

# eric firestone gallery

**Jeanne Reynal (b. 1903, Whiteplains, NY, d. 1983)** was a mosaicist whose revival of ancient techniques and experiments with abstraction mark a significant contribution to the New York School. Reynal was dedicated to challenging expectations of the medium by creating, as she described, "a new art of mosaic, a contemporary and fresh look for this ancient medium." Her work was largely abstract and was shown at prominent venues for modern art like Betty Parsons Gallery in New York City.

Born in White Plains, NY, Reynal apprenticed from 1930-38 with Boris Anrep, a Russian mosaicist working in Paris. This established her interest in working with the medium. Reynal spent the World War II years living in San Francisco and in Sierra Nevada, California. Her first solo exhibition was held in Los Angeles in 1940.

Reynal's father died in 1939, allowing her resources with which to build an art collection. She acquired a 1941 Jackson Pollock painting from Peggy Guggenheim's gallery -- one of the first ever sales of a Pollock. At this time, Reynal developed a relationship with the first director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: introducing her to the work of Pollock and other first-generation New York School artists, and helping to set the course of acquisitions and exhibitions at the museum. Reynal's closest artist friend was Arshile Gorky, and his wife Agnes (known as Mougouch). Reynal would show her own work in the SFMoMA Annual exhibitions from 1940-46. During her West Coast years, Reynal also developed a friendship with Isamu Noguchi who had enrolled, voluntarily, in an internment camp to aid other Japanese-Americans. She would later collaborate with Noguchi on mosaics for tables of his design. Reynal was also associated with the Surrealists - many of whom were living in exile in the U.S. In 1945, Reynal took a six-week visit to the Hopi, Zuni, and Navajo Indians with André and Elissa Breton as interpreter and guide.

Reynal moved to New York City in 1946. At that time, she further developed friendships with artists including Willem and Elaine de Kooning. In 1955, she married Thomas Sills, a largely self-taught African-American painter. They traveled together across Russia, Turkey, Greece, and Italy in 1959 to further study the art of mosaic. In 1960, she was asked by Elaine de Kooning to take over the organization of a show of Abstract Expressionist women artists held that year in West Texas, at Dord Fitz Gallery. It was in this period that Reynal began exhibiting with Betty Parsons Gallery.

Reynal was the subject of a traveling solo exhibition in 1964, organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The same year, a monograph of her work

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with essays by Elaine de Kooning, Dore Ashton, and Lawrence Campbell, was published. The solo show traveled to the Sheldon Museum in Lincoln, Nebraska, a city where, the following year, Reynal would create mosaic murals for the State Capitol building.

Reynal traveled with her husband, Sills, throughout South and Central America: Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru. She was influenced by indigenous art throughout her travels. In the early 1970s, Reynal began making totem sculptures utilizing mosaic tesserae and pieces of shell. These monumental works were exhibited at Betty Parsons and at the Art Association in Newport, Rhode Island. In the late 1970s, she made a series of portraits in mosaic (many of artist-friends), and depictions of animals.

Eric Firestone Gallery represents the estate of Jeanne Reynal and presented a survey exhibition of her work, *Mosaic is Light: Work by Jeanne Reynal, 1940-1970*, in 2021. Reynal's work can be found in institutional collections throughout the country, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, both New York; the Menil Collection, Houston; and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Her totemic works were recently included in the exhibition *Miró and the United States* at the Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona, Spain, and the Phillips Collection, Washington DC.