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The New York Times

Smith, Roberta "Stephen Pace, Painter and Abstract Expressionist, Is Dead at 91" *The New York Times,* October 7, 2010

Stephen Pace, Painter and Abstract Expressionist, Is Dead at 91

By Roberta Smith
Oct. 7, 2010

Stephen Pace, whose exuberant style applied Abstract Expressionist scale and directness to figurative painting, died on Sept. 23 in an assisted-living center in New Harmony, Ind. He was 91 and until two years ago had divided his time between homes in Manhattan and Stonington, Me.

The cause was pneumonia, said Katharina Rich Perlow, his New York dealer since 1985.

Mr. Pace was born in Charleston, Mo., in 1918, the second of four brothers who grew up helping their parents run a farm and a grocery store. He drew from an early age, improvising art materials until the fourth grade, when a teacher gave him a sketchbook and he saw unlined paper for the first time.

In the mid-1930s the family, still farming, moved to Harmony. Mr. Pace was entranced by the austere brick buildings of the town, which had been built as a utopian community. At 17 he began to study with Robert Lahr, a W.P.A. artist in Evansville, Ind., who emphasized anatomical studies and watercolor. He also worked as an architectural draftsman.

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Stephen Pace Katharina Rich Perlow Gallery

By the early 1950s, Mr. Pace was meeting with considerable success as a second-generation Abstract Expressionist, known for dark, energetically worked abstractions achieved through a distinctive blend of brushwork, drawing and staining. He exhibited in several Whitney Annuals, had his first New York show at the Artists Gallery in 1954 and was subsequently represented by the Poindexter Gallery and then the A. M. Sachs Gallery.

He served in the Army during World War II and studied art in Mexico on the G.I. Bill. He ended up attending a school in San Miguel de Allende, where he met the painter Milton Avery, who was on vacation. Mr. Avery encouraged him to move to New York and became a lifelong mentor and friend.

After living briefly in New Orleans, Mr. Pace moved to New York in 1947 and studied at the Art Students League and with Hans Hofmann. In 1949 he married Palmina Natalini, who worked as an art buyer for the McCann Erickson advertising agency and was often their main means of support. She is his only survivor.

Over the years Mr. Pace taught at several schools, including Pratt Institute, Bard College and American University.

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Mr. Pace liked to work from nature. Above, "At the Lily Pond." Katharina Rich Perlow Gallery

Reviewing an exhibition of his 1950s work for The New York Times in 2007, Karen Rosenberg praised it as "boisterous, confident and colorful" and said the show "proves that when he wanted to, he could gesture with the best of them."

In 1960 Mr. Pace began spending time outside New York, first in Pennsylvania and then in Maine, which reignited his interest in working from nature. By 1963, he had developed a broad-brushed representational style and a range of subjects that celebrated everyday life and labor. Some, like horse-drawn farm wagons and harvesting scenes, drew on childhood memories. Others were more current: Maine lobstermen tending their traps, his wife gardening, homey interiors and nudes in the studio or the landscape.

The force of these images resides in their deft command of bodies in space balanced by saturated colors painted patchily on bare canvas. The result is a magnified Fauvism or Post-Impressionism that takes inspiration from Avery, Matisse and Bonnard, as well as Chinese painting.

These works seem executed at high speed, with a once-over-lightly panache that leaves little margin for error. In fact, Mr. Pace was adept at discreet reworking. "You might call me a fake Zen painter," he once said.

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The New York Times

Rosenberg, Karen. "ART IN REVIEW; Stephen Pace," *The New York Times*, October 26, 2007.

The de Kooning shows now at Gagosian and at L&M Arts focus on an Abstract Expressionist at the very end of his storied career; for a sense of beginning, consider this exhibition of Stephen Pace's paintings from the 1950s. Boisterous, confident and colorful, they show this second-generation New York School artist trying on all sorts of styles.

The works from early in the decade have a masklike, totemic quality, reminiscent of Gorky and early Pollock. A 1951 painting made jointly by Mr. Pace and Frank Lobdell, while they were working with other American artists in a communal studio in Paris, displays the jagged verticals of a Clyfford Still. In the mid-'50s, Mr. Pace made liberal use of the palette knife, building up moody clusters similar to those in Joan Mitchell's canvases.

A showstopping work from 1959, a centrifuge for decisive brush strokes of uniform width, reveals Hans Hofmann's influence. (Mr. Pace, now 88, was one of his star pupils.) No matter who, or what, inspired them, these works have certain hallmarks: a strong verticality on the left side of the canvas, and a fish-pond palette of dark blues and greens, with pops of bright orange.

The latest works here, two paintings from 1962, have a more organic feel and a diffuse, cursivelike slant. Later, when Mr. Pace spent more time in rural Maine than at the Cedar Tavern, he turned to representation. This exhibition proves that when he wanted to, he could gesture with the best of them. **KAREN ROSENBERG**

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The New York Times

Glueck, Grace "ART IN REVIEW; Stephen Pace, 'The Nude'" *The New York Times,* April 28, 2000

ART IN REVIEW

ART IN REVIEW; Stephen Pace

By Grace Glueck
April 28, 2000

'The Nude'

Katharina Rich Perlow Gallery

41 East 57th Street

Through Thursday

There's an endearing klutziness to Stephen Pace's light-struck, loosely brushed paintings celebrating the nude, ranging in date from 1964 to 1999. In Fauvist colors and casual postures, they shun unnecessary detail to make large, impersonal generalizations about the female body: how it stands, sits, sprawls. In one, a red-haired nude is flopped on a summery-looking green couch gazing out a window, backside to the viewer, the essence of relaxed joie de vivre. In another, four nonchalant nudes whose colors range from palest white to lavender commune in a sunny yardscape evoked with a sensuousness equal to that of the figures.

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A third painting, of a woman showering outdoors, blends her body with a joyous setting of foliage, flowers and sun. In a rendering of a nude splayed awkwardly on a rug, her contour, crowned by a mop of red hair, is flattened against the rug to create an almost abstract shape, recalling this 81-year-old artist's start in the 1950's as an abstractionist. (He turned to representation in the 1960's.)

These exuberant canvases owe something to Matisse and Milton Avery, but their influence enhances rather than drowns Mr. Pace's own sophisticated voice. GRACE GLUECK

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Arts Magazine

Sawin, Martica, "STEPHEN PACE: ACTION PAINTING IN TWO MODES" *Arts Magazine,* 1987

STEPHEN PACE: ACTION PAINTING IN TWO MODES

MARTICA SAWIN

Although it is in a more lyric mode, certainly the present work of Stephen Pace would be unthinkable without that **gloriously adventuresome foundation on which it is built.**

Forty years ago Steve Pace paused in a New Orleans bus station on his way back from Mexico after a year of study at San Miguel on the G.I. Bill. "I knew if I went back to the Midwest they'd put me to work on the farm, so I flipped a coin, heads, New York, tails, San Francisco." It came up heads and so it happened that Pace was drawn into the orbit of nascent Abstract Expressionism and of the Hofmann school and its Provincetown extension, into the heady atmosphere of New York in the late forties and early fifties. To this very day, his style of decision-making in a given moment will determine the outcome of the painting; Pace practices a kind of Zen acceptance of what happens when his brush hits the canvas or paper. In fact an insistence on taking risks and allowing the paint to surprise him are fundamental to Pace's artistic gambit. There is nothing casual, however, about the lucid paintings that this seemingly fatalistic attitude spawns. Rather, what we witness is a spontaneous performance that is only made possible by the years of discipline that have preceded it. It is a discipline rooted in a boyhood of hard work on farms in Missouri and Indiana, and further conditioned by the study of architecture. Discipline is evident in the scores of fluent and precise watercolors Pace painted from his late teens through his five years as a GI, and into views of Paris at the time of the Liberation.

The unexpected happened in 1946 when, having chosen painting over architecture, he became the first American to enroll at San Miguel and was waiting for classes to begin. "You couldn't draw from the people there because they were very shy, I was in a hurry after five years in the service, so I would just push paint around the canvas, blobs of color, until figures would emerge. I couldn't understand why those blobs of color looked so good to me, but somehow the figure left me. I didn't consciously leave it." Thus, with no particular preparation for such a move in his background and training and thousands of miles from New York, Pace was developing, quite on his own, the attitudes and practices shared by others of the generation that would later be collectively christened Abstract Expressionism. In the painting entitled *Mexico* (1946) the paint appears to have been thickly spread and troweled with a palette knife; that the brusque gestural marks and thick swirls of paint roughly depict a massive maternal figure and apparitional heads is almost irrelevant-it is the power of the paint itself that evokes a response. This direction was later reinforced, of course, by contacts with other artist-veterans who were using up their GI Bill time at schools in Florence, Paris, and New York. Pace was at the Art Students League in 1948-49, in Florence in 1950 and at the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere in Paris in 1951, during which time he shared a government-owned studio with Sam Francis and Jerry Hatofsky. There followed the almost requisite stint with Hans Hofmann whose school by that time (1951) was so crowded that the master would come around to Pace's studio on Delancey Street to give crits. Even today as Pace talks about his work, Hoffman's precepts keep coming up. The importance of the space outside the rectangle, the need for drawing from life because "painting has to come from some- where," and the dynamic of the push and pull--principles better understood through Hofmann's gestures than his heavily accented words-- left their imprint on more than a decade of New York painting.

During the 1950s Pace showed at most of the Whitney Annuals, as well as at that salon of the New York School, the yearly invitational at the Stable Gallery. His work was included in exhibitions of the new American art circulated abroad by the Museum of Modern Art and the USIA. When he wasn't producing tumultuous paintings in the classic style of the period, Pace would sometimes drink with the older members of the Club at the Cedar Street Tavern. His style is well exemplified by *Prophecy* (1953) which was shown in the Carnegie International and selected by Thomas Hess for a show of the new American painting. The brush dragged across rough underpainting, the strategic drip, the brusque cancellation of any suggestion of latent image or defined shape, the look of struggle built into the layers of paint, the breaking apart of anything that might hint at order--all these are hallmarks of the work of the younger Abstract Expressionists. The latter were often World War II veterans who came back marked by Iwo Jima, the Battle of the Bulge, or exposure to death camps (Pace had survived the Normandy landings), and they didn't for the most part know much about the surrealist phase of Abstract Expressionism, the search for myth, or the notion of veiling the subject. What was apparent to them in this new style was that no holds were barred, that every artist faces the void, makes his or her mark, like the existentialist act, and begins

Stephen Pace, Mexico, 1946.
Ou on canvas, 26 x 23'. Courtesy Katharina Rich Perlow Gallery.

Stephen Pace, Prophecy, 1953.
Oil on canvas, 5' x 7'. Courtesy Katherinci Rich Perlow Gallery.

to interact with the emerging work, nurturing it and sparring with it at the same time.

Pace's *#2, 1959* offers a veritable storm of paint laid on in forceful slabs of primary color that struggle against the antagonistic incursions of black and brown. The artist describes it as a tornado, suggesting its cataclysmic nature and destructive force. He was a master of the decade's reigning and seemingly most valid style, action painting, carrying it even into prismatic watercolors with brilliant hues glinting under the networks of imprisoning black strokes. It was a stimulating time, this period of dialogue with the emerging unknown painting, this time of relative fraternity among artists when there were few rewards for which to compete, other than peer acceptance. Some observers thought that works such as these, along with the allied figure painting also being produced by younger New York School artists was a wave just gathering force at the decade's end, but the wave broke early and a surge' of a very different sort, made up of Day-glo color, benday dots, stripes, and targets rolled in and dispersed the Expressionist storm.

For Steve Pace who had always continued to draw the figure while making abstract paintings, the transition in 1961 came naturally. "I felt the figure trying to come back into my painting. We had a place out in the country in Pennsylvania and I started a vegetable garden that took me back to when I was a kid on the farm. I began getting up early, seeing the daylight--I had been too much a night person, too much in the studio." His palette lightened, his paint thinned and he began painting from models, usually friends, and sketching from nature, remembering Hofmann, and filling hundreds of spiral drawing books with sketches to be neatly filed away as a repository of future painting ideas. He had become friends with Milton Avery in Mexico in 1946; in 1963 he painted the Avery family on the shore. Perhaps Avery's unique capacity to synthesize an image with planes of color indicated a direction for Pace, but ultimately the two are very different. Pace has always retained the action painter's insistence on registering every stroke, giving it value as both shape and gesture. His reading on Zen calligraphy came as a support for what he was doing. Instead of a tussle on canvas between clashing forces, both watercolors and oils now became the fruit of long preliminary thought, contemplation and preparation of both mind and materials. The execution was required to be spontaneous, direct, and irrevocable, with each stroke essential to the whole. The final work must appear to be the result of an unbroken and flowing painting process, with no corrections and no reworking.

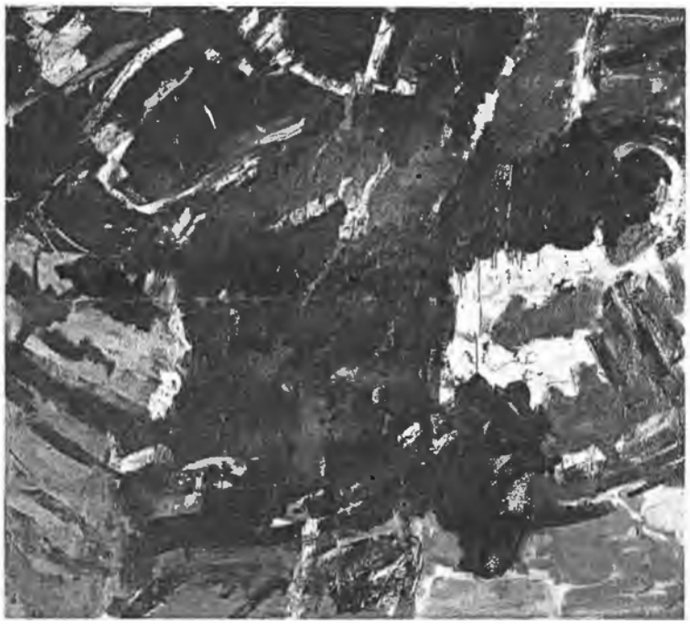
Four Tanned Nudes (1966) shows him five years back into painting the figure, using loose, lightly overlapping strokes, even a few action painter's drips and a thick brush-drawn line that is fully cognizant of volume, contour and negative shape. The water's edge is nearly at the top of the canvas, providing both flatness and distance; the sprawled nude extending off both sides of the canvas, a favorite Pace device, appears to lie right at the viewer's feet while the abrupt shift in scale to three small nudes conveys a generous sweep of space beyond. The diagonal of the outstretched figure, the slightly blurred curves of the legs, the shape that offers a synopsis of multiple views of the torso and the active shapes between the figures combine to give the work a kinetic quality that galvanizes what would otherwise be a passive sun-drenched scene. The artist insists that the work be charged with a sense of latent motion, a sense that is conveyed by the clear registering of each movement of the brush and by the tensions that his synthesizing simplifications generate.

"I think of art as a performance," he explains. "I do a lot of rehearsing on scrap paper before I start, to find the rhythm, the touch, the tool. When I begin, I have a lot of things already worked out, the composition and space, then I can search for the color, mood, wit, or passion." Just as the calligrapher's ink stick, paper, and brushes are laid out with ritualistic care, so Pace prepares and arrays his rows of plastic containers of watercolors, his battery of sable brushes, or, if working in oils, the canvases he has painstakingly sized himself. His engineering propensities find outlet in producing such devices as an easel that will hold the canvas in suspension so he can work right off the edges. Everything in his working environment is meticulously arranged to eliminate any distracting tasks that might interrupt the flow of the painting.

The adventure in his art is in meeting the ongoing challenge of trying to make image and process coincide. For this reason his subjects are usually taken from the familiar rather than the exotic or unknown. The unmistakable dark hair of his wife, Pam, punctuates both interior and exterior views of his sun-drenched farmhouse in Stongington, Maine. One of his models is a woman he has been painting since 1954. Many paintings record the seasonal changes in their vegetable garden, the yellow of the asparagus gone to seed or the mahogany color of the blueberry fields in autumn or the sea and islands through the studio window. Not infrequently the artist himself appears in the work, drawing the model who stands in front of her duplicate on canvas or standing on a rock ledge sketching his domain, the yellow farmhouse and studio barn against the gray sea beyond. And his.nudes are casually arrayed on the porch or in the garden as part of an everyday ambience rather than studio contrivance. It is his intimate relationship with this sensuous visual environment that makes possible the kind of daring improvisation he undertakes on paper or canvas as he tries to find the rhythm that will pull together all the elements of a given theme.

Forays into the less familiar include hundreds of drawings of animals and exotic birds at the zoo or horses from a stable near their former home in Washington, OC, some of which eventually become the basis for paintings, but only after a long gestational period. More recently he has been foraging in his memory and retrieving images of such acute immediacy that they are almost like snapshots pulled from the album of his early years. A mixture of comfortable warmth and awk-

Steven Pace, Number 2, 1959.
Oil on canvas, 75 x 83". Courtesy Katharina Rich Perl.ow Gallery.



Stephen Pace, Four Tanned Nudes, 1966.
Oil on canvas, 36 x 5U'. Courtesy Katharina Rich Perl.ow Gallery.

ward embarrassment suffuses a painting of the artist as a boy being bathed by his mother in a galvanized tub in front of the kitchen stove. The same child, a few years older, is seen in another painting standing in a road' through the cornfields, holding to his chest a dog hit by a car that is vanishing in the distance. He has found the exact colors with which to evoke the heat and the relentless glare of' the sun over the flat Midwestern landscape. Autobiographical also *is Shucking Corn* (1985) in which the boy and his father shuck they pick, tossing the yellow ears into a horse-drawn wagon. "Sometimes we would shuck a hundred acres by hand," Pace recalls. The yellow ear gleaming against. the red sun low in the sky becomes an emblem of that toil fixed forever on the retina, as images or any harvesting on a bright day swim before the closed eyelids al night. This composition is energized not only by color, hut by the complex spatial pulls that Pace insists on; the approaching horses fill half the painting and loom in front of the eye while choppy lavender strokes exert a counter pull into the peripheral distance. The white canvas is made to function to maximum effect: it shows through as an outline of light around the figures, it is left unpainted to serve as the head of a horse and work-gloved hands, and it provides the dazzling sensation of white heat throughout the painting.

Much has been written about Picasso as a performer, inside and outside his paintings or in his suites of prints of the artist and his model. It is intriguing to watch Pace manipulate this idea of being both subject and producer, on the one hand leaving the visible marks of a rhythmic artistic performance, and on the other being part or the image he creates. In what he refers to as his "Pygmalion series" the artist standing before the easel appears to join hands with the figure in the painting-as if bringing her to life and leading her into a dance. He may be seen from the back at the wheel of a car as if looking over his own shoulder or arriving, portfolio under his arm, on one or his yearly visits to the family homestead in Indiana. Sometimes his presence is indicated simply by his drawing hand and sketch pad intruding into the corner of a composition. The idea of defining himself in a role and in a place is important to Pace: "I spend a lot of time just thinking about who and where I am." This gives the work a reassuring completeness, even though we are made edgily aware at the same time that it is all a matter of sleight. of hand, a few well-placed passes with the brush that give us the aura of time and place.

"I try to move my body the way I want everything else to move. No shape is finished independently; they all come together at once." The artist's words suggest the kind of concentration the physical act of painting requires of him. The momentum of this kind of performance is most clearly seen in the web of light and color he weaves in paintings of land and sea. In a view downward from Cadillac Mountain in the fall, over the sea and islands, Pace represents autumn foliage by weaving together consistently hooked strokes of orange, red, and violet, with glints of green against the straighter strokes of blue water. Even though one watercolor stroke overlaps another, the sparkle and translucency is never dulled. The violet in particular generates a sensation of that almost painful brilliance of October color under a strong northern sun. It is a performance one beholds with sheer delight, admiring its hard-won ease, like that of a master playing a solo instrument.

Someday there will be an accounting for all those who flourished as so-called "Second Generation Abstract Expressionists," which may turn out to be a misnomer. There will be some sad stories and some revealing ones, but the most. fulfilled careers will turn out to be those who made that experience work for them in truly positive ways. Although it is a more lyric mode, certainly the present work of Stephen Pace would he unthinkable without that gloriously adventurous foundation on which it is built.

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The SoHo Weekly News

Kingsley, April "Art or Aesthetics?" *The SoHo Weekly News,* February 26, 1976

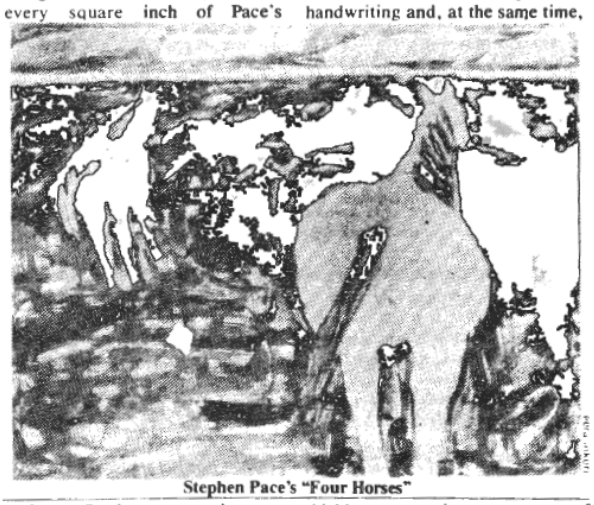
ART
Thursday, February 26, 1976 THE SOHO WEEKLY NEWS

Art or Aesthetics?

APRIL KINGSLEY

Once in a while, when you walk into an art gallery, colored light seems to fill the room, and you almost feel dizzy. Once in a while old familiar subjects—horses, trees, a clapboard farmhouse, women, water, a porch—look so new and fresh you find yourself wondering why no one thought to paint them before. For me those once-in-a-whiles happen when **Stephen Pace** has an exhibition. A. M. Sachs is showing six of Pace's large canvases, one small one, plus a couple of watercolors until March 4th, and each work is a gem. Even in reproduction you can, I think, sense the vitality, the nervous energy, the brio, if you will, of Pace's style.

Forsaking all-over, black and white, calligraphic abstraction in the early Sixties, Pace unleashed his pictorial energies on figuration instead. He took the hint from his friend Milton Avery and began to paint from personal experience, only the familiar quotidian scene around him. Summers in Provincetown and Maine provided most of his imagery (as they did for Avery) worked up from on-the-spot sketches to watercolors to large-size canvases. Avery's world is quiet and meditative, though, full of gentleness. Pace's is furious with tension. Criss-crossing, interlacing slashes of pure pigment, often straight from the tube, activate every square inch of Pace's surfaces. One's eyes are given no quarter. The brilliant, usually high-keyed color is further set in pulsating motion by the interstices of white canvas that flicker between each speeding line. There is an effect like that in watercolors where the white spaces breathe air into the image.



Stephen Pace's "Four Horses"

Although one is always aware of Pace's paint as paint deliberately applied to the surface, something happens as a result of the all-over agitation and the white flashes of light that dematerializes the pigment. Pace's colored light almost seems to float like a transparent screen in front of the canvas. This is not the screen of Impressionism which might seem very material in comparison. It shares something with the dazzling colored daubs of Bonnard, but its closest affinity is to the rectangles of Rothko floated before his canvases, as though they were vibrating in some placeless space between us and them.

Pace is an ambitious artist. He paints like an abstract expressionist, on a large scale, with brushstrokes that have untrammeled energy. These strokes are units of personal handwriting and, at the same time, highly expressive contours of recognizable things. A few strokes and a cantering horse materializes before your eyes. His subjects are intimately observed, yet universal; they are of no importance and all-important. Eschewing the dark symbolism and mythic content of early Abstract Expressionism for the lighter side of life must have been exhilarating for Pace because his paintings still convey a sense of liberation and joy. It is as though he's spreading quicksilver, not paint, and it's breaking up into myriad charged particles and coalescing back into pictorial imagery while we watch. That's art!

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The New York Times

Ashton, Dore, "Art: Battle of Elements; Exhibition of Paintings by Stephen Pace at Wise Gallery Shows Baroque Strain," *The New York Times,* March 31, 1960

Art: Battle of Elements

Exhibition of Paintings by Stephen Pace at Wise Gallery Shows Baroque Strain

By DORE ASHTON

STEPHEN PACE'S new paintings at the Howard Wise Gallery, 50 West Fifty-seventh Street, are abstractions in which energetic elements battle their way to equilibrium. No matter how baroque Mr. Pace's compositions are—and they are nearly all fretted with tilting and bucking forms—they do, ultimately, come to rest.

All of his paintings are large, but the least large are most compressed, most dramatic. In these, Mr. Pace varies his means, using scraped surfaces to offset impastos and neutral planes to give more power to occasional flares of hot red.

Above all, Mr. Pace utilizes swift lines to emphasize baroque activity in his compositions. In one painting, with blue, black and deep green undertones, the tracery of nervous white lines works to excite the surface in the way equivalent lines were used by Tintoretto in his backgrounds. Like Tintoretto, Mr. Pace is involved with an image of stormy climax.

In the mural-sized compositions, which by the way show Mr. Pace in a much more confident mood in regard to color, the heaving tensions are not so clearly stated. Although there are broad areas of bright, blunt reds, and electric interruptions of dark fragments on the surface, there is no counter-movement in depth. Still, this is the first time Mr. Pace has worked with a full color palette and he shows an ability to handle it.

●

Morris Louis follows his special muse in ever more simple turnings in his new paintings at French & Co. Galleries, Madison Avenue at Seventy-sixth Street. His pictures are extremely large, painted with thin washes of diluted color. The flattened forms, often loop-shaped like petals of large flowers, spread languidly into emptiness.

Mr. Louis' range of mood has broadened considerably since he has adopted this fragile technique of evanescent color veils. A picture with a cue in its title, "Floral" does suggest the lightness of spring and summer, composed as it is with overlays of butterfly-wing transparencies. Mr. Louis' peculiar technique is akin to that of the woodcutter who prints one transparent plane over another. As in a color woodcut, the forms must be read in a Louis painting in parallel planes rather than in depth.

When he wants to though, as he does in "Impending," he can paint a dramatic suspended form that gives the illusion of weight despite its diaphonous textures. Ruminating over spatial experiences that cannot be described but only evoked, Mr. Louis sometimes fails. The economy of means he imposes on himself at times leaves little on the canvas to recall the artist's original impetus. Some of the stylizations of what was once a corolla motif, for instance, become mere stripes on a flat surface. Yet, when he succeeds, he tells of distinct experience in an arrestingly personal idiom.

●

Louis Bunce, who is a resident of Oregon, has worked more and more with elements of the Northwestern landscape. His recent paintings at the Meltzer Gallery, 38 West Fifty-seventh Street, are abstractions of the thundrous weather, spreading plains and rugged natural phenomena of the Pacific Northwest.

His palette is keyed to darkness—grays, blacks, browns and tans—relieved only by a few planes of oblique light. He uses angular structures as pictorial scaffolding and plays cascades of smallish forms against them. The scatters of small strokes, and the thinned tonalities in his most recent paintings suggest an Oriental influence.