

**My point of departure is a step by step organization of shape and color into a unity of design. And these shapes and colors are like floats on a limitless space because I preoccupy myself with making them exist in a two-dimensional world—not in a world of perspective, but in an infinity of space.**

What Paul Burlin wrote in 1949 applies almost prophetically to the *Series of 9*, which he painted in 1969 during the five weeks before his death at the age of 82. This exhibition shows, for the first time, seven from this series, which evolved out of, but extends far beyond, Burlin's work of the preceding decade. The paintings of the 1960s, already concerned with the pictorial rendering of limitless space, were charged with surface energy generated by the opposition of open, angular forms and the fluctuation of juxtaposed pure colors. In this last *Series of 9*, Burlin has calmed the turbulent surfaces and moved toward a new openness, simplicity, and serenity. The window shape—the primary pictorial element repeated throughout the series—may in this context have ideological and symbolic significance as well. The artist's canvas is in a metaphorical sense his "window" onto the world. It is as if Burlin saw the essence of spatial infinity *through* his canvas and was thus able to achieve *on* its surface the climactic and authoritative synthesis of his life's work.

Burlin's somewhat enigmatic career embraced the artistic developments of the twentieth century. He never became wholly a part of any movement or style, always retaining that degree of skepticism which allowed him to reject what could not be reconciled with his demanding criteria for painting. He was associated with the Ash Can School, participated in the Armory Show of 1913, and lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico from 1913 to 1920. His departure for Paris in 1921 was as much a retreat from the chauvinism and hostility of the American art world toward "modern" painting as it was a journey to the center of that European painting which had excited him in the Armory Show.

In Paris, he absorbed the Cubist vocabulary of forms but rejected the rigidity and intellectualism of formal Cubist construction. Certainly the Impressionist/Fauvist color tradition was to have more lasting influence and significance in his work. Returning to America in 1932, Burlin worked in the prevalent Social Realist style of the Depression years. The 1940s saw his gradual escape from the fetters of subject matter, and he began to work Cubist forms in an increasingly expressionist manner.

From the early 1950s, Burlin's commitment to expressionism led him, like other painters of the New York School, increasingly in the direction of abstraction—looser forms, more painterly surfaces, and more expressionistic and sensory use of color. In spite of the obvious painterly gesture that links Burlin's work to Abstract Expressionism, his aesthetic—like that of his contemporary, Hans Hofmann, whom he first knew in Paris—lay outside the movement's mainstream. Both artists were substantially older than even the first generation Abstract Expressionists, their ties with the European tradition stronger.

What is most remarkable in the career of Paul Burlin is that, with increasing age, he painted with increasing vigor, sought and discovered pictorial solutions that were intensely strong, and achieved in these final paintings an elemental solution that climaxed a lifelong quest.

The Museum of Modern Art first showed the work of Paul Burlin in 1930—in the ninth exhibition of its young life. We are pleased and honored to present this small tribute on the fortieth anniversary of our association.

*Virginia Allen*

PAUL BURLIN (1886-1969): The Last PaintingsChecklist

December 7, 1970 - February 8, 1971

In the listing below, dimensions are given in inches, height preceding width. Dates enclosed in parentheses do not appear on the paintings themselves. All works are lent by Mrs. Paul Burlin, through the courtesy of the Grace Borgenicht Gallery.

1. Symmetry in Opposites. (1968). Oil, casein, acrylic on canvas, 25 1/4 x 32 1/4".
2. Series of 9, #1. (February 1969). Oil, casein, acrylic, charcoal on canvas, 60 1/2 x 53 1/8".
3. Series of 9, #2. (February) 1969. Oil, casein, acrylic, charcoal on canvas, 54 7/8 x 48 7/8".
4. Series of 9, #4. (February-March) 1969. Oil, casein, acrylic, charcoal on canvas, 45 x 56".
5. Series of 9, #5. (February-March) 1969). Oil, casein, acrylic, charcoal on canvas, 55 7/8 x 44 3/4".
6. Series of 9, #6. (February-March 1969). Oil, casein, acrylic, charcoal on canvas, 56 1/4 x 45".
7. Series of 9, #7. (February-March 1969). Oil, casein, acrylic, charcoal on canvas, 64 x 54 1/8".
8. Series of 9, #8. (March 1969). Oil, casein, acrylic, charcoal on canvas, 60 1/2 x 53 1/8".

# The Museum of Modern Art

West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

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PRESS PREVIEW DEC 7, 1970,  
1 to 4 pm  
FOR RELEASE DEC. 8, 1970

## PAUL BURLIN (1886-1969): THE LAST PAINTINGS

An exhibition of paintings by PAUL BURLIN from a series of nine executed rapidly during the five weeks before his death at the age of 82 will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from December 8 through February 8. The paintings, selected and installed by Virginia Allen, Assistant Curator of Painting and Sculpture, represent the remarkably intense and authoritative synthesis of a lengthy career which spanned many artistic movements and styles.

Burlin's experience and exposure can be said to have embraced the twentieth century. His stylistic associations progressed from the Ash Can School, through Neo-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism, which he first experienced through his participation in the 1913 Armory Show and later in Paris where he lived from 1921 to 1932, American Social Realism in the 1930s, and Abstract Expressionism of post-war America. From the early fifties, Burlin's commitment to expressionism led him, like other painters of the New York School increasingly in the direction of abstraction. In spite of the obvious painterly gesture which links his work to Abstract Expression, his aesthetic, like that of Hans Hofmann, falls outside the movement's mainstream. Burlin, like Hofmann, was substantially older than even the first generation Abstract Expressionists, his ties with Europe were older, and his individualism more deeply rooted in early twentieth-century America.

"What is most remarkable," Miss Allen says, "is that with increasing age, Burlin painted with increasing vigor, sought and discovered pictorial solutions which were intensely strong, and adhered to that most lonely and demanding criterion, 'inner necessity.' In these final paintings, Burlin has achieved a new openness and simplicity of forms within the calm of limitless space."

Paul Burlin was born in New York City in 1886 and grew up in New York and London. He resided in Santa Fe, N. M. from 1913 to 1920 before going to Paris. He returned to the United States in 1932, and between 1949 and 1960 was visiting artist or artist in

residence at many colleges and universities throughout the country. He exhibited widely in this country as well as abroad, and his work is represented in numerous public and private collections in the United States.

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Additional information and photographs available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, or Linda Gordon, Associate Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. Telephone: (212) 956-7501 or 956-2648.