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Charles Pollock at Jason McCoy

Winningly self-possessed, the paintings and drawings of Charles Pollock's "Chapala" series adopt a major New York

School gambit—exploring the continuities of drawing and writing—through impeccable technique.

Kindled by impressions of Maya culture and hieroglyphs, Pollock (1902-1988) named these five oil and tempera paintings and seven ink drawings for a lake in Ajijic, Mexico, where he lived in 1955-56. The "Chapala" works (1956) present all-over compositions rich in linear cadence and pattern, and varied in the treatment of pictorial space.

It is immaterial to compare these works to hard-core Abstract Expressionism (including that of his younger brother, Jackson, whose early career Charles nurtured in many significant ways). Charles Pollock's paintings are better seen in the company of discreet intimists of modernism such as Paul Klee or Mark Tobey or the European tachistes—models for his sensitivity to color and luminosity, delicate touch and often decidedly graphic sensibility.

Charles Pollock: *Chapala 4*, 1956, oil and tempera on canvas, 48 by 36 inches; at Jason McCoy.



Pollock came to abstract painting in the mid-1940s, after dedicating himself (in the WPA and elsewhere) to the kind of social realist painting associated with his mentor, Thomas Hart Benton. A teacher of printmaking, lettering and book design at Michigan State University (1942-67), Pollock developed the ingredients for his second act as an abstract artist in this series, where he moves from a calligraphically based visual language toward the more material effects and holistic impact of painting.

Jazzy and precise, *Chapala 1* consists of two opaque linear components, one weighty and hard-edged, the other fine and curvaceous; they are superimposed on a radiant, transparent field that recalls Ad Reinhardt's early work. *Chapala 1* glows from within, whereas the chunky light blue and sienna scaffolding of *Chapala 5* is penetrated by intermittent light seemingly projected on a shadowy, noirish ground. In *Chapala 3* and *4*, line has expanded into shape; each stratum of the paintings is precisely differentiated within an overall structure. The dense pigment and puzzlelike forms of *Chapala 3* are locked together in a flagstone pattern, in contrast to the more open pictorial space of *Chapala 4*, which is subtly modulated in its color and space and animated by broadly contoured gestural elements.

As in the paintings, Pollock's drawings favor premeditation over impulse. *Number 17* suspends dense black strokes of ink over a delicate grid; in repetition and detail it can be seen as a distant ancestor of present-day examples of "obsessive drawing." Other works on paper assimilate the nude female body into an overall composition of sensuously configured marks. Like the series as a whole, they make palpable the pull of Paris, where Charles Pollock spent his last years, from 1971 to 1988.

—Susan Rosenberg