

# eric firestone gallery

## *Mosaic is Light: Work by Jeanne Reynal, 1940 - 1970*

January 28th - April 10th, 2021

Opening | January 28th, 10am -8pm

40 Great Jones St | New York, NY 10012

### For Immediate Release:



Jeanne Reynal in her Sierra Nevada studio, 1943

**ERIC FIRESTONE GALLERY, New York, NY announces the representation of the estate of JEANNE REYNAL and a survey exhibition, *Mosaic is Light: Work by Jeanne Reynal, 1940 - 1970* at 40 Great Jones Street, NYC. JANUARY 28 - APRIL 10, 2021**

This major retrospective is the first opportunity to fully examine Reynal's significant contribution to post-World War II American art. On view will be work from the early 1940s through the 1970s, including works on loan from the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Sculpture Garden.

**Jeanne Reynal (1903 – 1983)** was a mosaicist, and a first-generation New York School artist. She challenged 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 she was dedicated to the ways in which hand-cut stones and glass tiles, set on a bias, could reflect and create light across a surface. She applied tesserae (the tiles, stone, and shells she used to construct her mosaics) in loose formations, to a ground of pigmented cement. Her work was often subtle and painterly.

Reynal would begin directly, without preparatory designs, and elaborately re-work her surfaces by removing tesserae and re-applying thin layers of cement. As **Dore Ashton** wrote of her work,

*“These surfaces, so appealing to the tactile sense, carried the eye on a fantastic journey through planetary landscapes punctuated by crusty routes of closely-grouped obsidian, and soft, misty hills of pulverized mineral matter. In these compositions the artist approached the freedom of the easel painter.”*

Born in White Plains, NY to a French-Jewish family, Reynal apprenticed from 1930-38 with **Boris Anrep**, a Russian mosaicist working in Paris. She spent the World War II years living in San Francisco, and in Sierra Nevada. Her first solo exhibition was held in Los Angeles in 1940. During her California years, Reynal also developed a lifelong friendship with **Isamu Noguchi** who had enrolled, voluntarily, in an internment camp to aid other Japanese-Americans. She collaborated with Noguchi on several mosaics for tables of his design. The exhibition will include a 1942 table on loan from the **Noguchi Foundation**. Additionally, the exhibition catalog accompanying the show will include an essay by **Dakin Hart**, Senior Curator of the Noguchi Foundation, on the subject of their collaboration.



Jeanne Reynal | *The Hours and Their Birds* | 1955 | smalti, marble, and pigmented cement on board | 47 3/4 x 48”



The inheritance following Reynal's father's death in 1939 gave her the resources with which to build a significant art collection. She acquired a 1941 **Jackson Pollock** painting from **Peggy Guggenheim**'s gallery -- the first notable sale of a Pollock. At this time, Reynal developed a relationship with the first director of the **San Francisco Museum of Modern Art**, **Grace McCann Morley**. Reynal introduced Morley to the work of Pollock, and counseled her on other artists emerging in New York, such as **Arshile Gorky**: profoundly impacting the course of acquisitions and exhibitions at the museum. Another essay in the accompanying exhibition catalog will be written by Morley scholar **Berit Potter**, in the context of this collaborative relationship. Reynal was the subject of three solo exhibitions at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: the first in 1941.



Jeanne Reynal | *Untitled* | 1945 | mosaic tesserae in plaster on wood | 18 x 24"

Gorky, and his wife Agnes (known as Mougouch), were Reynal's closest friends. Reynal was associated with the Surrealists - many of whom were living in exile in the U.S. Her 1950s work utilizes the biomorphic shapes associated with the intersection of Surrealism and early Abstract Expressionist painting. Reynal's work was part of the seminal 1947 exhibition "Bloodflames" —designed by **Frederick Kiesler** and presented at the **Hugo Gallery** — alongside **Wifredo Lam**, **Roberto Matta**, **Arshile Gorky**, **David Hare**, and others.

In 1946, Reynal moved to New York City, where she would live and work for the rest of her career. In 1953, she married **Thomas Sills**, a largely self-taught African American painter, who went on to have a significant career and four solo exhibitions with **Betty Parsons Gallery** beginning in the mid-1950s. In 1960, Reynal was asked, by **Elaine de Kooning**, to take over the organization of a show of Abstract Expressionist women artists held in West Texas, at **Dord Fitz Gallery**. It was in this period that Reynal began exhibiting with Betty Parsons Gallery. She also began working with shaped surfaces: diamond, octagonal, and circular structures.



Reynal was an extensive traveler, and was influenced by indigenous art across the world. In the late 1960s, Reynal began making totem sculptures. These monumental, freestanding sculptural works, some of which are over 10 feet tall, were originally exhibited at Betty Parsons and at the **Art Association of Newport**, Rhode Island. A large group of these works will be on view in this exhibition.

Reynal's work can be found in numerous institutional collections throughout the country, including the **Museum of Modern Art**, New York; the **Whitney Museum of American Art**; the **Noguchi Foundation and Sculpture Garden**; the **Menil Collection**, Houston, and the **Los Angeles County Museum of Art**.

At left: installation of various totems in Reynal's NYC studio, 1971

Eric Firestone Gallery announces the exclusive representation of the estate of Jeanne Reynal. The gallery is committed to re-investigating the ever-evolving art historical canon, and developing the scholarship on this significant American artist.

**'MOSAIC IS LIGHT' OPENS JANUARY 28TH, 2021**

**40 Great Jones Street | New York, NY 10012**

**646.998.3727 | efg@ericfirestonegallery.com | hours: Tuesday - Saturday, 10am - 6pm**