

Spotlight Research Paper

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Subject: San Jacinto Mountains, 1960

Artist: Eva Slater American, Born Germany 1922-2011

(Oil on Masonite)

"...that was another time. I'm done with that (painting)", Eva Slater, circa 1990

(Note: She eventually return to painting. See Geese Flying 2010)



Background

“The San Jacinto Mountains are a range in Riverside County east of Los Angeles... the mountains are named for one of the first Black Friars Saint Hyacinth (San Jacinto in Spanish) who is a popular patron in Latin America”¹

This painting is owned by the Palm Springs Art Museum (PSAM) and was purchased with funds provided by David and Marguerite Wilson, and the Western Art Council in 2018.

The Artist

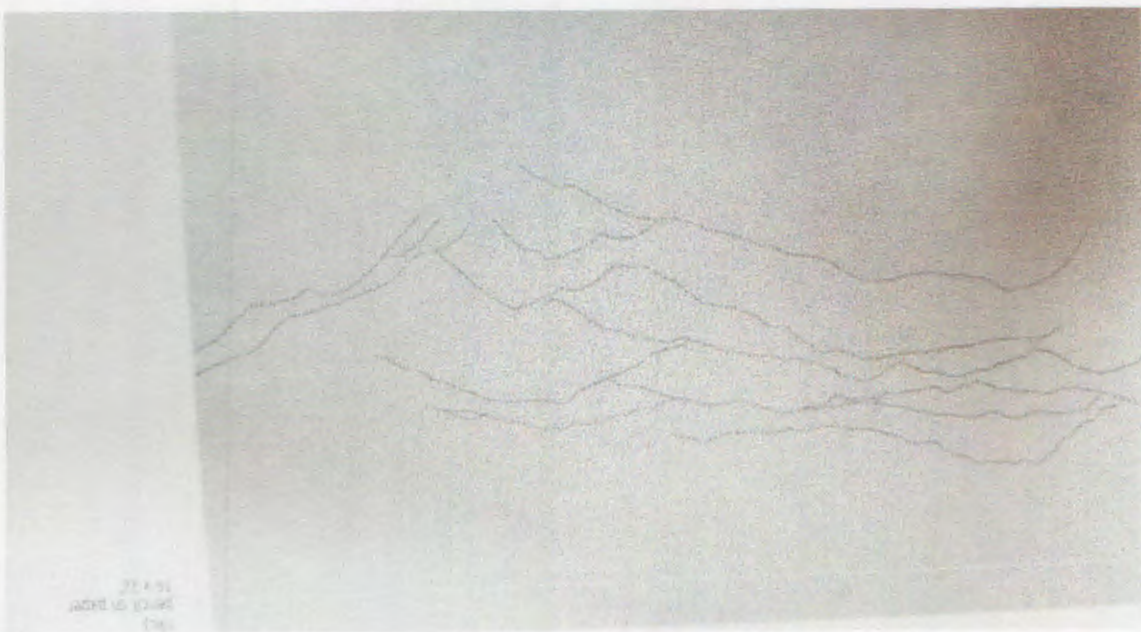
Eva Slater was born in post war II Berlin Germany in June, 1922 and died in Santa Barbara California in May 2011.

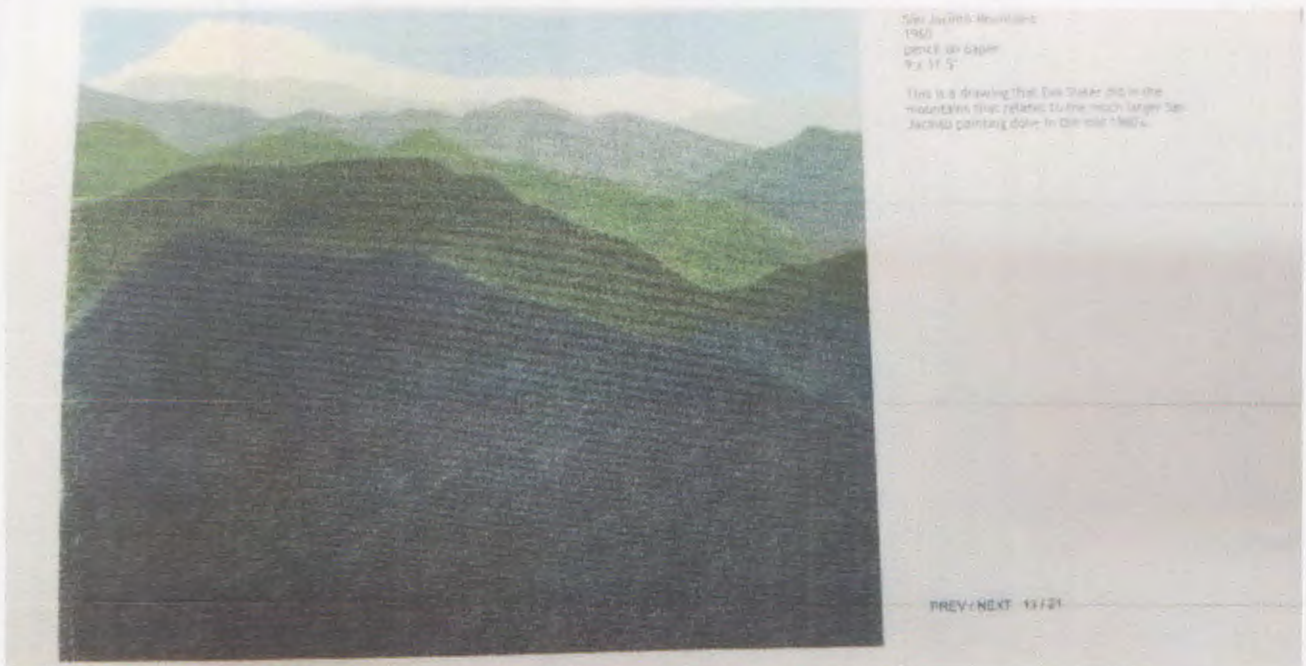
¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Jacinto_Mountain

After moving to the United States, shortly after the war she worked as a fashion illustrator in New York city. She met her husband John Slater there and they moved to Fullerton in Orange County California. She and her husband had two children, a son and a daughter. Her daughter Mariam became an artist and an advocate for her mother's inclusion in the pantheon of California landscape artist.

Slater studied painting at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena California. It was at Art Center where she met Loser Feitelson, founder of the "Hard Edge" movement in California. Feitelson greatly influenced her style of painting. She also became good friends with Helen Lundeberg, the wife of Fietleson and both were inspired by the shapes and landscape of the desert. (Lundeberg went on to become a more recognized painter than Slater as her daughter stated in an interview published in California Desert Art in 2011.

The Slater family often went on car trips across the southwest desert, including Palm Springs California. On those trips her husband would take photographs of the landscape. Later Slater would make sketches of the photographs and later transform them into abstract paintings. **See Below.**





From 1950 through the 1960's Slater became a painter employing the Hard Edge style. However, her use of the style was uniquely different. Initially she used straight line triangle forms, which she called cells. The straight line triangle later morphed into fluid, curvaceous forms that were connected at the tips of the forms. The cells seem to float through the art work as if they were immersed in a plasma.

Although her style was unique, the influence of Feitelson's earlier work is clearly visible.



Mirabilia, Magical Forms, 1945



LORSER FEITELSON (1898-1978)
Dancers - Magical Forms Oil on canvas 1945
 36 x 40 inches (91.4 x 101.6cm)

Later in life, in the 1960's, Slater moved away from painting altogether and began exploring the mountains in northeastern California. She began researching her book on local basketmaking of the Panamint Shoshone indigenous people. Her focus on this subject became her passion for the rest of her life and resulted in a book entitled "Panamint Shoshoe

Basketry: An American Art Form. (The book is still available). "It remains a classic because it's one of the few (books) to approach basketry as art, not strictly anthropology."²

She donated her basket collection to the Eastern California Museum in Independence, California.

The Movement: Hard Edge

As stated earlier, the California Abstract Classicism "Hard Movement" spearheaded by Lorser Feitelson was initiated between 1940 to 1960 in Los Angeles California. Feitelson moved to California in 1927. "Highly influential as a leader and teacher in the community, ... he taught at the highly influential Chouinard Art Institute (Los Angeles) and Art Center College of Design in Pasadena."³

According to the Tate Museum of Art terms, "hard-edge" painting was coined by California critic Jules Langster in 1959. He used it to describe work of abstract painters, particularly on the West Coast... who reacted to the more painterly or gestural forms of abstract expressionism by adopting a consciously impersonal approach to paint application. Their paintings were made up of monochromatic fields of clean-edged colour which reinforced the flatness of the picture surface."

Some of the California proponent of this style were contemporaries of Feitelson, such as his wife Helen Lundeberg, Karl Benjamin, Frederick Hammersley and John McLaughlin. Of course, this movement spreaded across the country and eventually across the ocean to Europe.

Others who embraced the hard-edge style were: Frank Stella, Ellsworth Kelly, Sam Gilliam and Alexander Liberman. The hard-edge style was reflected in sculpture by Alexander Calder and is even reflected in the Finnish fabric design by Maija Isola for the fashion design house Marimekko.

Interpretation/Compare and Contrast

Many hard-edge painters use masking tape to achieve the sharp edges depicted in their paintings. By contrast to works by painters such as Stella and Ellsworth, Slater used a freehand method of achieving her cellular triangles. Upon close inspection it is easy to discern she was a skilled painter, by the crispness of the edges without any trace of "over-bleed".

Compared to "color field" and gestural" styles of contemporary art, Slater is true to the hard-edge style as she successful isolates each color and shape. However, unlike artists such a Stella and Ellsworth, her paintings do not reflect the flatness of those and other "hard-edge artists. She successfully achieved a sense of depth and perspective in her paintings.

² [Californiadesertart.com/eva-slater-deathvalley-journey-of-a-modern-artist/](http://californiadesertart.com/eva-slater-deathvalley-journey-of-a-modern-artist/)

³ <http://www.loserfeitelson.com/new-page/>

Touring the Artwork

At first glance I questioned the placement of the Slater piece in the “Lines in the Sand” exhibit. Now, after this exploration, I have a better understanding of its relation to other objects in the exhibit. That is especially true of the basket exhibited adjacent to the painting. Even though the baskets are from the Cahuilla band of indigenous people, their relationship to the painting is a subtle nod to Slater’s love of the basketry of the Panamint Shoshone people.

In touring this work I would want to engage the viewer by first inquiring if they understand or sense why this painting is included in the exhibit. This would lead to a discussion of not only the landscape but the relationship and importance of basketry to the artist.

Going further I would talk about the artist’s vantage point in fashioning the painting. Where is she standing ... is she looking up at the mountains or is she looking across and/or down at the landscape?

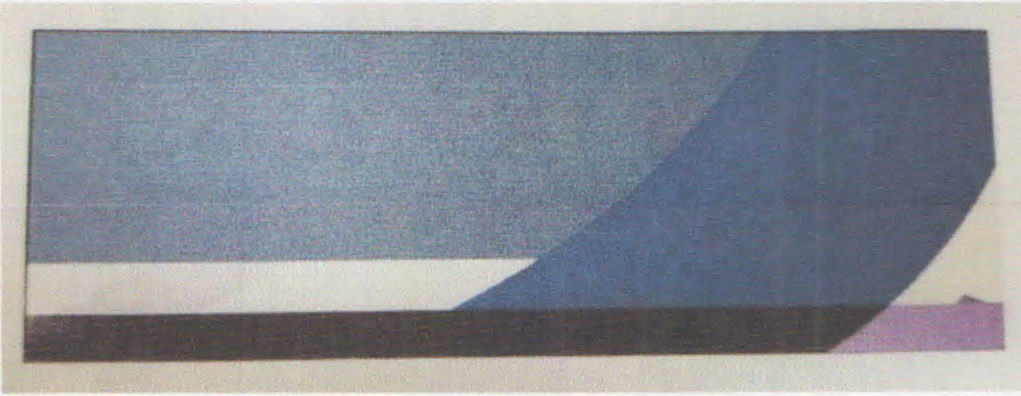
Although the colors are very muted (mauve, gray and shades of pink) in this piece, they serve a very interesting and very important part in appreciating this work. As with landscape painting, color denote the three distinct elements of a landscape; foreground, middle ground and horizon. The viewer could be queried if they can clearly detect those elements in the painting?

For me, I am reminded of the song Purple Haze by Jimi Hendrix. Although, the song was not recorded until 1967, seven years after the painting was produced, I could just envision Slater in her solitude grooving to sound of Purple Haze. This could segue to a discussion of what genre of music or song might the viewer associate with this painting.

Other Works by Slater



Desert Rain, 1959, Oil on panel



Desert Rain 2, 2010, Oil on board



Forest #2, 1959, Oil on Panel



Geese Flying, 2010 (Probably her last painting)

Bibliography

<http://evaslater.com/artwork>

<http://americanart.si.edu/research/my-art/biographical-resources>

“Eva Slater 1922-2011, Santa Barbara (<http://www.independent.com/obits>)