

Dorothy Stratton King

A brooding, gestural California modernist

by Heather Peck

Dorothy Stratton (1908-2007) moved easily between painting and printmaking throughout most of her career. Today, a full decade since her death, interest in the work she produced as a California midcentury modernist is growing as museums, scholars, and collectors rediscover her richly colored and elegant work.

A recent book, **Emerging from the Shadows: A Survey of Women Artists Working in California, 1860-1960**, features a lithograph and an abstract oil landscape. The City of San Diego this year secured the rights to use a color intaglio and oil painting for municipal marketing purposes. And Stratton's work now shapes the permanent holdings of the print archives of the National Museum of American History in Washington, DC, which last year added several of her prints and plates to its vast collection of historically significant holdings.

Stratton is "one of these women who thankfully is now being given renewed attention for her thoughtful and very distinct body of work," said Maurine St. Gaudens, who wrote **Emerging from the Shadows**.

Stratton grew up in Sharon, Mass., and studied drawing and painting at Pratt Institute and the Brooklyn Museum School with Alexander Brook. After divorcing her first husband, a New York City firefighter, she moved to Los Angeles in 1944, where she painted Tom and Jerry film cells for Warner Bros Studios and designed costumes and sets for Paramount Pictures and George Paul's Puppets. In 1948, she married animator William Asbury King and spent almost two years in Paris studying painting with cubist and sculptor Andre Lhote at the L'Academy de la Grande Chaumiere.

Her vivid abstract expressionist paintings gained attention after her return to Los Angeles in the early 1950s. Studying advanced painting with Rico Lebrun at the University of California in Los Angeles, her first major solo show was held at the Pasadena Museum of Art in 1959 and, influenced by Lebrun, marked a deliberate movement from realism to abstraction.

She turned to printmaking in the 1960s in La Jolla, studying at the University of California, San Diego. In 1966-7, she worked as a technical assistant and student to printmaker Paul Lingren in the University of California in Los Angeles. By the early 1970s, her mastery of etching, aquatint, drypoint, engraving, softground collograph, and mezzotint reversed her role from university student to teacher.

She also began a meaningful friendship with printmaker Beatrice S Levy, a prominent painter and printmaker from the Chicago's modernist movement, serving as her conservator until her death in 1974. (See the July/August/September 2018 issue of the *Journal of the Print World* for Helen Peck's forthcoming article on Beatrice S. Levy.)

In the early 1980s, King and her husband moved to McLean, Virginia. There, Stratton co-founded the Washington Printmakers Gallery in 1985 and secured solo exhibitions at Acadia University in Nova Scotia in 1991 and Washington Printmaker Gallery in 1992. After her husband's death in 1990, she returned to San Diego and was honored by a retrospective of her work at the University of San Diego's Founders Gallery in 1994.

Moving back to Virginia in 1996, Stratton exhibited at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, London's Barbican Center, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art. Three Washington, DC institutions added her work to their permanent holdings in 2000-02: the Corcoran Gallery of Art, National Museum of Women in the Arts, and Georgetown University Lauinger Library's Fine Prints Collection.

She carried what the Washington Post described as a "brooding, gestural" style across both the painting and printmaking, making a distinctive contribution to the southern California modernist movement from the 1950s through the 1970s. That contribution was further enhanced by her efforts to secure Beatrice Levy's representation in exhibitions, museums, galleries, and libraries across Southern California and elsewhere.

Today, work by both Stratton and Levy is being inventoried to create a full record of their contributions. DorothyStrattonKing.com

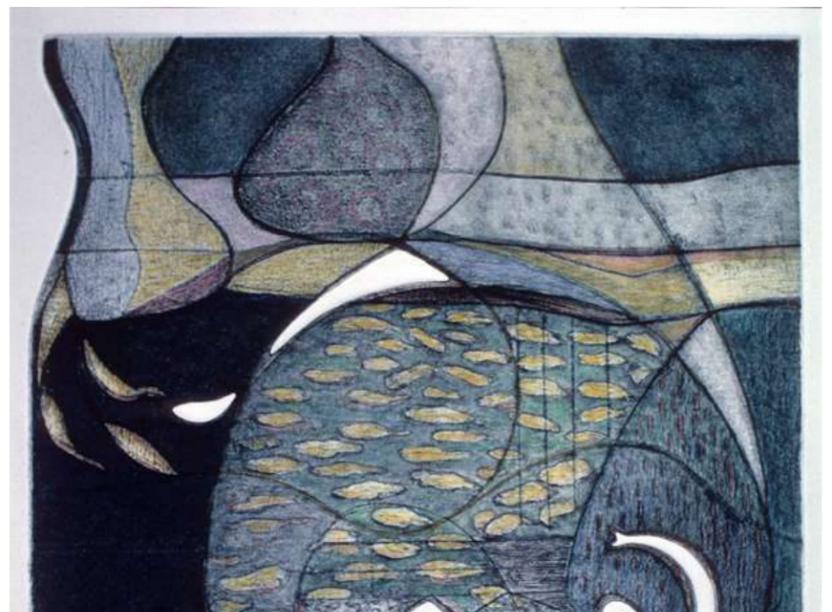
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Dorothy Stratton King



Dorothy Stratton King, "Moon"



Dorothy Stratton King, "Peer Under"