

Rare paintings on display at Asheville Art Museum

Emily Patrick, epatrick@gannett.com 9:46 p.m. EDT March 26, 2015



(Photo: Arnold Newman/Getty Images)

In chess, the knight moves slowly through tight right angles, but it can have dramatic and surprising effects on the game. The piece is an appropriate symbol for the later work of artist Jack Tworokov, and it's the subject of a never-before-displayed painting, Knight Series V, part of an exhibition at Asheville Art Museum that opens Friday.

In the style of the knight, Tworokov was often deliberate and meditative, but he celebrated reinvention and exploration in art. Like many of Tworokov's later paintings, Knight Series V uses geometry to pull the viewer into the canvas. Start at the green dot in the top left corner, and trace the possible movements of the piece across the canvas, which is gridded like a chess board. "It created this wonderful, unexpected composition," says Jason Andrews, curator at the Tworokov estate in New York City. "(The knight) is mischievous as a chess piece. I think he was really drawn to that alternative movement that he could capture."

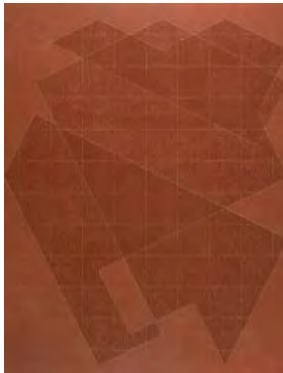
The exhibition follows Tworokov's work from the summer of 1952, when he taught and worked at Black Mountain College, until his death in 1982. It begins with abstract expressionist works that invoke his friendship with Willem de Kooning, with whom he shared a studio in New York City for a time. It moves on to

his later works, such as Knight Series V, that employ simple geometric principles to draw the viewer into large 72-inch square canvases.

Andrews came to Asheville to co-curate the show, and he brought with him detailed informational cards that engage viewers with Tworokov's life and personal writing. The first painting, a study in oil for House of the Sun, hangs alongside an excerpt from a letter the artist wrote while he was at Black Mountain College.

"This place is apt to do more for my education than I can do for the students," he wrote to his sister, painter Janice Biala. "There exists the utmost freedom for people to be what they please."

Born in Poland but raised in New York City, Tworokov is one of the New York School artists, along with Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock and others. Tworokov isn't exactly a household name, unlike some of his affiliates. Andrews says his reputation is different because he wasn't as prolific — producing closer to 10 paintings a year whereas others were creating 40 or 50 — and he was very choosy about when and what he would exhibit. Still, he was very well respected, with exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art and The Guggenheim during his life. He was also chairman of the art department at Yale University, where he helped recruit celebrated artists such as Chuck Close, Richard Serra and Jennifer Bartlett.



Knight Series #5, oil on canvas, 1976 (Photo: Jack Tworokov Estate/Special to the Citizen-Times)



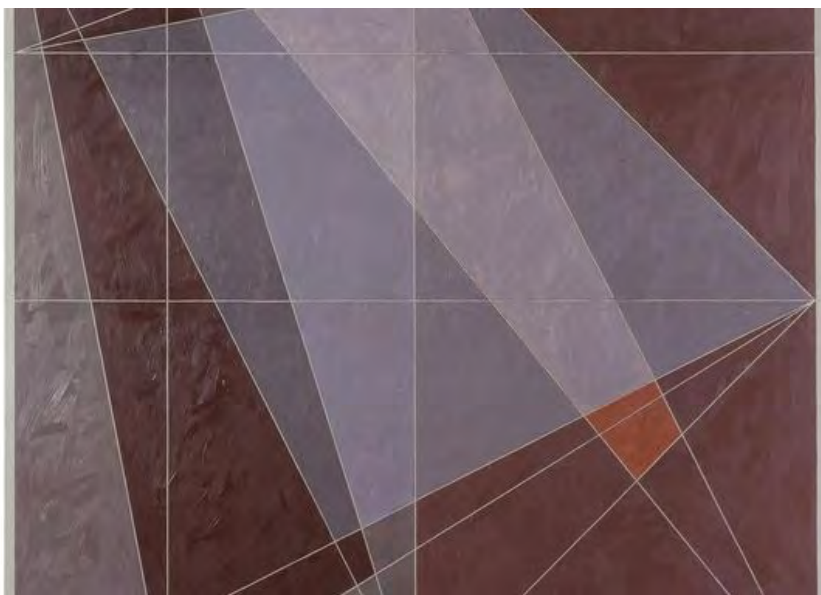
One Turning, oil on canvas, 1952 (Photo: Jack Tworokov Estate/Special to the Citizen-Times)

Cole Hendrix, curator at the Asheville Art Museum, says the exhibition is one of the museum's most remarkable. "It's certainly not often that we get a survey of this magnitude and richness here," she says. "This is a big deal for Asheville."

Although most of the paintings will go back to New York when the retrospective ends on June 14, one will stay. It's a gift from the Tworkov estate to the Asheville Museum of Art. "This is a major gift — not just in terms of its incredible value," Hendrix says, explaining how the large, gridded canvas displays several technical elements that many artists conceal and includes both gestural and geometric elements. As part of the permanent collection, she expects it will be a great piece to talk about.

The educational programming that goes along with the exhibition makes it great for kids and art novices as well as painting buffs. Hendrix says the work's large size and hidden math puzzles will entertain children, and docents are ready to explain the geometry involved, such as the golden ratio.

Despite the mathematical principles at work in the paintings, Tworkov actually applied color with a lot of emotion, Hendrix explains. Unlike some of his contemporaries who were known for their light brushstroke, such as Rothko in his signature multiform paintings, Tworkov charged his canvases with well-defined, lyrical brush strokes and, often, thick layers of paint. Hendrix finds his work emotional, and Andrews says the brushstrokes are spontaneous.



Indian Red Series #1, oil on canvas, 1979 (Photo: Jack Tworkov Estate/Special to the Citizen-Times)

Hendrix acknowledges that abstract work can be intimidating, but given the size and richness of the paintings on display, she's confident Asheville will engage with Tworkov. It's about the feeling it inspires as much as the principles used to create it, she says.

About the exhibit

Jack Tworkov: Beyond Black Mountain is on display at Asheville Art Museum, 2 S. Pack Square, from March 27 to June 14. For more information, visit [ashevilleart.org](http://www.ashevilleart.org) (<http://www.ashevilleart.org/>).