



MULLICAN

Untitled

1949

Oil on canvas

30 x 40 in.

James Cohan is pleased to announce its representation of the Estate of Lee Mullican.

Lee Mullican (b. 1919, Chickasha, Oklahoma; d. 1998, Los Angeles, California) was active as a painter and educator for over sixty years. He has been the subject of exhibitions in both the United States and abroad including a solo show at James Cohan this year.

Mullican developed a uniquely West Coast method of abstraction; grounded in content, full of mysticism and connected to the transcendent. His prolific and varied sixty-year career was launched in San Francisco as one of three artists who identified as the Dynaton Group. Through a chance meeting, he befriended Gordon Onslow Ford and later met the Surrealist painter, Wolfgang Paalen, who had published the influential *Dyn* Magazine. Their shared interests culminated in the seminal *Dynaton* exhibition at San Francisco Museum of Art in 1951. Of this period Mullican recalls, “We were involved with a kind of meditation, and for me this had a great deal to do with the study of nature, and the study of pattern...We were dealing with art as a way of meditation.” This describes a different path toward abstraction than that of his East Coast contemporaries who were developing the action-driven work of the New York School of Abstract Expressionists.

Mullican culled influences from a wide range including his training as a topographer during WWII from which he developed the mapmaker’s bird’s-eye perspective, to Surrealism’s automatism, Zen Buddhism and traditional Native American textile arts.

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Inspired by his close study of nature and the prehistoric past, Mullican focused on finding new meanings through formal problems of composition, color and mark making. He created a unique method of applying paint to the canvas with the thin edge of a printer's knife, building up the surface with textured, fine lines--a technique he referred to as striation. Mullican's work continued to evolve throughout his career, constantly expanding upon his established practice while integrating new influences. Mullican first visited the subcontinent in 1980 and continued these trips throughout that decade. There, his studies of Indian tantric art helped him refine the conflation of inner and outer space that he tried to achieve in his work. Mullican also worked across mediums creating bronze, ceramic, wood sculpture and photography. His interest in computer-generated art later during his tenure at UCLA further revealed his unstoppable instinct to burst through boundaries and further his own learning. In 1980, Mullican wrote, "I pulled the essence of nature down over my head." This small note acts as statement of purpose for his entire career - intent upon his project of both distilling and enlarging the concept of nature while approaching the vast world as seeker and supplicant.

Lee Mullican attended the Kansas City Art Institute after transferring from the University of Oklahoma in 1941. Upon his graduation from the Institute in 1942, Mullican was drafted into the army, serving for four years as a topographical draughtsman. Mullican traveled to Hawaii, Guam and Japan before ending his tenure in the army in 1946, when he moved to San Francisco. After winning a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship in 1959, he spent a year painting in Rome before returning to Los Angeles where he joined the teaching staff of the UCLA Art Department in 1961, keeping his position for nearly 30 years. He divided the later part of his life between his homes in Los Angeles and Taos, traveling internationally and co-organizing exhibitions at UCLA. Mullican's works are included in the permanent collections of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, as well as in numerous other institutions.

Mullican's work was the subject of a recent comprehensive solo exhibition titled *Shatter Special* curated by Ryan Good in Los Angeles, which was included in *Artforum's* Best of 2016 issue.

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