

BEATRICE MANDELMAN - TAOS MODERNIST

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Closely associated with the thriving artists' colony of Taos, New Mexico, since 1944, Beatrice Mandelman is representative of the international perspective that began to typify the post-World War II era. When she arrived in New Mexico at age thirty-two, Bea had already associated with a number of the most prominent members of the New York vanguard, including Louis Lozowick, Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock, and Stuart Davis. Although still working through a social realist phase that alternated with a strong interest in School of Paris aesthetics when she came to Taos, Mandelman quickly adapted to the area and used its local color, together with that of Mexico, as a basis for her work until the mid-1950s. Study in Paris with Léger, a brief but important friendship with Picabia, associations with both East Coast and Bay Area painters who came to Taos, and frequent trips to New York enabled Mandelman to cohere her knowledge of Constructivism, Cubism, Fauvism, and Abstract Expressionism into a Modernist style that recalled aspects of all these schools without slavishly adhering to the principles of any one group. Mandelman's Modernist art is a grand synthesis of disparate cultures and traditions under the aegis of universal form. Her work is memorable for its syntheses and also for its dissonance. Relying on the intense light of New Mexico, Mandelman creates works that she has described as "minutely off center." Beginning in the late 1970s and continuing in the 1980s, this artist began to transform Modernism into an incipient Postmodernism as she recycled and parodied the antiquated vocabulary of Cubism and Constructivism.

Oscillating between regionalism and internationalism and between an interest in local traditions and a rejection of them, Mandelman's art epitomizes the tensions of the Taos Modernists who wished to forge a synthesis of the best East and West Coast ideas while remaining independent of both. Intrigued with Native American and Hispanic cultures, always fascinated with the landscape, and yet resolute in maintaining an international stance, Mandelman in her art masks many contradictions of the cultural milieu of the seemingly unassuming village of Taos which is attuned to the advanced thinking of urban artistic centers.