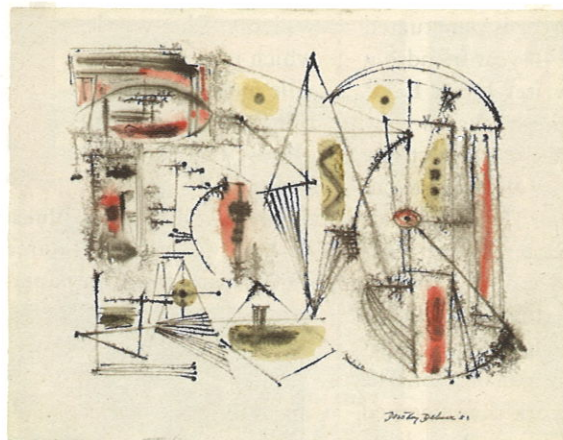


A Sculptor in Paint

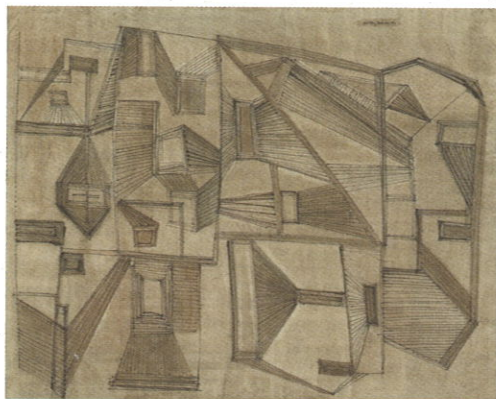
DOROTHY DEHNER, who was born in Cleveland in 1901, studied drama before she turned to fine art. As a teenager, she moved with her family to Pasadena, Calif., where she got involved with the local playhouse. Later, she dropped out of her theater studies at UCLA to hit the stage in New York, finding starring roles in off-Broadway productions. But not finding fulfillment in acting, she left showbiz—and the U.S. altogether—to travel alone throughout Europe in the mid-1920s. When she returned to the states, her head full of masterpieces by the Cubists, Fauvists, and Constructivists, she was determined to study art.

Dehner quickly enrolled at the Arts Students League and began to be active in New York's avant-garde circles in 1925. However, it wasn't until 1950 that she began publicly showing her work. Her debut was a tumultuous one, though. Her partner, the sculptor David Smith, with whom Dehner was living in upstate New York, threatened to destroy the artist's draw-



ings if she submitted them for consideration for the 1950 Whitney Annual Exhibition. Of course, her pieces were accepted by the Whitney, but not by Smith. Several months

marked by exploration and success. She had her first solo exhibition at Rose Fried Gallery in 1952, and was in group shows at both MoMA



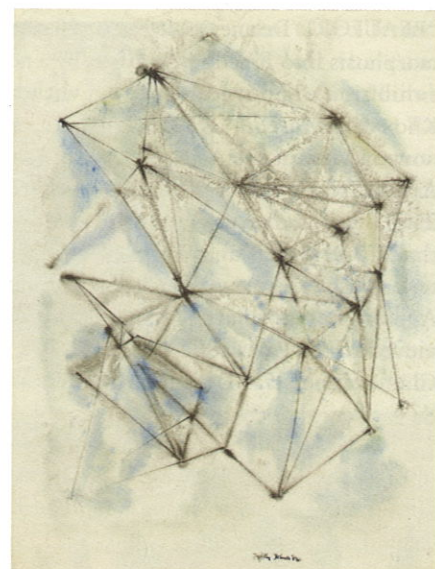
after the show's opening the sculptor physically assaulted Dehner, breaking several of her ribs. Dehner left Smith, moving to New York City.

Her career thereafter was

and the Met the following year. She began printmaking at Atelier 17, a practice that led to both a solo print show at Morris Gallery in 1954 and a lifelong friendship with Louise Nevelson, whom she met at the studio. Then in 1955 came sculpture; Dehner began modeling abstract forms in wax for bronze casting.

ing, creating works that played with scale and balance. In 1958, she created two original chess sets in silver and bronze. The uniquely characteristic and formally fascinating sets are made of 32 pieces that are each miniature sculptures—all signed by the artist.

The New York gallery Rosenberg & Co. is currently presenting "Dorothy Dehner," an exhibition that highlights the artist's watercolors and sculptures during this incredibly formative period in her



career—1949 through 1958.

Among the highlights of the show is the incredible chess set, which is still highly refreshing and modern. Early watercolors in the exhibition, like *City Life* (watercolor and ink on paper) from 1949, reveal Dehner's intuitive sense of form and line. The abstract geometric work portrays an architectural schematic and foreshadows the artist's highly linear sculpture to come. *Burst #5*, a 1953 watercolor and ink on paper, softens Dehner's strict line work with soft smudges and specks of pink and blue, a type of application that would have challenged the vanguard of Ab-Ex. Similarly, *Untitled #61-A* (1952, watercolor and ink on paper), features a geodesic structure brought alive by swaths of watery blue pigment. *Untitled #51* (1953, watercolor and ink on paper) is a biomorphic, Rube Goldberg-machine-like composition, with a myriad of component parts. Dehner highlights her inky black line work with wet yellow and orange passages. The effect is high drama.

