Mason (1932-2019) at the 2024 edition of Frieze Masters, London.

This selection of paintings represents a holistic overview of Emily Mason's singular approach to painting, developed over six decades of dedication to gestural abstraction and the phenomenology of color.



The earliest works on display are two oil paintings on paper, dated 1962 and 1964. During this period, Mason and her husband, Wolf Kahn, had just returned from Europe and taken up residence in his studio on Broadway with their two children. Despite many of the demands of domestic life falling to Mason, she remained prolific in her practice. Using a technique that she developed during her Fulbright in Venice (1957–59), Mason found painting on paper provided space to experiment freely alongside her canvases. On a practical level, their flexibility and quick drying times allowed her to roll or lay works out under her bed at the end of a session. Mason continued working on paper into the 1970s, trading the lighter Fabriano paper for a thicker Strathmore patent paper stock that allowed her to build up and remove as she did on her canvases.

In his catalogue essay for a show representing these early works, Bruce Museum Director Robert Wolterstorff writes:

“During the decade . . . 1958–1968, she moved beyond Abstract Expressionism, first forging a style of gestural abstraction grounded in pure color, and then, by 1967–68, creating a highly personal style of delicate veils and washes of color that depends on complex effects of transparency and opacity, of layering, dripping, and bleeding thinned oil paints, to produce dynamic contrasts of color and texture.”<sup>1</sup>

By the 1980s, Mason's children were grown and she began teaching. She now also had a full-floor studio to call her own in Chelsea, New York. Her production flourished, with her works on canvas taking a more prominent place in her daily studio activity. As seen in both *Caught Sunrise First*, 1980 and *Undo the Sea*, 1985, Mason conveys the balance and restraint she had so deftly cultivated in over two decades working on paper and card stock. In a catalogue essay focused on the 1980s, Andrea Gyorody writes of Mason's development:

“Pigment, in these works, is delicately layered; it is not soaked through the canvas, as in paintings by Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis, but the paint nevertheless appears to be so flat and fused to the support as to be pre-given—a marvel of technique that led Robert Berling to write that some of Mason's paintings ‘seem for all the world to have occurred without a human agent.’”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Robert Wolterstorff, “Gesture into Color: Early Works on Paper by Emily Mason,” in *Color-Gesture: Early Works by Emily Mason* (Bennington Museum, 2019), 65.

<sup>2</sup> Andrea Gyorody, “Landscapes, Seascapes, Fire Escapes,” in *Chelsea Paintings: 1978–1997* (Miles McEnergy Gallery, 2021), 3.

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The three 2008 paintings on display represent the culmination of over five decades of experimentation, confidence, patience. While in her early career, Mason was criticized for not painting in series and cultivating a personal style, she remained steadfastly independent; improvisation, the ability to remain curious, and restraint were paramount.

From Dr. Barbara Stehle's essay "The light that lives within colors: The work of Emily Mason":

"Mason preferred exploring over establishing a recognizable style. 'Exploring, it's like being in touch with some inside energy, some force, and you know it when it starts to happen.'<sup>3</sup> Her process was focused on these interactions and the compositions that would emerge from them, the mystical lessons of paint.

"As she developed her practice, Mason increasingly cultivated an economy of gesture. Her abstractions were the result of few interventions. 'The process is a series of moves, like a chess game,' she explained.<sup>4</sup> At times, Mason barely seemed to touch the canvas, her colors beamed and yet pigments were few.

"At the end of a workday, Mason would let the painting rest. The oils would dry up a little and, in the morning, she would reengage with them. The painter was willing to follow the natural rhythm of a work. She remarked: 'This is something that is not taught in school, but time is very important in the creative process.'<sup>5</sup> Each work had a flow; some were fast, some were slow. Mason spent a lifetime refining her intuitive relationship to time, when to wait and when to act. She would stay absorbed, until she finally had that feeling in her stomach: the work was done."<sup>6</sup>



**Painting:** *Natural Ingredients*, 2008, Oil on canvas, 50 x 60 inches, 127 x 152.4 cm

**Image:** Emily Mason working with oils on paper, photography by Jean E. Davis, 1986. 2024 © Emily Mason and Alice Trumbull Mason Foundation, Inc. (ARS, New York NY)

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<sup>3</sup> Lona Foote, interview with Emily Mason, May 27, 1975, I.

<sup>4</sup> Wolterstorff, "Gesture into Color," 64.

<sup>5</sup> Emily Mason talk at Mitchell Giddings Fine Arts, December 20, 2017, Brattleboro, Vermont.

<sup>6</sup> Monograph for release with Rizzoli in Fall 2025.