



THE BOUNDARIES IMAGINED *Louisa Chase*

Paintings, Drawings, Prints 1975–2003

THE TROUT GALLERY

THE ART MUSEUM OF DICKINSON COLLEGE

Carlisle, Pennsylvania

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Louisa Chase

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Feb. 23–April 6, 2024

Curators:

Isabel Frangules

Ben Goodrum

Zander Holt

Xenia Makosky

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Acknowledgments

Dickinson College's senior Art History Seminar is unique among undergraduate programs in art history in both process and outcome. It offers students the opportunity to become curators for a semester, wherein they formulate, research, and write a professional catalogue for and organize a public exhibition in, The Trout Gallery, the museum of Dickinson. In the short three-and one-half months of the fall semester, this process is demanding and always seems a difficult challenge at the start. This year, the images around which the seminar was organized are 21 paintings, prints, and drawings by the fascinating American artist, Louisa Chase (1951–2016), graciously loaned to The Trout Gallery for this class by the Estate of Louisa Chase, courtesy of Hirschl & Adler Modern, NYC. We owe our greatest thanks, first and foremost, to Eric W. Baumgartner '79, Senior Vice President and Director, American Paintings & Sculpture at Hirschl & Adler for suggesting Chase's work as a possible exhibition theme. As an alumnus of Dickinson with a major in art history, Eric has been more than generous with his time and support, providing high-resolution photographs of the works, facilitating transportation, and meeting with the students for a class session over Zoom. This is the fourth such collaboration for this seminar with Eric and Hirschl & Adler, and we could not be more appreciative of the exciting and qualitatively unique opportunity that this collaboration has provided for the students.

The students enthusiastically rose to the challenge presented by the seminar and exhibition, and devoted enormous time, energy, and excitement not only to the course material for the class, but also to the advanced research and writing of the essays for this catalogue. The thematic approach, installation design, and idea for organizing the catalogue are the result of their collaborative endeavor, and the outcome is something they can collectively be proud of.

We extend special thanks to the staff of the Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, for facilitating access to the collection of *Louisa Chase Papers* for the students' research. Chase received her undergraduate degree from Syracuse, and a substantive collection of her journals, notebooks, letters, and exhibition catalogues are housed at the SCRC. Having access to these materials was an unprecedented and rich opportunity for all of us, and we are grateful for the generous support of Nicolette A. Dobrowolski, Director, SCRC; Amy McDonald, Research & Access Services Librarian, SCRC; and Carin Wolfe, who swiftly produced digital scans of selected documents from the collection and got them to us in plenty of time to consider carefully. We also thank Andrew J. Saluti, Associate Professor and Program Coordinator for Museum Studies in the School of Design at Syracuse University, for offering his assistance to the students and sharing a file compilation he had assembled of exhibition reviews for Chase that

spanned decades. As one of the few experts on Chase's life and work, Prof. Saluti saved the students an inordinate amount of time in having tracked down these critical reviews from a variety of newspapers, magazines, and journals.

The Boundaries Imagined would not have been possible without the generosity of many colleagues at Dickinson who contributed their time and expertise to the seminar exhibition. The students and I owe sincere thanks to Shannon Egan, Director of The Trout Gallery, for her enthusiastic support along every step of the process, including allocating funds for transporting the works from and to Hirschl & Adler Modern and helping to secure publication rights for comparative images in the exhibition catalogue. We are gratefully indebted to James Bowman, Gallery Registrar and Exhibition Designer, who made the works available for study and on an individual basis for each student when needed. James also prepared the images for display and shared his advice and supervision in all aspects of the design and installation process, which formed an important part of the students' experience in the seminar. The professional quality of the installation is a tribute to James's expertise and skill.

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And, as always, my faculty colleagues in the Department of Art & Art History, particularly Elizabeth Lee and Ren Wei, willingly gave their much-appreciated advice, expertise, enthusiasm, and support.

Melinda Schlitt
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Introduction

MELINDA SCHLITT

In the introduction to a short unpublished manuscript, Louisa Chase explained to her reader that “It may appear a bit scattered but I was simply trying to ‘bear in mind’ what I believe is the quest for reality in modern art and keep typing away.”¹ This honest admission of her attempt to express in writing what she was engaged in as an artist also mirrors much of her artistic practice and the attendant challenges and struggles she experienced throughout her 45-year career, from 1971–2016: the results may be untidy, but the process is a driven search that one simply keeps pursuing. The characterization of her artistic practice as a “quest,” the basic dictionary definition of which is “a long search for something that is difficult to find,” is fitting to both the vibrant immediacy of her images and the probing reflections in her many journal entries. Even without access to her journals, a viewer’s thoughtful engagement with Chase’s imagery reveals the artist’s dialogic presence in the energetic materiality of brush strokes, marks, gestures, scrapes, drips, shapes, and forms that seem deliberately layered in an evocation of spatial depth while simultaneously trying to escape the surface on which they exist into the space occupied by the beholder. Her process is revealed in the works themselves, and one can see her grappling with ideas about imagery and the image as an object with an unreserved authenticity and honesty. In the same unpublished manuscript mentioned above, Chase evoked this silent dialogue with the viewer in noting that, “The artist has a feeling (vision); He uses the visual symbols (does not describe the experience) and with a little magic the feeling is transferred to the spectator.”²

The 21 images in this exhibition, spanning from 1975–2003 (most are from the 1980s) and graciously on loan from the Estate of Louisa Chase, courtesy of Hirschl & Adler Modern, NYC, represent the broad range of media (oil, wax, ink, graphite, watercolor, charcoal, woodcut, lithograph, etching) through which Chase grappled with ideas about gesture, color, figuration, the representational, and the non-representational, throughout her career. In the many reviews of major exhibitions of Chase’s work during the 1980s and 1990s, art critics often seemed to search for adjectives and descriptive analogies with which to describe her fluid visual language and its impact on the beholder. One approach was to try and relate her work to that of other artists or stylistic “movements” and categories as a way to frame the dominant visual qualities of her work at a given moment within known and graspable boundaries. In reviewing Chase’s 1991 solo exhibition at the Brooke Alexander Gallery, NYC, for example, Nancy Princenthal wrote:

One way of looking at the development of Louisa Chase’s painting shows her consistently bucking trends. She began her career by defying Minimalism with recognizable imagery. Early in the ‘80s when NeoX was burgeoning, she turned from representation to increasingly nonreferential, if loose, abstraction. At the decade’s end, she again embraced the figure. Figuration, for her, is not a way to play out personal narrative.³

Although such broad categorical bins may be useful in organizing a chapter in an art history survey text, they also have the effect of blurring more nuanced distinctions between individual works of art and even between those from similar years, which rather reveal Chase’s well-considered process in working out an idea or problem in the act of making art. Other reviewers invoked well-known artists as points of comparison, such as Barry Yourgrau exemplified in his review of Chase’s important solo exhibition in 1981 at the Robert Miller Gallery, NYC, the first of four during the 1980s at this prestigious location:

Chase builds her paint surfaces to a waxy physicality reminiscent of Elizabeth Murray’s. Her brushstroke is thatchy à la Philip Guston, but not as loosely applied. The paintings are tidy. Things in them have a solidness and bulk that suggests Guston again, or more so, Marsden Hartley.⁴

In aligning Chase’s work with the technique of Murray and Guston, and the stylistic effects of Hartley, Yourgrau inadvertently foregrounds these artists while casting Chase’s painting into a somewhat derivative pastiche, even though she may have been intentionally engaged with artists like Guston and Murray, for example. Her style, if we can characterize it across four decades, remained uniquely her own. Indeed, Chase wrote reflectively in her journals about other artists whose work she was studying and/or admired for specific visual qualities at various points throughout her career, from Sieneese painters of the 14th century to Jackson Pollock. We can glimpse an internal moment of her engagement with other artists and thinking about her own process from a brief journal entry, which as Andrew J. Saluti has noted, seems to refer to the structure of her work:

Mondrian > vertical/horizontal; Tintoretto, Monet, Pollock, J. Michel [Basquiat], [Brice] Marden > weaving; [Philip] Guston, [Susan] Rothenberg > mark making.⁵

Even from this brief note in her journal, Chase was clearly thinking about this diverse group of artists and what she saw in their work in the context of her own art and interests, and not as venerable models for imitation: “vertical/horizontal; weaving; mark making.” The most helpful reviews of Chase’s exhibitions were those in which the authors sought to create an evocative verbal account of active viewing, thus providing the reader with a model of how to engage with the visual language of the works. Holland Cotter, renowned art critic for *The New York Times*, noted the following about Chase’s paintings from her fourth exhibition at the Robert Miller Gallery in 1986:

In expressive tone, Louisa Chase’s painting has always been ambitious without grandstanding, intimate without thinking small – and her move from a figurative to an abstract mode, which seemed like such a precipitous leap a season or two ago, is acquiring the look of inevitability... Chase’s brand of representation was conceptually abstract from the start.⁶

Cotter’s verbal characterizations succeed in communicating a way of seeing Chase’s imagery and some of the ideas that informed it without confining that visual engagement to an already-determined category, thus granting the would-be viewer a degree of flexibility and personal interaction with the paintings.

One always desires to hear directly from artists about what they were thinking or how they went about making their art, as if what artists say will contain a revelation or the truth of intention, thus providing some sort of concrete “meaning” or “understanding” that relieves viewers from having to undertake the more complicated and ambiguous act of entering into a dialogue with the work on its own, *sans* artist. After all, if it is coming “from the horse’s mouth...” is the hopeful thinking here. However, even formal artist statements can be notoriously obtuse, and many artists prefer not to try and describe their work or process verbally. Some of the more lucid passages that Louisa Chase wrote in her private journals and artist statements that accompanied exhibition catalogues are still somewhat opaque and require sustained consideration, even as they grant us small windows through which we can better think about how to see her work. In a journal entry from March 1988 (two years after her fourth exhibition at the Robert Miller Gallery), she noted the following:

What I am trying to do is incredibly complicated. The problems that I have been having this winter have to do with that core – the drawing in space – lines in and out – edges vibrating in and out of focus. The form arrested in its elusiveness. Demanding that reality that fluctuates. There is no ground there. No where to take a rest...⁷

Four works in particular from this exhibition (cats.1, 7, 8, 11), all of which fall within a general characterization of geometric/gestural, non-representational works, are excellent examples to consider within the issues Chase described above, imprecisely expressed though they may be.

However, a more formal artist statement about the process of painting that Chase wrote for a group exhibition in 1980 at The New Museum of Contemporary Art, NYC, although descriptively evocative, still challenges the reader to bridge the gap between Chase’s verbal and visual languages:

Painting for me has been a constant search to hold a feeling tangible. Recently, the images have become more figurative, their structure or language internal. One moment is shattered into many moments, one place into a thousand places. Their relationship and scale determine the nature of experience, a psychological cubism in which all the directions are at once being that experience, the complexities of one feeling.⁸

The phrase, “to hold a feeling tangible,” has been cited often in analyses and descriptions of Chase’s work, almost as if it were a leitmotif or overarching theme for her images in general, where detecting a personal and emotional expression is claimed to be the artist’s and viewer’s goal. But Chase’s visual language is not analogous to the kind of overt emotional expression of a Munchian *Scream*, or works by the Symbolists or German Expressionists, as some commentators have sought to attribute to her imagery, even though she indeed took formal ideas from German Expressionist woodcuts, for example, and transformed them into her own unique visual language in a series of large woodblock prints from the early 1980s (see cats.19, 20, 21). Rather, if we consider the entire first sentence from Chase’s artist statement instead of just the second half, what she is alluding to is the constant challenge of visual ideation that goes back to Plato’s Theory of Forms. How does an artist represent something that is immaterial, like an idea, a feeling, or a concept? As the works in this exhibition demonstrate, Chase’s visual language was thoughtfully considered and could remain expressive in its materiality and the gestures of mark making without being overtly “emotional,” by more visually descriptive standards. Her art was always about art, and not about her emotional identity as an individual or as an artist.

A passage from a lengthy essay written by the American poet and essayist, Ann Lauterbach, a friend of Chase’s, for a solo exhibition in 1991 at the Brooke Alexander Gallery, NYC, encapsulates well the intentionality and sophistication of Chase’s quest as an artist and the problematics of rendering an abstracted emotional identity:

One possible way to speak of Louisa Chase’s unfurling methodology over the past decade is as a search for a revised pictorial language through which to depict a revised sense of self. This is not to suggest that Chase is after literal self-portraiture, but rather that she wants to convey the process by which perception shapes being and being becomes identity. Her model would not be the Freudian one of an alignment of disparate parts into a coherent whole. Instead, identity would be understood as a series of discrete responses, fluid and participatory, to myriad events located in the human psyche as well as in the world, and the paintings would be seen as the trace or

inscription of those responses. Such a revised notion of self might need to disturb a host of conventional dichotomies such as subject/object, figure/ground, time/space, stasis/movement, presence/absence, and reconstrue them into a matrix of intertwined or overlapping congruencies and contingencies.⁹

In formulating a title for this exhibition, the student co-curators hoped to foreground it within Chase's own words, and sifted through all of the journal entries, exhibition reviews, and artist statements they could locate. The phrase they decided upon, *The Boundaries Imagined*, came from the same unpublished manuscript cited at the beginning of this Introduction, and formed the second part of a sentence that Chase used to characterize an ancient Mayan game of risk and chance: "The game is built in risk – the boundaries imagined." Up to this point in the manuscript, Chase had been discussing various forms of game theory and their analogy to the Avant Garde and artistic practice. She related how the painter, Al Held, whom she knew from her time in the MFA program at Yale University, had explained the Mayan game in great detail to her, thus prompting her summary characterization.

The co-curators saw that the second half of Chase's sentence encapsulated both the material boundaries with which she worked (the edges of canvas, paper, etc.) and the fact that every image in this exhibition suggested its visual continuation beyond those material boundaries, which could then be said to be imagined.

Researching and writing about an artist who worked during the second half of the 20th century was challenging and new for the students, even if they had prior training within this period in art history classes. They had to become knowledgeable, fairly quickly, about Modernism, Minimalism, Abstract Expressionism, Neo-Expressionism, and then how Louisa Chase could be understood within or in contradistinction to these dominant "isms." In addition to several monographs and articles the students read and shared with each other, two essays in particular that they read toward the beginning of the semester served as signposts, so to speak, for some of the broader perspectives they developed in the course of writing their essays for this catalogue. The first was the still-resonant and, at the time it was written, groundbreaking essay by Clement Greenberg, "Abstract, Representational, and so forth." Greenberg first presented his foundational argument in a lecture at Yale University in 1954, with the published version appearing in 1961. Greenberg had single-handedly boosted the careers of several now-renowned artists during the 1940s and 1950s, such as Jackson Pollock, Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Morris Louis, among others, when "abstract" art was not yet well accepted in the United States. After reading and discussing Greenberg, the students were convinced that some of the same issues raised over 60 years ago would still be relevant to many viewers who would see the Louisa Chase exhibition at The Trout Gallery. Two brief statements from the opening of Greenberg's essay underscore this sensibility and how the curators might address it:

The tendency is to assume that the representational as such is superior to the nonrepresentational as such; that all other things being equal, a work of painting or sculpture that exhibits a recognizable image is always preferable to one that does not...Art is a matter strictly of experience, not of principles, and what counts first and last in art is quality; all other things are secondary. No one has yet been able to demonstrate that the representational as such either adds or takes away from the merit of a picture or statue.¹⁰

The second, more challenging but equally important, essay the co-curators read and thought about with respect to Louisa Chase was "Art and Objecthood" by Michael Fried.¹¹ Although primarily concerned with sculpture, Fried critiques Minimalist Art (what he calls "literalist" art), a particular form of expression that Louisa Chase also rejected early in her career, and discusses a specific relationship between the beholder as "subject" and the work of art as "object," as something that takes place in time and has a duration. In her journals, Louisa Chase also discussed the idea of her paintings becoming "objects" with respect to the viewer, and the Fried essay provided some of the co-curators with a useful interpretive framework for parts of their essays.

Four major themes define the essays in this catalogue, which the co-curators determined would inform readers in the broadest and most substantive context about the works in the exhibition. Isabel Frangules begins with an artistic biography of Louisa Chase in which she selectively traces Chase's career as represented by the works in the exhibition, and highlights particularly important moments with close analyses of specific images. Zander Holt picks up where Isabel left off by focusing with greater attention on Chase's engagement with other artists and their work, demonstrating how we can see in specific stylistic gestures and broader visual ideas Chase's active dialogue with some of her contemporaries and the generation immediately preceding her own. Xenia Makosky tackles the important question of the "representational" and "non-representational" in Chase's visual language, how these qualities can be defined, how we should "see" them, and the significance they hold within her artistic trajectory. Finally, Ben Goodrum addresses the elusive but essential issue of mark making in Chase's work, a topic she herself brought up several times in her journals. Through a close analysis of some exemplary images, Ben highlights the importance of the mark to Chase's visual language throughout her career.

Despite Louisa Chase's untimely passing in 2016, her presence is everywhere visible in the works that comprise *The Boundaries Imagined*.

- 1 Undated typed manuscript. *Louisa Chase Papers*, Box 21, "Writings, Essays and Poems," Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, Syracuse, New York. n.p.
- 2 Undated typed manuscript. *Louisa Chase Papers*, Box 21..., n.p.
- 3 Nancy Princethal, exhibition review of "Louisa Chase at Brooke Alexander Gallery," *Art in America*, November, vol.79 (1991):158.
- 4 Barry Yourgrau, exhibition review of "Louisa Chase at Robert Miller Gallery, 1981," *Art in America*, April, vol.69 (1981):14.
- 5 Undated journal entry, *Louisa Chase Papers*, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, New York, cited in, Andrew J. Saluti, "Now Here," *Louisa Chase - Force Field*, exhibition catalogue, Hirschl & Adler Modern (New York, N.Y.: Hirschl & Adler Modern, 2019), 4.
- 6 Holland Cotter, exhibition review of "Louisa Chase at Robert Miller Gallery, 1986," *Art in America* June, vol.74 (1986):123.
- 7 Journal entry, March 23, 1988, *Louisa Chase Papers*, Box 21, "Writings-Journals, 1987-1988," Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, Syracuse New York, n.p.
- 8 Louisa Chase, "artist statement," in Susan Logan and Allan Schwartzman, *New Work/ New York - Nancy Arlen, Louisa Chase, Rudy Heintze, F.L. Schroder, David Wells - The New Museum, 1980*, exhibition catalogue, (New York, NY: The New Museum, 1980), 16.
- 9 Ann Lauterbach, "Louisa Chase: Figure in a Landscape. I. Introduction: An Interpretation," *Louisa Chase - Brook Alexander, April 3-27, 1991*, exhibition catalogue, (New York, NY: Brooke Alexander, 1991), 1.
- 10 Clement Greenberg, "Abstract, Representational, and so forth," in *Art and Culture - Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 133-138; 133.
- 11 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum*, no.5 (June, 1976):12-23.

The Artistic Life of Louisa Chase

ISABEL FRANGULES

Louisa Chase began her artistic career as an undergraduate student at Syracuse University in 1969. Although initially entering as a Classics major, Chase was introduced to printmaking by Professor Don Cortese, and she ultimately obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree specializing in printmaking in 1973. Throughout her four years, Chase became known for her innovative and often imaginative works. Those who knew her, such as friend and artist George Negroponte, recalled Chase's ability to push the boundaries of the many materials she worked with, creating objects like life-size sculptures constructed out of vinyl and canvas. During her time at Syracuse, experimental media had become popular within the art department, and students were encouraged to explore new mediums such as videography or installation art.¹ Chase participated in these new practices, often creating large-scale or suspended sculptures. For example, in the basement of the Syracuse art building, viewers could enter a different world surrounded by colorful vinyl cones suspended from the ceiling.² Often life-sized, these installations would surround viewers, with several cone-shaped sculptures positioned around them. One example consisted of horn shapes with bands of colors that came down from the ceiling, revealing themselves to be larger than the viewer. As viewers navigated through the hallway, they walked next to these large forms, some of which were made of canvas, while others were made of vinyl. These large and often enigmatic works required that viewers interact with them.

This interaction between sculpture and viewer is particularly obvious in the 1972 Seymour Feilmore exhibition (fig.1), where Chase was one of six Syracuse artists represented. In this exhibition, Chase created a large-scale inflatable vinyl sculpture that was displayed at the Syracuse Loewe Art Center in 1972.³ Those who went to school with Chase recall how she would be seen carrying these sculptures through campus, placing them in different spaces.⁴ Sometimes, her sculptures could be found outside, sprawling across open lawns, and at other times, they would be in a more cramped gallery space. The Seymour Feilmore exhibition included a sculpture made of one large blue triangle with several inflated appendages stretching out, overtaking the space around it. Chase constructed the sculpture entirely of vinyl and inflated it with a fan. The primary colors of red, yellow, and blue, along with the relatively simple shapes, created a playful environment, inviting viewers to explore and experience the work, as they had the opportunity to wander through the multicolored appendages. Furthermore, audiences were encouraged to interact with the sculpture, often squeezing or hugging the limbs.



Fig.1 Louisa Chase, *Vinyl Inflatable*, 1972, temporary exhibition, Syracuse University, from "Louisa Chase: What Lies Beneath - Panel Discussion," October 2, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=klOpQWygCDs&t=1120s>.

Beneath the lighthearted and whimsical appearance and interactions, however, was a more somber message. The Syracuse New Times described the statue as a "transitory event" given that the exhibition only lasted several weeks. The sculpture was described as if it was a living being, with the author comparing the conclusion of the exhibition to the idea of death. Another Syracuse art student, Suzanne Sherley, described the concept as "The vitality in this show is that it is limited in time."⁵ As people touched the sculpture and as the wind blew through it, it moved as if it was alive. These interactions would eventually lead the material of the sculpture to wear down, resulting in deflation and fading colors, and therefore losing its liveliness. Even with a lighthearted, huggable sculpture, Chase communicated a broader theme of impermanence. Beneath bright colors and shapes was a message about the transient nature of the experience itself and the sculpture that shapes that experience. In this sculpture, Chase prompted viewers to contemplate the life cycle of objects and their inevitable decay, serving as a poignant reminder of the impermanence of human and material life. This tension between Chase's underlying messages and how she visualized them is a recurring theme throughout her artistic career.

While Chase devoted significant time to sculpting during her time at Syracuse, she also undertook printmaking. Although her interest in printmaking began during her undergraduate education, it is one medium that Chase revisited throughout her career. Chase explored multiple techniques, such as etching, woodcut, and lithography. Her color lithograph, *Sticks and Stones* (cat.16) from 1975, is an example of a print made early in her career. In this print, Chase explored geometric forms, with circles representing stones and rectangles as sticks. Spherical forms are placed atop each other while others are balanced on rectangular shapes. These geometric shapes challenge the laws of gravity, seeming to keep themselves upright despite being unbalanced. All the shapes are outlined in black, with the lines striking through some of them, and circles are divided into halves or quarters, along with rectangles segmented into smaller rectangles or squares. Certain shapes are filled with blocks of color, such as the spheres, which contain tones of pink, red, or yellow. The lines and shapes of this print convincingly replicate the quality of a drawing. The outlines of geometric shapes and isolated lines are unpredictable and free flowing, as if sketched quickly with a black marker. The red, pinks, and yellows only partially fill in some of the shapes. These loose patches of color further contribute to the resemblance of a quickly drawn sketch.

It was later in her career, in the 1980s, when Chase became interested in the process of Japanese woodblock printing. In 1980, after visiting an exhibition at the Guggenheim, *Expressionism: A German Intuition 1905–1920*, Chase was motivated to explore this medium. Particularly impressed by the woodblock prints in the exhibition, Chase began to focus on the qualities of mark making that were possible through the woodcutting process.⁶

Chase's large woodcut, *Chasm*, 1983 (cat.21) is one of many woodblock prints created during this period. In this print, a pair of feet rests firmly atop jagged cliffs. The feet appear as stable despite the dramatic angles of the fractured cliffs. Chase transformed the idea of cliff sides, creating a dramatic and unrecognizable landform. The feet, recognizable appendages, become unfamiliar as they are augmented to encompass a large part of the cliff top. Chase positioned herself within the image using the feet, stating, "The feet put myself in it – on the edge – (the spirit of the place)."⁷ This depiction of the artist's presence emphasizes her understanding of the natural forces that she depicts in that Chase established a correlation between the natural forces of the landscape and the emotional forces within her own experience.

The steep slopes are saturated tones of brown and orange, and the feet are created using the same colors, seamlessly integrating them into the surroundings. The dramatic angles of the cliffs anchor the print, covering the majority of the paper. The middle part of the image reveals a dark, starry background. Repeated and imperfect lines come together to form the cliff tops and faces. Each line, which would have been individually carved, varies in length and thickness. The wavering lines reveal the gestural and spontaneous manner with which Chase used the

chisel. The convergence of small markings into large patches of color create a visual sense of weightiness, while the minimal lines that outline the feet add a contrasting, lighter element. Between the threatening spiked triangular edges, there are white specks resembling stars. The interaction between the foreground of landform and dark nightlike background creates a limited sense of space. A bright blue light is revealed behind the rock faces in the upper right corner, which slowly dissipates into the black sky beneath.

In her woodblock prints, we also see how Chase deviated from the familiar tradition of the print blocks being perfectly aligned. At the edges of the print, viewers can see that the different color blocks are not aligned, unveiling elements of the printing process. Another artistic choice is that the printing block's wood grain remains visible and is particularly apparent within the black background. Chase's prints *Red Sea* (cat.19) and *Untitled (Black Sea)* (cat.20), both from 1983, demonstrate her exploration of color. In these two prints, Chase repeated the same rolling waves alongside several severed hands in two different color palettes. In the *Red Sea*, Chase employed vibrant shades of red, blue, and purple, while in *Untitled*, she repeated the same setting, but this time with tones of green, yellow, and purple. The curling waves in both prints communicate a visual force against each other. In the *Red Sea*, clusters of small red marks converge to form the robust and dense crest of the wave and the deep red tones transition into a brighter, nearly neon hue. In *Untitled* print, Chase achieved the same effect of numerous small lines compressing into a larger wave, but this time represented through shades of yellow and green. The turquoise shades shift into a green hue, eventually transitioning into a vibrant yellow. Both prints are covered with squiggly lines, which vary in thickness and length. The subtle variations among the lines reveal the differing depths of each carved stroke within the print block. In Chase's depiction of hands at the upper part of the print, viewers are asked to imagine the sensation of one hand above the water's surface and the other submerged beneath. Though Chase initially began printing during her time at Syracuse University, her interest in printmaking extended throughout her career.

Chase's education continued after Syracuse when she moved on to the MFA program at Yale University in 1973. Chase entered into an extremely competitive environment, and strove to impress renowned professors such as Al Held, Judy Pfaff, and artist-in-residence, Phillip Guston.⁸ After two years in the painting program, Chase earned her MFA. Despite being in a painting and printmaking program, many of Chase's earlier works of this time were sculptural. These works included what could be called "jovial objects" such as small wooden cars and subdued floor paintings. Chase's "floor paintings" at this time included painted wooden arches, painted wooden balls, and felt elements. The floor sculptures would later evolve into Chase's first solo exhibition. In 1975, during her last year at Yale, Chase was invited to participate in an exhibition at the Artist Space in SoHo. Her sculpture, *Cars and Triangles* (fig.2) included cars constructed of wooden cylinders on wheels that were

placed upon flattened pieces of raised aluminum. In an exhibition review, Alan Moore described the installation in the following manner: “These works look like games, but it’s not any game you can play. It’s more like toys left out on the floor.”⁹ Similar to her earlier whimsical sculptures made as an undergraduate at Syracuse, Chase created a new, and almost recognizable, environment but on a much smaller scale. Within the sequence of horizontal strips, colored blocks that interrupt the strips can be seen, along with other elements that connect the strips. Strategic placement of the blocks and aluminum strips is an example of Chase’s interest in the theme of systems and games. In her journals, Chase discussed this theme at length, considering the role of games in art and the process of making art through 12 pages of writing: “My work has always been involved in the fantastic game.”¹⁰ This idea of chance and risk involved in game theory that Chase wrote about is an interest of hers that is similar to other themes she explored, like boundaries, rules, and space. Her sculptures of cars and balls can be seen as more obvious examples of considering game theory. Laying out sculptures of various shapes allowed Chase to explore ideas of systems, relations, and how these different elements interact. In the *Cars and Triangles* exhibition, viewers might have questioned which lines were physical boundaries for the car forms, what these forms were allowed to do, and how the pieces interacted. Some of the sculptures further pushed the ideas of rules, such as when one of the car shapes was bent in half when ascending an elevated aluminum strip.¹¹ Chase’s sculptures encouraged spectators to reflect on how rules are implied within the sculpture. This theme can also be seen in the lithograph *Sticks and Stones* (cat.16). In this print, Chase experimented with how different forms, circles, and rectangles interact with one another. The colorful balls balance precipitously among one another or atop lines and rectangles. As the creator of the game, Chase suggested that the different shapes were stacked atop one another in an unbalanced state, but without the chance of them falling. Large balls rest comfortably on top of much smaller ones with no signs of falling over, and rectangles rest firmly on small circles, showing no signs of slipping. The rules and systems that Chase suggested in this work allow all of the various visual elements to stay put.

Soon after graduating from Yale and having her first solo exhibition in 1975, Chase moved to New York City, where she remained from the late 1970s into the 1980s. During this time Chase lived with some of her previous classmates from Yale and taught at the Rhode Island School of Design, commuting to Providence, and then moving on to teach at the School of Visual arts in Manhattan.¹² During these years in New York City, painting became Chase’s primary medium, and it coincided with a challenge to the dominance of Minimalism as a conceptual and stylistic movement, when several artists deliberately began to reintroduce figuration into painting.¹³ Minimalist arts emerged in the 1950s and remained popular into the 1970s. This movement was characterized by simplified forms and a lack of representation. Many Minimalists solely focused on the basic elements of color and form in their most reduced



Fig.2 Louisa Chase, *Cars and Triangles*, installation view of exhibition, detail, “Louisa Chase, Ted Stamm, Meryl Vladimer,” Artists Space, 1975.

qualities.¹⁴ As Chase continued to make representational works, she also began employing an *impasto* technique in her works, a gesture that entails applying paint in thick layers to generate textural depth.¹⁵ This technique is evident in her painting, *Untitled* (cat.3) from 1979. The painting’s paramount element is the blue torso, which encompasses a large portion of the canvas. Reduced in shape, only a few curved lines delineate the body, and the gentle contours of the body invite viewers to imagine it swaying. The arms and legs extend gradually, blending into the yellow background. The form is created with an *impasto* technique, where multiple layers of blue tones are built up to create the form. By layering the paint, Chase created a rich and tactile surface. The blue hues extend beyond the darker outlines of the figure, which are clear indicators of Chase’s decision to transcend her outlines. These outlines and others are carved out of the paint layers, unveiling other layers of paint beneath. Tones of green and black reveal themselves alongside the sprawling blues. Another identifiable carved section shows an outstretched arm and hand positioned to the right of the body. Beneath these, two curvy lines are created with the same technique. These carved lines are also placed toward the left of the torso, with a somewhat arched shape.

Chase partitioned the canvas into four geometric parts. The most expansive yellow rectangle encapsulates the blue torso. The tonalities of the yellow backdrop are created by the application of multiple colors to the canvas. The hues of pink and turquoise, which create the yellow, can be seen in areas near the torso. Another area where the layers are most evident are at the edges of the canvas, where viewers can discern sheets of greens and blues. To the left, a vibrant expanse of turquoise contrasts with the blue-contoured figure. Once again, Chase left both lighter and darker patches visible. This deliberate variation in texture and hue serves

as a reminder of the artist's hand. In the upper part of the painting, Chase created a dark sea-green, five-sided shape. And, in the top left corner, the smallest geometric component, Chase used more yellow. These very angular geometric sections provide a striking counterpoint to the figure's graceful contours. The straight lines of the geometric shapes create rigidity, challenging the sweeping, more organic markings of the body. Though much of this canvas is flat, the flatness is disrupted by texture and outlines. The distinct, vivid colors were created through the meticulous layering of multiple hues.

As Chase progressed in her career, she continued to work with layering techniques to achieve unique textures and coloration. Along the edges of many of her canvases, observers can find thick accumulations of paint. Forms like the torso and hands, seen in *Untitled*, 1979, emerged as recurring motifs in Chase's subsequent work. For example, the torso reappears in the painting, *Wave*, 1982 (cat.2). In that painting, the torso reappears at a smaller scale, with the arms wrapped around itself. In the earlier *Untitled* painting of 1979, viewers can find techniques and recurring motifs that continue into Chase's later works. These elements served as the building blocks that shaped and informed her artistic evolution.

As Chase moved forward with her work, her focus shifted toward conveying the idea of emotions within natural landscapes. The *Untitled* painting (cat.14) from 1982 is one of Chase's many depictions of landscape or weather phenomena. Within the theme of natural events, Chase often depicted seascapes, snow squalls, and rainstorms. Her interest in these themes began to appear in her work in 1980 and lasted for over four years.¹⁶ In this work, Chase depicts the idea of storm clouds, with dark circular clusters of black and gray, focusing on the edges of the canvas. The texture and shiny surface of these clouds seem to have been created by heavily layering oil paint. Chase layered gray and black paint to create the clouds, and the brushstrokes are visible when looking closely. The clouds are perfectly circular, almost resembling bubbles or cotton balls, and they suggest an energetic space that is also imaginative. The round shapes are connected or layered on top of one another, forming the expansive and menacing cloud formations. Central to the painting is the representation of what appears to be a downpour, which strikes diagonally through the thick clouds. This sheet of rain reveals itself from behind a cloud in the upper right corner and moves neatly across the canvas to the bottom left corner. This bold diagonal guides viewers' eyes despite the smaller scale of the canvas. Tones of blue blend into each other while maintaining their independence, thus allowing viewers to imagine the pelting of raindrops. The dark rose-red clouds barely peek through the intense storm, suggesting some depth. The dark tones of the black and gray clouds set against the vivid hues of the bright blues and pinks create a captivating and energized image.

Through her natural iconography, Chase created what she called "internalized landscapes."¹⁷ Along with these natural phenomena, Chase portrayed distinct emotional moods that she connected to the imagery of

the scene. In the *Untitled* painting (cat.14), viewers' senses are awakened by the strong pellets of rain and looming dark clouds. The tumultuous sky with saturated colors adds energy and apprehension to the image. Visible brushstrokes that comprise the rain and clouds signify Chase's hand, while also adding to the intensity of the scene. In this dramatic moment with color, shape, and texture, viewers are absorbed in the power of natural forces. Chase effectively created a recognizable yet non-literal depiction of a rainstorm, which projects an ominous mood. Also, in 1982, Chase produced a much larger painting of the same subject matter. *Thunderstorm* (96 in. x 96 in.) allowed viewers to be enveloped within the image, given its massive scale. Here again, Chase depicted her plump clouds releasing a neat, diagonal downpour. Expansive circular clouds loom over the sheets of rain, and within the pink-hued clouds, ominous shades of gray appear where the raindrops are released. Whimsical rosy clouds transition into threatening hues of gray and purple. Straight strokes of blue paint form the individual raindrops, which seamlessly transform into layers of dense blue hues, creating the image of the downpour. The multiples sheets of rain layer on top of one another, heightening the storm's intensity and adding to the sense of depth. While both paintings capture the power of a rainstorm, the two have distinct visual qualities and techniques. Chase seemed to be exploring various methods of capturing the intensity of a raging rainstorm and the feeling evoked in the viewer by the scene.

Chase's frustration while trying to create these internalized landscapes was published as part of the exhibition catalogue for her 1984 solo show at the Robert Miller Gallery, NYC. The entire text included in the catalogue of this solo exhibition consisted of excerpts from Chase's journal entries she had written while creating six of the paintings in the show. Readers gain a deeper understanding of Chase's struggles and goals in creating these landscapes, and her reflections about the process. Chase articulated the difficulties while describing the process of making one of the paintings: "Pumped it too full of color and it lost the light. Toned it down again, and the sadness emerged."¹⁸ Amid her challenge with colors, Chase struggled to discover the hues that would result in the desired ambiance. The balance between lighting and mood compelled Chase to work persistently on the painting. These private frustrations that Chase grappled with are revealed in passages like the following: "Each painting feels very specific – not only concerning a different phenomenon, but having an emotional charge that is contained in color and direction of the mark."¹⁹ Chase frequently dedicated extensive periods of time to her paintings, sometimes removing most of the progress she had made by day's end. The frustrations Chase faced when trying to depict natural phenomena within a representational art eventually led her to experiment with more abstract imagery. As estate manager at Hirschl and Adler Galleries, Ted Holland, suggests, this interest in depicting phenomena eventually pushed her to move away from more familiar representational works.²⁰ Viewers can observe this transition in her images such as *FACE to ECAF Study* from 1985 (cat.5). Here, Chase applied a black paint layer on

top of a white one and then etched bold lines into the top layer to create the two faces. Irregular lines traverse the canvas, forming vaguely discernible facial features. Much like her earlier work, Chase used a scraping technique to create her lines. Various thicknesses and curvatures of the carvings manifest the energy of the artist. The lines vary in length, with some more sporadic short ones and some lengthier ones. The wavy edges of some of the lines create a less visually distinct head, while other lines are unbending. Compared to the landscape paintings from the previous three years, these works are more abstract. Chase relied on gestural lines to create identifiable faces. Though reliant on linear gestures, these faces indicate that Chase never entirely abandoned a representational vocabulary.

The transition from gestural, figurative art to more abstract imagery did not hinder Chase's artistic inclination. She continued to make art up until her death in 2016. Across a diverse array of mediums throughout her career, Chase's art exhibits consistent techniques, themes, and symbols.

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- 3 Jud Rosebush, exhibition review of "Seymour Feelmore," *Syracuse New Times*, April 20, 1972, n.p.
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- 18 Exhibition catalogue, *Louisa Chase*, Robert Miller Gallery, 1984, n.p.
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Louisa Chases's Artistic Inspirations

ZANDER HOLT

Throughout Louisa Chase's career, she was inspired by fellow artists—both those who were creating art at the same time, and those who came before her. As she was learning and growing as an artist, from graduating from Yale School of Art with a M.F.A in 1975 to entering the New York art scene, Chase's style developed with reference to elements from artists like Philip Guston, Jackson Pollock, Cy Twombly, and Piet Mondrian. In this essay, I will address specific visual elements within Louisa Chase's work, and how Chase seems to have drawn upon these artists' works in shaping her own style.

During her final year of graduate school, Chase was introduced to Philip Guston, a renowned painter who was teaching at Yale during the late 1970s. Guston subsequently became a close friend of Chase's and an artistic mentor.¹ As a painter and printmaker who began making art in 1927 when he enrolled in a high school for the arts, Guston created works well into the 1970s.² Guston would depict and comment on the world around him in his own abstract style, discussed below.³ His ideas can be seen throughout Chase's earlier works, including the painting *Untitled*, 1979 (cat.3), which was completed a year before Guston died.

In the painting *Untitled*, a headless blue torso with incomplete arms and legs stands on a cream-colored background. The arms are stretched out from the body, and it appears as though it is leaning heavier on one side, putting the weight on one leg while kicking the other out as though it was dancing. To the side of the torso is a stack of colored blocks: a teal-colored rectangle and a black squared shape with the upper left corner cut off. The teal rectangle has scratches and marks across the paint, made before the paint had time to dry. Beneath the teal paint, different shades of dark green can be seen through the scratches, made most likely by the handle of one of her tools. The scratches add texture to the blocks in contrast to the smoother cream-colored canvas. In other places on the canvas, such as the end of the torso's raised arm and the space below the lowered arm, it appears as though Chase brushed her hand through the paint to create a smudged appearance.

The edges of the canvas are unfinished, with layers of the different colored paints clearly visible. Despite the mostly cool-toned palette of the painting, such as the sky-blue torso and the colored blocks, the cream background is much warmer. Cool tones relate to the shades having bases of blues, greens, and purples. Warm tones are on the opposite end of color spectrum, and shades have bases of reds, oranges, and yellows. In the space surrounding the light-blue torso, pink and yellow can be seen

pulling through the cream color, making the background more dynamic than if it was a flat-toned background.

This technique of layering the different colored paints is akin to a method that Guston used in his own works. Guston referred to this technique as "weaving the paint," describing the way that he would layer different colors in his paintings to create textures and depth.⁴ This technique is demonstrated in the use of color within his painting, *Painting, Smoking, Eating* from 1972, which is described by Guston as a self portrait.⁵ In the painting, Guston depicts a one-eyed, bubblegum-pink man with a blanket tucked up to his chin lying down in bed. Beyond the bed is a wall of shoes and suitcases in shades of pink and red. To the left of the wall of shoes is a large red lightbulb with a golden chain, and the lightbulb appears to be linked to a pull cord on the right side of the canvas. On top of the blanket is a pile of rectangular shapes, balanced on top of a plate. The shapes resemble toy food: plastic rectangular French fries and wooden slices of cake. In the space around where the bean-shaped head's mouth should be, there is a rectangular-shaped cigarette. From the end of cigarette is a small black-and-gray smoke cloud.

Although the majority of the painting is rendered in the same warm pink color, the blanket within the painting has spots of blue, white, and red paints built upon the base. The layered paint makes the blanket seem to be three dimensional, with the different colors acting as highlights and shadows around where the body would be under the covers. Similar blending and layering are seen in Chase's *Untitled* (cat.3), such as in the transition between the legs and the background, as well as in the paint built up around the curves of the torso. A very similar painting by Guston, *Painter in Bed* (1973), can serve as an equal point of comparison. This painting shows the same bubblegum-pink man under bed covers and smoking a cigarette, however, balanced on the man's chest are cans of paint instead of a plate of food. The same layering of color is visible in the man's facial stubble, which also has areas of blues and grays mixed into the pinks.

In a review of Chase's exhibition at the Robert Miller Gallery in 1981, art critic Kim Levin stated, "Like many other young artists, she [Chase] obviously learned something from Guston about clunky images and dragged brushfuls of paint."⁶ The "brushfuls of paint" were demonstrated in the way the torso was represented, as the paint was built up to create creases and peaks. The bumpy torso then creates a contrast of texture against the smooth surface of the cream background and the matte surface of the two-colored blocks. In addition to experimenting

with layering paint, Chase experimented with different applications and removal of paint. Critic and fellow artist Richard Kalina, when writing about Chase's exhibition at the Brooke Alexander Gallery in 1989, 10 years after *Untitled* was painted, commented on Chase's scraping and gouging as a technique, saying that "it is carving without loss: Nothing is added, nothing is removed. There is a feeling of careful abandon; Chase lets go but within limits."⁷ The scraping technique seen in *Untitled* (cat.3) adds a dimension to the painting. The canvas was painted a dark blue as the base color, with cream paint placed over top. Then, the outline of the body was carved into the cream base, giving the torso a dark blue outline. The outlining gives the illusion of the body receding slightly into the canvas, like a cookie cutter into dough.

Louisa Chase used everything from a palette knife to her own hands to create different textures within her art. Through her use of varying textures, Chase worked with the concept of space and how space would interact with depicted objects. From 1979 and through the early 2000s, Chase worked with different mediums, such as woodblock printing and etching, to approach the idea of space in new ways.

In 1984, Chase was a part of an exhibition for the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis titled *Images and Impressions: Painters who Print*, which highlighted 20th-century American painters who also created woodblock prints. The curator of the exhibition, Elizabeth Armstrong, wrote the following about Chase in her catalogue essay:

She became increasingly fascinated with the woodcutting process and with the character of markings that resulted in the manipulation of the hand tools. Her original concepts for the prints fell away as she let her involvement with the carving process dictate the forms of the finished works. One reason the woodcut process so intrigued Chase was that it forced her to cut into and thus animate the large, solid forms that she favored during this period.⁸

Chase was first inspired to work with woodblock prints after seeing German Expressionist prints in the early 1980s in an exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Chase remembers being "struck by the power that was held by the prints."⁹ The German prints were black-and-white images created with sharp, abstract figures.

The cutting and shaping of the designs within Chase's woodblocks allowed her to build upon her color weaving and scraping techniques. Woodblock prints are created first by making a design that is copied onto wooden blocks. The design is then divided by the different colors within the image. For each color, one block is carved with the part of the image that corresponds to that color. The lightest color is printed first, and the darkest color is printed last. In her woodblock print *Chasm*, 1983 (cat.21) Chase depicted a disembodied pair of feet standing on the ledge of a series of rock faces and cliffs. Another quotation from the *Images and Impressions* catalogue reads:

In this work, a pair of gently rendered feet rests at the edge of a jagged precipice, animated by surrounding cliffs that jut into each other at all angles. In her paintings in the early 1980s, these same

forms are presented as dense and weighty. In her prints, they have less materiality – they are simultaneously opaque and atmospheric.¹⁰

The black background of the print with dots of white from the paper gives the illusion of a night sky, making the scene seem to recede beyond the cliffs. The black color of the imagined sky is the same shade as the black used to fill in the rocks, however, the rust color creates a highlight and the deeper brown creates an illusion of height to the cliffs. The blue color at the top of the image creates the illusion of a sky, as though the day is rising just beyond the cliffs. The black also colors the pair of feet, adding to the appearance of weightlessness as it matches the black of the sky, as though the viewer is looking through them and the two are made of the same material. The painting *Crevice*, 1982 is made of a similar grouping of cliff faces against a night sky and was painted a year before the woodblock prints were created. Chase described part of her painting, *Crevice*, with respect to her own presence: "The feet put myself in it – on the edge – the spirit of the place."¹¹ However, since the feet are disembodied, the feet can be anyone, and the cliffs could be anywhere.

The cliffs exist on an angle, with the largest cliff holding the feet pointing downward, as though the feet are about to slide off the edge. The cliffs are made of three central crown-like points, with smaller points sitting on either side. Similar to the unfinished edges in the *Untitled* (cat.3) painting from 1979, the edges of the print *Chasm*, 1983 (cat.21) are also rough and unfinished, which can be seen at the top right of the image, where the rusty brown color expands past the black. The cliff imagery is also seen at the bottom edge of the print, where the paper is cut jaggedly, almost mirroring the jagged cliff faces. Through the use of different textures and shapes, the viewer is then presented with a spatial dilemma—where do the cliffs end, and the rest of the world begin?

As Chase began to work more with woodblock printing as a medium, with images like *Chasm* and *Thicket*, 1983 (cat.18), she began to experiment with the idea of infinite space. By using greater contrast between the parts of the image that have objects or patterns, and the parts of the image with no markings, Chase was able to give the illusion of the images moving forward or backward in an otherwise two-dimensional space. By manipulating the perspective, the artist can appear to make space go on forever, infinitely. A similar effect to this perception of space can be seen within the splatter paintings of arguably the most well-known Abstract Expressionist, Jackson Pollock.

Pollock was a painter who created large splatter paintings by laying canvases on his floor and flicking, dripping, or throwing paint onto the canvas from above. In a review of Pollock's life and career, Nancy Jachec wrote that Pollock was "obsessed by the immense emptiness" of paintings, and acted as a juxtaposition to the development of the Pop style that began to be associated with the American art world.¹² An interview with Pollock in 1947 explained his process as "painting with his canvas on the floor to be able to work at the painting from all four sides."¹³ Pollock would create his paintings by first painting the

unprepared canvas with a base color, then layering different color paints on top of the base color.

In Pollock's painting *Blue Poles* from 1952, he worked from the ground up with a navy-blue base coat added to his canvas. Next, Pollock layered different colored splatters on top of the navy blue, making sure to not concentrate one color on one portion of the canvas to "avoid any points of emphasis."¹⁴ Finally, he added three vertical poles across the center of the canvas, in the same shade as the base color. This layering in this particular order created an optical illusion, making the poles seem both above and below the other splatters of paint. In Pollock's painting *Watery Paths* (1947) we can see a similar pattern of layering, as the black circular drizzle of paint is the same shade as the base color, creating a division between the splatters. Although Chase's woodblock prints are not splatter painted, the different layers formed by the woodblocks create a similar manipulation of space through her use of color.

One motif Chase used as a way to layer colors can be seen in the jagged cliff faces in the print *Chasm* (cat.21) and in her drawing *Untitled (Cavern)* from c.1984 (cat.17). The cliffs all come to the same crown-shaped points. The drawing is similar to another painting done by Chase, *Pink Cave*, (1983) and it appears as though the drawing was created as a first draft of the final image in the painting for Chase to work out the placement of the objects.

Much like Pollock's large splatter paintings, in which layered colors create the illusion of space, Chase's layering in her prints create a similar visual effect. Pollock used colors to emphasize the presence of layering and space within his works, while Chase used layering to emphasize the colors of objects within space.

Thicket (cat.18) is a woodblock print of a headless torso without hands or feet, trapped behind a series of two-pronged branches and twigs that are intertwined with one another. The dark-brown and gray branches that begin at the image's left side weave and overlap with the branches that begin along the bottom edge and the right side of the image. Short vertical and diagonal lines fill the space behind and around the torso and give the impression of leaves. On the left side of the print is a bright yellowish-green ball, made of the same colors as the center of the torso. The ball also appears to be restrained by the network of branches. The torso in *Thicket* is colored in a yellowish green, similar to the color used for the small linear leaf shapes and the ball on the left side of the print. The body glows against the dark background and stands in sharp contrast to the dark browns and grays of the branches that stretch across the print. While the torso is colored with an array of yellows and greens, the outline is rendered with the same reddish-brown color as the branches. Most of the branches that cover the print appear in pairs, with two limbs sprouting from a single, larger branch. At the end of these pairs of limbs are two smaller, pointed prongs. The overall effect makes the branches resemble bug-like arms ending in pointy claws and pincers. Much like in the print *Chasm*, the paper is cut crudely, with the bottom edge uneven and fraying. Along the top right corner of the print, the light-green ink extends

beyond the black-brown, revealing that the prints were not aligned exactly before being placed upon the paper. The unfinished edges of the surfaces, like the printing paper or canvases, are something that Pollock and Chase both share, and act as a way to extend the space of the image from the paper and into reality.¹⁵

A recurring motif is the swirled waves visible in the prints *Red Sea*, 1983 (cat.19) and *Untitled (Black Sea)*, 1983 (cat.20). Chase had these two images printed using the same woodblocks with watercolor on Japanese fiber paper. The difference between the two lies within the colors, as *Red Sea* has a warmer-toned palette, and *Untitled (Black Sea)* has a cooler-toned palette. Five disembodied hands are placed within a series of swirled wave patterns in both images.

Within these two prints are six large waves. Two waves in the upper center of the image are positioned about to crash together, while smaller waves in the lower left and right corners seem to roll through uninterrupted. When first looking at the image, the waves appear to be in monochrome, however, upon closer inspection, the waves are made of short, overlapping lines of yellows, greens, blues, purples, oranges, and reds. The lightest of the shades seem to glow against the black backdrop of the print. The lighter colors of yellow and orange make up the crests of the waves, and the shifting colors from dark to light create movement, as the viewer follows the colors around the shape of the wave. The color gradient creates visual variety. As Pollock layered his paints by working color by color, Chase layered her color on the woodblock. The first color printed onto the paper is seen beneath the color that is printed last. This layering of color affects how the viewer sees the dimensions of an object within an image by creating highlights and shadows. Both artists placed their colors deliberately to create this spatial illusion.

The five hands seem to be completely submerged in the water within the print. The hands are shown from the wrist down and appear to be palm down, as the thumbs of the hands are pointed toward one another. Like most of Chase's representational imagery, the hands take on a more silhouetted appearance, as there is no indication of fingernails or of knuckles. There are two sets of hands, each consisting of a right hand and a left hand, and one isolated hand in the top right of the image.

The waters by the isolated hand in the upper right are much calmer than the waters by the two sets of hands. In the upper right, the water appears as shorter horizontal lines colored with the same shade as the outline of the hand. In the lower left of the image with the two sets of hands, the water appears as zigzags and squiggles, creating a crowded and chaotic space in contrast to the top right. The smaller of the two sets of hands seem to be completely restrained by the ripples over top of them, as though the person the hands were connected to became too tired to continue to swim. The larger of the two sets of hands, by contrast, seem to be pushing through the water, thus creating more of the ripple effect. The outline of the larger hands seems to be double printed, meaning that multiple prints of the same color were placed slightly off center, creating a shadow, or second line, to the image. This double

printing creates movement, as though we can watch the hands move through the sea.

Unlike Pollock, Chase used representational imagery to create landscapes, such as her woodblock prints as discussed above. "These landscapes repeat like a recurring dream," wrote Kim Levin in her article for the *Village Voice* on Louisa Chase.¹⁶ The dreamlike quality of the landscapes is created in part through Chase's use of colors, as they are layered and woven together so tightly. Central also to this effect is Chase's individualistic mark making.

Cy Twombly was an artist known for his gestural marks. His work often focused on ancient history or mythological stories, such as the Trojan War or the story of Zeus and Leda.¹⁷ Twombly's use of writing and scribbles, while seemingly a simple artistic technique, relates to his work as a poet as well as a painter.¹⁸ The scribbles and writing create a form of concrete poetry, which is a kind of poem that takes the form of an image.¹⁹ By combining the writing of concrete poetry with the color and gestural marks of painting, Twombly was able to create a style of painting that is uniquely associated with his work. Chase recalled elements of Twombly's style within her prints *Red Sea* (cat.19) and *Untitled (Black Sea)* (cat.20) through the images of the waves and the implied weather. The scribbles are also seen in her later etching, *Untitled (Hands)*, 1990 (cat.9). In this large etching, the hands are disconnected from any completed body, much like the disembodied feet in the print *Chasm* (cat.21) or the torso in *Untitled* (cat.3).

Chase expanded from woodblock prints in *Untitled*, 1990 into using five different print techniques. By using multiple techniques, she explored the effect of texture in her work. Artists such as Philip Guston, Chase's mentor, and Jackson Pollock used different materials, such as paint thinner or acrylic paint, to create textural effects. Chase's techniques were layered on top of one another on a single printing plate that allowed her to experiment with layering, specifically with different opacities and scale. Opacity relates to how pigmented a color is. If the color seems to show the surface below it, then it is considered to have a low opacity, or be more translucent. If the color does not show any of what is beneath it, then it is considered to have a high opacity, or be more opaque. Since scale is the relative size of an object in an image, when different objects have different sizes, the differences in scale can direct the perception of space in the image.

Thin, scraggly lines seen in the top right of the etching were created using a traditional etching method, done by carving a design into a piece of metal, then coating the surface in ink or paint to transfer the image. These thin lines seem to be placed further into the space. If we imagine the white paper as one of Chase's infinite spaces, the thin lines seem to sink into the background.

The softer, blurrier lines were created using a sugar lifting technique, such as in the bottom left of the print. In sugar lifting, a thick substance, such as molasses or honey, is applied onto a block to create a pattern or design one wants to keep. Then, inks or paints are applied over the top of

the design, and the resulting transferred image appears light and feathery, as if it was painted with a calligraphy brush. The sugar lift lines appear to be closer to the surface of the image because of the size of the shapes. The thinner lines made by traditional etching are a sharper black. This contrast between the two manipulates the viewer's perception of the image.

Spit bite etching, seen in the print over the top of the colored blocks, creates the smudged lines of indistinct hands. This technique is achieved by painting a pattern or image onto a prepared metal plate, normally made of copper, with an acid. The acid is then diluted by a water-based mixture. The acid eats into the plates and the marks that are left behind then hold the ink that is used for transferring the image. Similar to the lines created by the sugar lift technique, the smudged lines appear to be closer to the surface.

Soft ground etching creates faint lines, as seen at the bottom of the image with the two hands reaching toward one another. This technique is created by drawing a desired design onto a plate treated with a "soft ground," which refers to the fat used to resist acid. The soft ground differs from a hard ground by keeping the plate slightly tacky, making it easier to transfer patterns or designs. After transferring the designs, the plate is washed in a gentle acid, and the resulting lines attain a soft appearance. The soft ground lines recede midway into the space of *Untitled (Hands)*, creating the effect of shadow in relation to some of the darker lines, such as in the area at the bottom right.

The color blocks appear to be added to the image with watercolor or with India ink, however, they are actually pieces of tissue paper applied with a technique called *chine-collé*, which binds the fibers of the tissue paper to the printing paper. Small portions of tissue paper are placed on the printing paper and are painted with a binding agent. Then, the papers are pressed together, and the pressure fuses the fibers of the two papers. Because the colored paper is placed on top of the image paper, it does not always dry completely flat. In *Untitled (Hands)* the colored blocks are uneven and slightly crooked. Pilling of the paper can be seen where the paper did not dry completely flat.

These color blocks are reminiscent of the paintings by the Dutch Abstractionist Piet Mondrian. The most well-known of Mondrian's paintings are geometric patterns of black, white, and primary colors, such as in his painting *Composition in Red, Black, Yellow, and Blue* (1921) (fig.3). During his early career, Mondrian became inspired by theosophical ideas of truth and beauty.²⁰ In an essay he published in 1917, Mondrian proposed a theory that claimed that "the combination of vertical and horizontal lines in a two-dimensional surface was the most intuitive way to communicate beauty, which [he] saw as the harmonious aspects of the world, and the most basic truths."²¹ As Chase was a very well-read student of art, often referring to philosophers within her essays and journals, it is likely that Chase would have read Mondrian's theory and could have adopted elements of his de Stijl style within her own art.²² As noted in her personal journal from 1987:

The mark making is to become essential – a language in itself without the figuration – without the outline – marks built up – the simplicity of the red, yellow, and blue geometry interests me into restrictions...I don't think these will be crowd-pleasers but there is something in them that if I can only connect to...²³

Chase considered the geometry of an image to be a new language that she had yet to use within her art. The primary-colored geometric blocks became a staple throughout her work from the late 1980s and early 1990s. *Composition in Red, Black, Yellow, and Blue* (1921) (fig.3) by Mondrian has more structure to its forms than Chase's etching *Untitled (Hands)*, 1990 (cat.9), with each block in Mondrian's work defined by a thick black border. In Mondrian's *Composition A* (fig.4) from 1923, there is more variation to the size and positioning of the geometric patterns, but there is still a uniformity, as the placement of the shapes is balanced and orderly. In Chase's *Untitled (Hands)* etching, the geometric shapes are not perfect squares or rectangles boxed in by a black border. Instead, the blocks have extra sides, with parts fitting together like puzzle pieces, centered at the right center of the etching.

Concurrent with the primary-colored pattern reminiscent of Mondrian, Chase's scribbles are invocative of the scribbled style of Cy Twombly, an artist referenced above, in her woodblock prints from the 1980s. Unlike Chase, but much like Pollock, Twombly did not use representational forms within his works. Instead, Twombly used calligraphy and print writing alongside his scribbled marks as a part of his storytelling. In his painting *Leda and the Swan* (1962), white and gray scribbles are built up on top of streaks of pink and red, with scribbles scattered across the canvas. In contrast, Chase's scribbles are more isolated, such as in the watercolor-and-ink painting *Untitled*, 1989 (cat.7) where the black scribbles are concentrated at the bottom left of the canvas.

Surrounding the colored blocks and filling the rest of the paper of *Untitled (Hands)* are shapes suggestive of hands. The fingers on the hands are rounded and have no lines or markings to indicate where knuckles would be placed. The palms are squared off, and it appears as though Chase is breaking the hands down into key shapes: ovals, squares, and circles. The breakdown of the hands in *Untitled (Hands)* differs from Chase's depictions of hands in previous works, such as *Red Sea*, 1983 (cat.19) and shows her gradual shift into nonrepresentational imagery.

The hands in *Untitled (Hands)* reach across the paper, overlapping with the different opacities and line thickness. At the center of the image, two of the hands seem to have the fingers steepled together, as if the figures the hands could be attached to were holding hands. The fainter, blurrier shapes created with the sugar lift technique appear to be underneath the sharper, thinner lines created with the traditional etching technique, which gives the illusion of movement, as seen with the hands at the center left part of the print. It appears as though the thin hands were moving back and forth rapidly, creating blurry lines, like they were waving at the audience. Remember Guston's *Painter in Bed* (1973) that

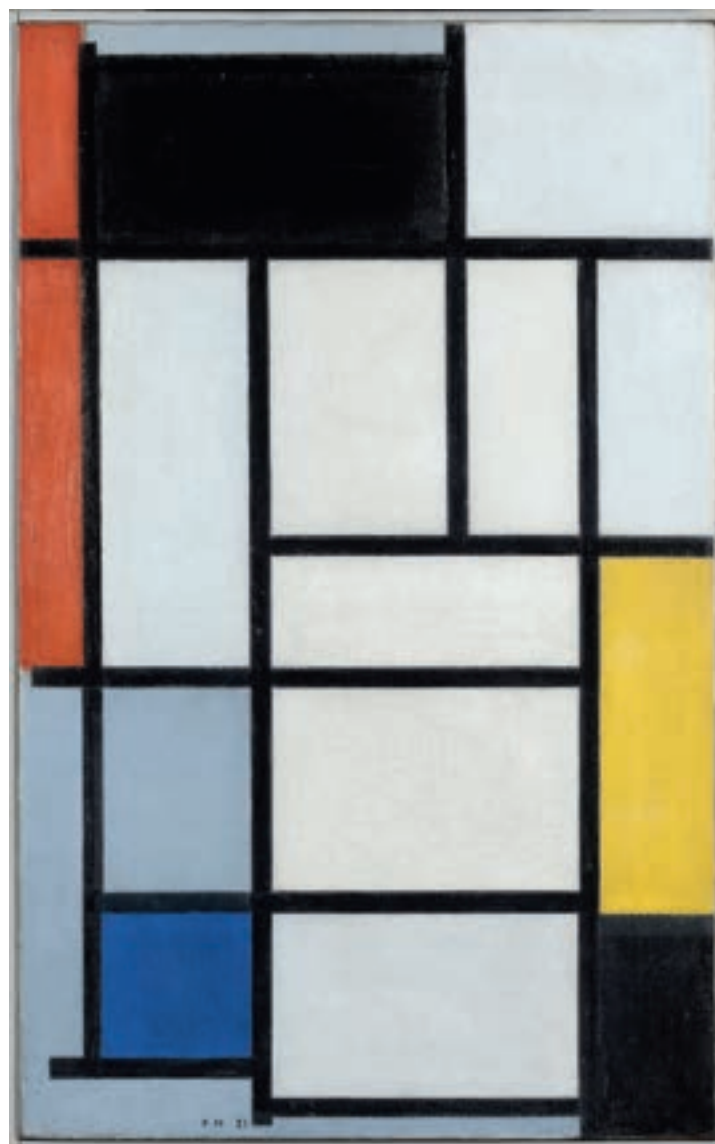


Fig.3 Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) *Composition with Red, Black, Yellow and Blue*, 1921. Oil on canvas. The Hague, Netherlands. ©2023 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust, Photo Credit: HIP / Art Resource, NY.

had a bubblegum-pink man smoking a cigarette? A similar allusion to motion can be seen through the smoke from the end of the cigarette, as it is created through the layering of black, gray, and white paint.

Although Chase's style continued to evolve, she also continued to experiment with techniques and inspirations from her past. Although we can see the influence of other artists within Chase's work, it would be a disservice to try and place her into a single stylistic box. Beginning as a

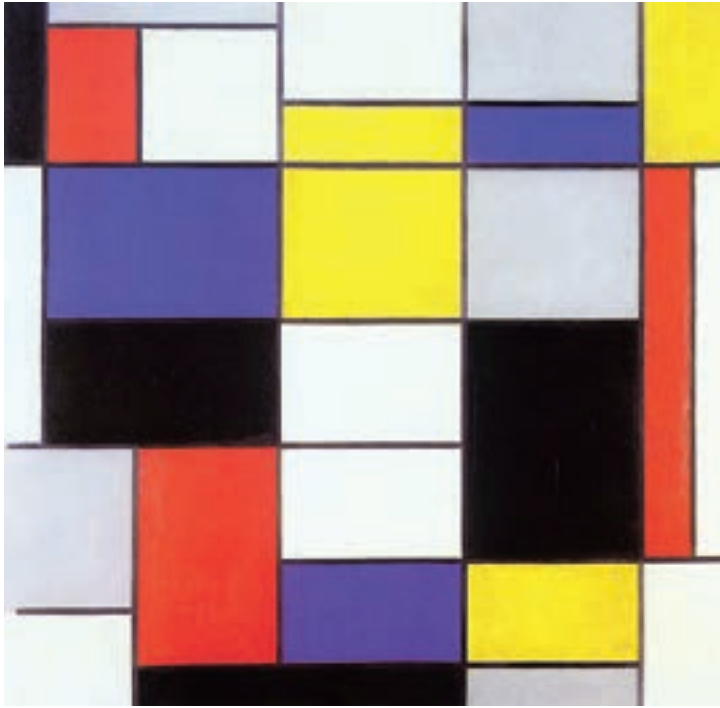


Fig.4 Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) *Composition A*, 1923. Oil on canvas. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome, Italy. © Public domain. WikiArt, <https://www.wikiart.org/en/piet-mondrian/composition-a-1923>.

sculptor in college and graduate school, then moving into her own as a painter and printmaker, Louisa Chase was always looking for new ways and mediums with which to depict different ideas and concepts.

- 1 *Louisa Chase: What Lies beneath* - Leepa-Rattner Museum of Art, exhibition catalogue, Leepa-Rattner Museum of Art at St. Petersburg College, August 28, 2020. <https://leeparattner.org/exhibitions/collections-online/louisa-chase-what-lies-beneath/>.
- 2 Dore Ashton, *A Critical Study of Philip Guston* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 153–184.
- 3 Dore Ashton, *A Critical Study of Philip Guston*, 153–184.
- 4 William Corbett, *Philip Guston's Late Works: A Memoir* (Cambridge, MA: Zoland, 1984), 46–49.
- 5 William Corbett, *Philip Guston's Late Works*, 46–49.
- 6 Kim Levin, "The Secret Life of Louisa Chase," *The Village Voice*, (January 1981): n.p.
- 7 Richard Kalina, "Louisa Chase," *Arts Magazine* (May 1989):90
- 8 Elizabeth Armstrong and Marge Goldwater, eds., "Louisa Chase," *Images and Impressions: Painters who Print Exhibition Catalog* (Minneapolis, Walker Art Center: 1984), 16–21.
- 9 Elizabeth Armstrong, "Louisa Chase," 1984, 16.
- 10 Elizabeth Armstrong, "Louisa Chase," 1984, 16.
- 11 Elizabeth Armstrong, "Louisa Chase," 1984, 16.
- 12 Nancy Jachec, *Jackson Pollock* (Barcelona; Ediciones Poligrafa, 2011), 120–126.
- 13 Nancy Jachec, *Jackson Pollock*, 126–127.
- 14 *Jackson Pollock (1912-1956): Enchanted Forest*. Guggenheim Museum. <https://www.guggenheim.org/teaching-materials/selections-from-the-permanent-collection/jackson-pollock-1912-1956-enchanted-forest>
- 15 Nancy Jachec, *Jackson Pollock*, 126–127.
- 16 Kim Levin, "The Secret Life of Louisa Chase," n.p.
- 17 Mikey Rinaldo, "Between Paint and Ink: Cy Twombly, Steve McCaffery and Textual Illegibility in North American Art and Poetry 1950s-1970s," *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 17 (2/3) (2018.):144–59.
- 18 Mikey Rinaldo, "Between Paint and Ink..." 144–59.
- 19 Mikey Rinaldo, "Between Paint and Ink..." 144–59.
- 20 Isabella Alston, *Mondrian* (Charlotte: Taj Book International, 2014), 4–10.
- 21 Isabella Alston, *Mondrian*, 4–10.
- 22 Isabella Alston, *Mondrian*, 4–10.
- 23 *Louisa Chase Papers*, Box 23, "Writings, Journals 1987-1988," Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries. n.p.

The Representational and Non-Representational in Louisa Chase's Art

XENIA MAKOSKY



Fig.5 Willem de Kooning (1904-1997) *Woman, I*. 1950-52. Oil on canvas, 6' 3 7/8" x 58" (192.7 x 147.3 cm). Purchase. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA. © 2023 The Willem de Kooning Foundation / ArtistsRights Society (ARS), New York, Photo Credit: Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.

Throughout her artistic career, Louisa Chase was in a constant state of exploration, and pushed her expressional capabilities. Despite Chase's numerous stages of exploration, however, she never completely left representation. Early in her career in the 1970s, Chase rooted her art in recognizable imagery and developed signature motifs based on the body. Yet, she was never entirely satisfied with any iteration of the body or the setting that she placed it within. She considered the body in forms ranging from whimsical torsos to geometric stick figures. In the late 1980s, as Chase searched for a new artistic language, her art became increasingly abstract, and recognizable imagery dissipated as she experimented with geometric color blocks and gestural marks. Despite the shift in artistic language, she nonetheless stayed within the realm of representation. In drawings from this period, her gestural marks advance and recede to suggest depth and layering. Chase's art documents her process of pushing gesture, geometry, color, and form, but in some way or another, she always returned to representation.

Chase embraced representation and participated in reacting against the Minimalist art movement. Minimalism flourished in the 1960s and 1970s in New York City and stood in stark contrast to the Abstract Expressionist movement that dominated the 1940s and 1950s. Artists, such as Helen Frankenthaler, Wassily Kandinsky, Lee Krasner, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, and Jackson Pollock, are commonly categorized by art historians as Abstract Expressionists. These artists concentrated on dynamic, spontaneous gestures that revealed the artist's presence and emphasized the artist's emotional gesture and self-expression. For instance, in de Kooning's *Woman I* (fig.5) an abstract woman composed of large horizontal, vertical, and diagonal brush strokes occupies the canvas. The energetic and vigorous brush strokes, characteristic of the Abstract Expressionist movement, appear to be improvisational and make it hard for the viewer to differentiate between the background and figure.

Unlike the Abstract Expressionists, artists who aligned themselves with the precepts of Minimalism, including Carl Andre, Dan Flavian, Donald Judd, Yves Klein, Robert Morris, and Frank Stella, stripped sculpture and painting down to the most essential elements of shape, color, form, and composition. Yves Klein introduced his monochrome blue squares in 1947 and promoted a new style that freed him from representation. Klein dissolved the illusion of fictional, perspectival spaces within paintings that artists had worked for centuries to create. According to Klein, the painting no longer represented anything anymore, and the painting was no longer a painting, but an object. In Klein's *Blue*



Fig.6 Yves Klein (1928-1962) *Blue Monochrome*. 1961. Dry pigment in synthetic polymer medium on cotton over plywood, 6'4 7/8" x 55 1/8." The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA. © Succession Yves Klein c/o Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris 2023, Photo Credit: Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.

Monochrome (fig.6), for instance, the blue square is not an imitation of an object, person, place, or even a reflection of an emotion or feeling. The paint that Klein applied to make the square and its form are the reality and not an imitation of something else. Minimalist principles also appeared in sculpture. Sculptors like Donald Judd used industrial materials to create singular monochrome geometric forms. In his article entitled "Art and Objecthood," Michael Fried noted that Judd was interested in the "kind of wholeness that can be achieved through the repetition of identical units" and the value of a form's shape.¹ Fried continued that Minimalist artists, like Judd, understood:

...shape as a given property of objects, if not needed as a kind of object in its own right. It aspires, not to defeat or suspend its own objecthood, but on the contrary to discover and project objecthood as such.²

In other words, the shape is the object, and therefore the shape is the work of art, as seen in Judd's *Untitled* (fig.7), where several rectangular iron boxes hang on the wall from floor to ceiling. The rectangular shapes have no symbolic meaning and are meant to be understood as objects, and therefore as works of art. The art is what the viewer sees directly in front of them.

In New York in the 1970s, Chase was part of an emerging group of what has been called Neo-Expressionist artists who reintroduced imagery and representation into art following the dominance of Minimalism.³ In addition to Chase, art historians commonly categorize artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, Philip Guston, Francesco Clemente, and Julian Schnabel as Neo-Expressionists. While these so-called Neo-Expressionists did not form a cohesive movement, in general they all rejected the sparseness of Minimalism and instead drew upon pop culture, literature, mythology, and art history to create narratively charged works that returned to an idea of representation. Likewise, Chase returned to representation in *Untitled* (cat.3) from 1979, where she placed an icy blue androgynous torso and hands within a geometric space. Chase divided the canvas into four major geometric quadrants. The bright, light beige section takes up about 75 percent of the canvas. Within the beige square Chase carved, and then built up, a torso, a reaching arm with a hand, two wavy lines under the hand, a post-and-lintel arch to the left of the torso, and her name in the bottom right. The remaining quarter of the canvas is divided between a sea-green turquoise section, which dominates almost all of the left side of the canvas, and a small white triangle and a black trapezoid in the upper left corner. Chase reintroduced representational imagery in the abstract forms of a torso and hands in *Untitled*. The torso, as well as the feet, hands, and arms, is a motif that appears in Chase's work from the '70s until the '90s in various forms, including what art historian Nancy Princenthal called "a highly abstracted geometric stick figure."⁴ During the 1990s Chase returned to the figure and experimented with a geometric form of the body in the active postures of swimming, cartwheeling, sitting, and falling. Art historians, such as Nancy Princenthal, have noted that Chase's "embrace" of the figure and her turn to figuration is:

Not a way to play out personal narrative. Nor does she dally amid the pictorial conventions that have consumed so many painters of the last decade. For Chase, figuration is a way to wrestle with the body [and] with . . . how the body represents itself to itself and to others, in motion, and across time.⁵

According to Princenthal, Chase's representation of the body from works in the exhibition at Brooke Alexander was not a form of self-portraiture or an expression of emotional identity. While the blue torso in *Untitled* is whimsical and elongated, as opposed to the geometric block



Fig.7 Donald Judd (1928-1994) *Untitled (Stack)*. 1967. Lacquer on galvanized iron, Twelve units, each 9 x 40 x 31" (22.8 x 101.6 x 78.7 cm), installed vertically with 9" (22.8 cm) intervals. Helen Acheson Bequest (by exchange) and gift of Joseph Helman. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA. © 2023 Judd Foundation Artists Rights Society (ARS), New YorkPhoto Credit: Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/ Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.

figures from the Brooke Alexander exhibition, Princenthal's commentary helps illuminate how Chase used the body as a pictorial device. The figure in different positions was a tool that Chase used, almost like a formula, to explore the duality of how the body appears to itself and to others. Chase continued to play with representing the body and parts of the body, such as hands and feet, in different spaces throughout her career, including the confines of irregular geometric grids, as seen in *Untitled*, and also within abstract landscapes as in *Wave* (cat.2), *Fire Study* (cat.15), *Untitled (Black Sea)* (cat.20), *Red Sea* (cat.19), and *Chasm* (cat.21).

To create the torso in *Untitled* (cat.3), Chase first carved the torso's outline into the paint on the canvas to establish its boundaries and then built up its interior. The figure is androgynous. Chase has painted long, lean limbs that fade before they reach the elbows or knees. The figure is also in motion. She accentuated the long line on the torso's right side and the arched curve on the left side of the body, which makes the torso appear to be softly bending, almost like it is dancing or stretching. The torso's right shoulder and top half of the arm reach up and the left arm curves down, but what the arms and hands do after that point is unknown. The other form of representational imagery that Chase introduced in this early painting are the hands. The hand to the right of the torso reaches toward the left side of the canvas as if it is trying to grasp or embrace something. If viewers look carefully, right above the hand, they will see shallow faint traces where Chase was experimenting with an alternative location and position of the thumb and first finger. Two faintly carved overlapping hands also appear on the beige section, around the torso's right hip (fig.8). They, too, are in the same reaching gesture.



Fig.8 Louisa Chase, *Untitled*, 1979 (cat.3), detail.

The torso and hands also reveal Chase's process of creating sculptural forms on a two-dimensional canvas. In other words, Chase physically built painted forms. She applied at least three different shades of blue inside the torso to build up the surface of the figure, including an electric, cobalt blue at the base paint of the torso, an icy, puffy, streaked layer on top, and a matte gray blue at the end of the extended arms. The numerous layers of paint that Chase applied to the canvas are also revealed through her carving technique. Depending on how deeply Chase pressed her tool into the canvas, the viewer can distinguish the different layers of paint. The torso's outlines and floating hand to the right are the deepest grooves, allowing the viewer to see an original black layer, a sea-green turquoise layer, an icy flat-blue layer, and finally a beige top layer. Through addition and reduction of paint, Chase created three-dimensional textures and forms that advance and recede into the viewer's space. She created an advancing, puffy, tactical figure with receding boundary lines. Even though Chase carved thick boundaries for the torso that seem like they should designate an edge, Chase let her paintbrush drag over the boundaries in wispy strokes. At this stage of her career and from this painting specifically, we can see that Chase was exploring sculpturally abstract forms of the human body that floated within defined, geometrical spaces.

In the early 1980s Chase's artistic language changed. In 1982 she had a solo exhibition at the Robert Miller Gallery in New York City. Duane Stapp, an art critic from *Arts Magazine*, remarked that the show highlighted:

Workings of nature: animate visions of golden sunrises, splashing ocean waves, and vast churning thunderclouds. Chase brushes in her pictures with streaks, slashes, and torrents of brightly colored paint, echoing the energy of the natural forces she depicts.⁶

Stapp's review documents a stage in the early 1980s when Chase started to situate her recurring motifs, such as the torso and hands, within gestural, abstract landscapes that evoke the force and motion of nature. Her charged and highly saturated abstract landscapes document her search to represent an intangible emotion, experience, or idea in visual form. Deborah Phillips, a reviewer who also saw the Robert Miller exhibit, noted the change in Chase's artistic language by commenting:

Over the past three years, this young artist has charted a course through her symbolic landscapes that has taken her from ambiguous terrain or earlier paintings into rigorously focused locales of the current work. The journey parallels the increased effectiveness of Chase's nature-based iconography of waves, mountains, ravines, trees, and clouds to express emotional states.⁷

Phillips associated Chase's landscapes with emotional states that functioned like metaphors for unstated feelings or experiences. Later in her review she suggested that through her natural imagery, Chase was able to "recapture past experiences," but she does not elaborate further

on how Chase's biography overlaps with the landscapes.⁸ The viewer can, however, identify in the *Wave* from 1982 (cat.2) the charged and "passionate" abstract nature imagery that Phillips noted in the saturated colors, thick application of paint, and gestural brushstrokes.⁹ These techniques could be seen to communicate a heightened emotional state.

Chase drenched every surface of the 72- x 72-inch canvas on which the *Wave* is represented in paint. Energetic blue and white brush strokes overlap, and at first it is hard to tell what color Chase started with and how she made the painting. White appears to be the top layer of paint in most sections of the canvas, and a pale sky-blue highlights the white strokes. Most likely, the white was added when the blue was still wet. The two colors mixed on the canvas and then the blue lingered on the artist's brush, resulting in an abstract ocean landscape. Near the end of her review of the Robert Miller show, Phillips remarked that "everything about these works is obsessive, from the overly defined volumes of three-dimensional shapes to the lurid colors and the application of paint."¹⁰ The same comment can be applied to *Wave* (cat.2). The viewer can almost imagine seeing Chase's hand in motion constantly adding, removing, blending, and modifying the surface. Chase wrote in an artist's statement from 1979:

Painting for me is a constant search to hold a feeling tangible. Recently images have become more figurative, their structure or internal language. One moment is shattered into many moments, one place into a thousand places. Their relationship and scale determine the nature of experience, a psychological cubism in which all the directions are at once being that experience, the complexities of one feeling.¹¹

In *Wave*, Chase's continual layering of gestural marks of paint indicates a continually worked surface, as if she was trying to find the wave and its energy as she painted. The search to find the wave was part of Chase's lifelong quest not just to depict an object, but to have the painting become a phenomenon. In other words, Chase was not just interested in depicting a wave on a canvas but also transforming the canvas into a wave.

Similar to the carving technique that Chase employed in *Untitled* (cat.3) she also carved representations into the *Wave*, including diverse rolling waves. The implied curling, coiled shape resembles Ionic capitals.¹² All the waves appear to be reaching their crest, about to crash. Chase did not mark a starting point for the swirls, so they appear to emerge directly out of the abstract ocean landscape, creating a motion and an outward force that radiates from the canvas. The largest spiral shape is painted at the bottom right corner. Chase painted the giant crashing wave in bright azure blue and added a darker sapphire tone to its inside on the right to further define the spiraled form and enhance the volume. Chase also appears to have been playing with the carved spiral wave form during the early 1980s in other paintings, as well. For

example, there was a painting entitled *Wave* in the Robert Miller 1982 exhibition with similar spiral forms. Stapp noted:

A work entitled *Wave* is covered with these spirals, dashed out in thick smears of paint and etched in sgraffito against a light pink background. Although it could be seen specifically as an ocean wave, the spiral begins to generalize out until it becomes a sort of generic natural force, a record of any swarming action whether of water, air, or the artist's own hand.¹³

Stapp's reference to a "light pink background," means that he viewed a different variation of the *Wave*. What is similar between this version of the *Wave* and the one exhibited at the Robert Miller exhibition, however, are the spirals and the impression of force that they produce. The spirals captivated Stapp, who remarked that "Chase's most prevalent visual symbol is a swirling snail spiral, alternately used to represent eddies of water or wind."¹⁴ There is plurality in Chase's abstract spiral forms, which encourages the viewer to perceive multiple forms. Whether the spiral forms represent wind, water, or perhaps both, they contribute to the swarming energy of the landscape.

Among the crashing waves, Chase carved a resting torso and flailing hands. Unlike in *Untitled* from 1979, this torso seems to interact with the abstract landscape and has become a part of it. The torso no longer floats in a geometric space but stands upright and submerged in a pool of deep-navy water. Similar to the torso from *Untitled* (cat.3), there is no head and the bottom half of the legs are missing, but this time there are complete arms that hug each other. The figure curls its long, extended fingers, arms around its elbows, perhaps in a gesture of comfort or embrace. Similarly, the hands emerge out of the waves in reaching gestures. We can almost imagine the hands as being connected to a larger torso that is floating under the waves. In Chase's paintings from the early 1980s Stapp noted:

Only truncated glimpses of human beings are visible, floating against the natural backdrop: a pair of reaching hands, the outline of an outstretched torso. But rather than isolated fragments, these body parts seem to interact with the natural environment around them.¹⁵

Similar to what Stapp signifies in *Wave* (cat.2), we see an incomplete figure that is more reduced compared to *Untitled* (cat.3). In *Wave* the legs end abruptly after the hips. Furthermore, the hands emerge out of the abstract ocean landscape and the torso stands within a pool of water. Unlike in *Untitled*, where the torso and hands float in geometric space, the torso and hands in *Wave* are integrated into a surrounding landscape.

In the mid 1980s Chase introduced a new subject into her artistic language: faces. *Face to Ecaf Study* (cat.5) from 1985 is part of Chase's face series, along with *Untitled* (cat.6) and *Untitled* (cat.4). Out of these three paintings, however, *Face to Ecaf Study* (cat.5) is the only one that is signed (on the back), possibly signaling that Chase was especially pleased with it, and that it had been included in an exhibition. Some paintings in Chase's *Face to Face* series were featured along with a variety of paintings

and ink drawings at another exhibition at the Robert Miller Gallery in 1984, such as *Face to Ecaf Study* (cat.5), which is the only face series painting in the current exhibition that was featured at Robert Miller in 1984. Similar to *Untitled* (cat.3) and *Wave* (cat.2), Chase employed a similar carving method by coating the canvas with a ground and then taking an object, perhaps the back of a paintbrush, and carving the faces out of the wet paint.

From the beginning of her artistic career Chase experimented with abstract representations of the body, but in the mid-1980s her figures became more gestural. Holland Cotter, a prominent art critic who attended Chase's Robert Miller Gallery exhibition in 1986, remarked in *Art in America*:

A year ago color, figure, and painterly gesture still served narrative ends... Chase isn't settling for anything that concrete now, and the paintings in her most recent show, farther from representation than ever, are the most charged-up work she has yet done.¹⁶

Cotter goes on to note the differences in Chase's style and remarked that "angry-child scratches have exploded into an allover web of messy Twomblyesque cross hatching; the individual lines gouge the built-up surface cruelly."¹⁷ Cotter insinuates that the gestural has overtaken the figural and that it parallels the gestural language of Cy Twombly, an American painter, sculptor, and photographer most well-known for his paintings and drawings with seemingly spontaneous scribbled calligraphic and graffiti marks. In *Face to Ecaf Study* (cat.5), Chase utilized the same technique that Cotter referenced. Chase laid a white ground, smeared a thick black layer over top, and then cut into the wet paint. She eliminated all color in *Face to Ecaf Study* and used only black and white: two tones. The white ground under the black is also revealed by a triangular patch of tiny speckles that run from the top left corner of the canvas to the bottom right. Within this triangle, the canvas is peppered with tiny flecks that expose the white ground underneath and give the effect of falling snowflakes or shining stars in the night sky.

Chase carved two minimal "jug-eared" heads into the canvas. The heads, however, are not immediately obvious, especially in *Untitled* (cat.6) and *Untitled* (cat.4). She has hidden faces under furiously gouged lines. In his catalog essay for an exhibition held at Bowdoin College that featured some paintings from Chase's face series, Justin Schuetz wrote that, "Visual fragments are left to be assimilated and organized by the mind's eye. . . Human presence is intimated by just a small number of cues."¹⁸ In other words, Chase's heads are not as immediately recognizable as her clearly outlined and defined torsos and hands. The viewer has to search the canvas for the loosely defined, and sometimes hidden, facial features. Likewise, In *Face to Ecaf Study* (cat.5) the oval face, on the viewer's left, is tilted slightly to the right and bursts with violent horizontal and vertical scratches that vary in width and depth, disrupting the black top layer on the canvas. The longer the viewer looks, the more likely they are to find abstract yet recognizable facial features.

For instance, two ears appear to be scribbled onto the right and left side of the scratched face. Two slanted oval-like shapes within the scratched face suggest eyes added over the gashes. Some of the scratches extend beyond the face's boundaries, which leads the viewer to believe that the face outline was drawn first and then Chase furiously and quickly added the gestures. On the right side, Chase mirrored the scratched face. She carved the face outline out of the black paint and added only one horizontal scratch near where the chin would be. An overlapping oval to the right suggests an ear. Another oval appears, perhaps an ear, to the left of the face, but it is not connected. Two incomplete and unconnected ovals in the middle appear to be eyes. Overall, however, more of the top black layer of paint remains inside the right face. Additionally, there are two curved lines on the left side of the face, which suggests that Chase was exploring the face shape as she carved the head, similar to the manner in which she explored hand position and placement in *Untitled* (cat.3).

While the carved gestural marks can be read as being on the faces, I would propose that Chase employed them as representations of different spatial planes. For instance, the white gestural marks that Chase carved into the black layer appear to advance. Likewise, the black areas appear to recede. Chase seems to be playing with a similar idea in *Untitled* (cat.6), where the viewer perceives the warm orange color to be advancing and the emerald green to be receding, similar to the violet and lime green in *Untitled* (cat.4). Consequently, the gestural lines can be interpreted as a progressing spatial plane that sits in front of the black layer. Even though the gestural marks do not denote recognizable imagery, they are still representational because they create a layered space. Consequently, the layered space implies a physical space, which is itself a form of representation. Chase, therefore, was representing space with the abstract and kinetic carved marks.

In addition to the two heads are the words "face to face" in lowercase letters scratched into the bottom right corner in shaky, almost childlike handwriting. Similar to the mirrored heads, the text is also mirrored. The juxtaposition of text and imagery is noteworthy and not something that Chase seems to have experimented with exclusively at this stage of her career. Justen Schuetz, however, notes that the text is a way to clarify Chase's abstract representations. For instance, when writing about a larger painting from the "Face to Face" series exhibited at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Schuetz remarked:

As we attempt to reconcile our perception of erratic marks with our conception of what they represent, gestural ellipses become faces suspended within a field, tightly drawn lines become eyes. The words "face to face," which appear faintly in two of the images further suggest an order within each set of scrawls.¹⁹

Schuetz might be correct in asserting that text can help the viewer distinguish imagery, but Chase also implied a deeper meaning. The phrase "face to face" denotes something that needs to be confronted openly,

directly, and honestly. Similarly, black and white are diametrically opposed, as white is the combination of all hues in the visible light spectrum and black is the complete absence of white. By juxtaposing, white and black together, Chase insinuated a meeting of two conflicting tones: "face to face." Furthermore, the medium and small size of the canvas itself, 11x10 inches, is a form of confrontation with the viewer. Only one person can reasonably view the painting at a time, stipulating an intimate, direct meeting between Chase's faces and the viewer's own face.

Around 1987, Chase started to move away from her earlier motifs of body parts and faces and created a new artistic language based on geometry and gesture. Chase detailed the long, frustrating process of inventing her new language to be free from what she calls "the structure of old" in her journals.²⁰ In an entry from 1987, she wrote that she had been "learning a new language. There was no choice. I do feel I am entering a new ball game involved with the history of painting."²¹ Based on this entry, and several others in journals from this period, it appears as though Chase felt as if her old language was limiting, and she needed to explore other modes of painting. Around this time, Chase expressed that she had to "rid [her]self of everything, literally going back to scribbling and playing with blocks."²² Art critics, too, eagerly awaited the change in Chase's language and were equally excited, yet challenged, by her new compositions.²³ Upon seeing Chase's new work at the Brooke Alexander Gallery in 1989, for example, Michael Brenson wrote in a column in the *New York Times*:

Louisa's Chase new paintings are the most challenging she has done. They are almost entirely abstract. Drawing and color are now almost split. With a palette knife and the handle end of a brush, lines have been scratched and scribbled in creamy all-white fields laid over all black grounds. In each painting, there are relatively small red, yellow and blue rectangles or squares.²⁴

Devoid of any recognizable imagery, the viewer is confronted directly with Chase's new mode of complete abstraction that splits color and drawing. Similar to Brenson, after visiting the same exhibition, another reviewer, Richard Kalina, also called Chase's new paintings "her best and most challenging work."²⁵ Kalina noted in *Arts* that:

Louisa Chase's recent show at Brooke Alexander has solidified her gradual move from figuration to abstraction: from an accessible, if somewhat thorny ambiguity, to a questioning, unstable clarity.²⁶

Critics such as Brenson and Kalina, who followed Chase's career, were keenly aware of her refreshing transition to abstraction. Just because Chase started to move away from a depiction of recognizable forms and instead used lines, shapes, colors, and gestural marks, however, does not mean she left representation. In fact, what makes Chase's new color block and gestural drawing and paintings so challenging is that the abstraction is rooted in representation.

Chase's new artistic language of color blocks and gestural marks is seen in *Untitled* (cat.7), *Untitled* (cat.8), and *Untitled* (cat.11). In *Untitled* (cat.8), geometric shapes fill the white paper, with all but three or four being rectangles. Chase first outlined the shapes and then filled them with primary colors of pale navy blue, scarlet red, and mustard yellow. The geometric shapes also seem to echo the geometric forms in *Untitled* (cat.3), from the beginning of Chase's career. When working on geometric paintings incised with gestural marks in 1988, Chase wrote "God damn – I am learning to draw – drawing in space. So primary. The geometry grounds it," which is a statement that can also apply to *Untitled* (cat.8).²⁷ For instance, the viewer can see the sketched pencil marks, places where Chase might have been considering placing colored rectangles and squares. Even if Chase did not intend to use the pencil marks as outlines for colored blocks, they add a geometric presence to the drawing, and she was selective regarding the amount and location of the pencil marks and the blocks on the page. In 1987, when Chase started to move into her new language, she discussed her process of working on a painting she called "Port," and wrote:

It is at this point now where the atmosphere is gelling . . . I hope the geometry isn't overkill - the atmosphere being so delicate - the most difficult part for me is the bringing of parts out - not separating them from air.²⁸

Unfortunately, any record of a painting entitled "Port" does not appear in exhibition catalogues or reviews from this time, but this entry does reveal Chase's thinking and attentive process as she worked on the color blocks. She wanted to make the geometry present, but not overpowering and heavy. In *Untitled* (cat.8) Chase implemented the structure of geometry, but she avoided its accompanying weight by leaving ample white space and then adding energetic black ink marks that float around, behind, and in front of the color blocks.

Chase's style from the late 1980s is often described by reviewers as echoing Piet Mondrian in the color blocks, Cy Twombly in the gestures, and Jackson Pollack in color drops and spontaneity. Mondrian was a Dutch painter and one of the founders of the De Stijl movement, which was an abstract art movement in the early 20th century that embraced art based on theory, balance, proportion, and logic. De Stijl artists embraced reduced aesthetics, basic geometric forms, and primary colors. Mondrian believed in distilling representation down to basic vertical and horizontal elements and fundamental color to reveal the spiritual order and balance of opposing forces in the visual world. In *Untitled* (cat.8) Chase recalled Mondrian's primary-colored horizontal and vertical quadrilaterals as seen in his *Composition A* (fig.9). In *Composition A*, Mondrian painted an irregular grid and filled it with quadrilaterals in primary colors, black, and gray. In this painting, he presented the viewer with asymmetry and the transition between bold border lines and colored rectangles and squares to create tension and stillness.

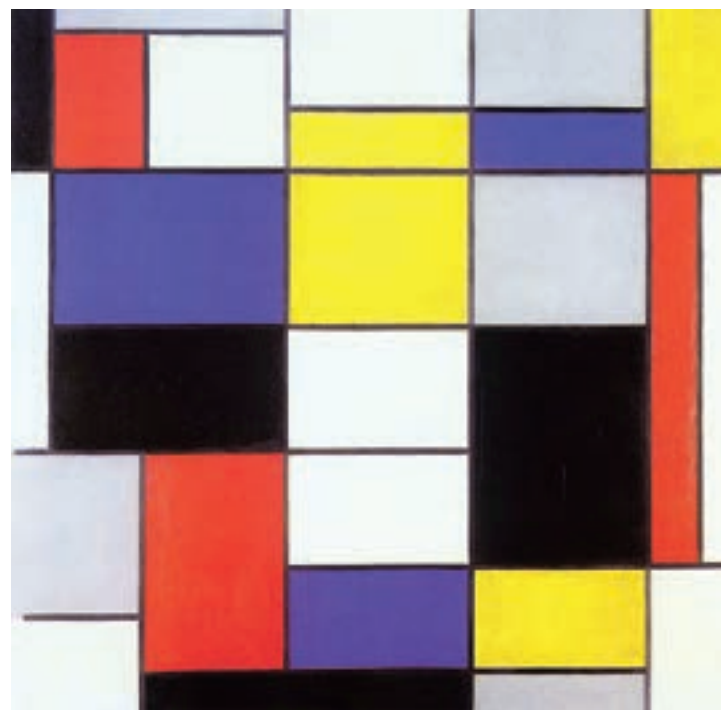


Fig.9 Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) *Composition A*, 1923. Oil on canvas. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome, Italy. © Public domain. WikiArt, <https://www.wikiart.org/en/piet-mondrian/composition-a-1923>.

Similar to Mondrian in *Composition A*, Chase invoked an idea of geometric shapes and primary colors, but unlike Mondrian, Chase did not apply an even stroke of color to the shapes. While all the blocks are translucent, the depth of tone subtly varies even within some shapes, ranging from opaque and watery to rich and dark, based on the amount of pigment on the brush. Tiny air bubbles also appear inside the shapes, as seen in the top red square on the viewer's right. Additionally, unlike Mondrian, Chase did not draw precise borders around her shapes to define the edges. The graphite outlines of the shapes are uneven and not perfectly mathematical. Even the watercolor that fills the shapes bleeds out of the penciled outlines, and in some shapes the watercolor does not perfectly fill all edges of the outline, resulting in miniscule white gaps. The indefinite borders and variation in coloration reveal how the drawing was made, along with the visible presence of the artist's hand.

The imprecision of the color blocks' borders recalls Chase's own writing where she discusses the process of learning to develop a new style. In 1987 Chase wrote, "It is taking a very long time to become comfortable with seeing without edges. Nothing to hold on to. No death grip on form."²⁹ In another short entry, she wrote one sentence on a piece of paper: "where is the edge anyway?"³⁰ In her writing, Chase often tried to conceptualize intangible concepts, so it is difficult to know exactly

what she was referring to, but one might interpret this entry as a resistance to boundaries and reflection of Chase's urge to expand. Chase negated boundaries even in her color blocks from the late 1980s. For instance, like Mondrian, Chase suggested the continuation of her geometric abstractions beyond the edges of the paper by situating shapes on the edge without distinct borders. Chase also represented a three-dimensional plane and implied depth within a two-dimensional medium by layering. For instance, Chase placed a red vertical rectangle on top of a blue horizontal rectangle in the middle of the paper. The viewer can interpret the red vertical rectangle as being on a spatial plane closer to the viewer and the horizontal blue rectangle as sitting directly behind the red rectangle on a more distant spatial plane. Although the two rectangles appear to overlap on the two-dimensional surface, Chase implied depth and space, which is another form of representation.

In addition to Mondrian, in *Untitled* (cat.8) Chase recalled Pollock's splatter paintings and paint-throwing technique with the black gestural lines and drops of yellow, red, and blue. Pollock was a leading artist in the Abstract Expressionist movement, an American artistic movement that developed in New York City in the 1940s and '50s. Abstract Expressionists created abstract imagery that featured bold, energetic gestural marks on the canvas, documenting the artist's presence. Pollock is especially famous for his splatter and drop paintings that Chase recalls with the ink lines. For instance, in *Number 26 A* by Pollock, we see similar dynamic black gestural lines that vary in thickness and pigmentation, not unlike those in *Untitled* (cat.8). In addition to the splattered and thrown paint marks in *Number 26 A*, Pollock also pioneered a droplet technique. For instance, if the viewer looks carefully, they will notice drops of pigment in black and white between the paint splatters. In *Untitled* (cat.8), Chase also drops globs of paint onto the paper in primary colors, but unlike Pollock, her paint drops are more controlled. Pollock loaded his brush and flung paint at the canvas to create the drops. Chase, on the other hand, was more specific and minimal with her paint drops. She held her brush over the specific area where she wanted colored drops and then released the watercolor by carefully moving her hand, allowing the watery paint to fall and form a droplet.

In addition to Pollock, Chase's calligraphic gestural marks from this period of her career are often compared to Cy Twombly. As previously mentioned in the discussion of *Face to Ecaf Study* (cat.5), Twombly is well known for his stream of consciousness-like gestural swirls and loops, such as can be seen in his *Untitled* from 1970. Twombly's abstract continuous scrawls are infused with energy and vibrant life and border between calligraphy and graffiti. Similarly, Chase's charged and pulsating black ink marks in *Untitled* (cat.8) echo Twombly's kinetic scrawls. As in *Untitled*, the black lines move the viewer's eye across the surface. Tension between rational forms and spontaneity is further developed by the energetic and gestural black ink marks that float around, behind, and in front of the geometry. The black ink lines vary in pigmentation and thickness, with some constituting heavy blotches, and others, watery wispy trails. The ink

runs and bleeds in some gestures too, as revealed by smudges and smears. Owing to the dynamic direction of the marks, the viewer is led to believe that they were drawn quickly, and that Chase finished the work only a few minutes ago. This spontaneity, however, is a constructed effect and similar to the color blocks, Chase had to carefully balance and place the calligraphic marks.

Although the geometric forms emphasize order, rationality, and clarity, the watercolor splatters and black lines suggest spontaneity. Brenson in his *New York Times* article commented on paintings like *Untitled* (cat.1) in this exhibition. Although the paintings that were displayed at the Brooke Alexander Gallery were in a different medium than the drawing being discussed here, the paintings that Brenson observed are from the same period as the color block and gestural drawings in this exhibition. In both the paintings and drawings, Chase explored a similar division between "color" and "drawing" by segregating color into blocks and drawing into gestural lines.³¹ Brenson noted that the gestures with the small red, yellow, and blue rectangles or squares introduce tension between "peace and restlessness, wildness and order, free expression and deliberate construction in a purer, more distilled state than in anything Ms. Chase painted before."³² The dynamic marks emphasize energy over form, and consequently, document the presence of the artist.

Like the layered color blocks, Chase created an illusion of depth and represented space by layering the black gestural marks. The kinetic black marks contribute to an illusion of depth. For instance, the lighter, more diluted, almost gray ink marks recede, especially in comparison to the darkly pigmented ink marks, which appear to be advancing. Although the background and foreground may seem fused here, Chase utilized layering to create a three-dimensional space. Even though Chase no longer created recognizable forms and turned to abstraction, it is not the case that she abandoned representation. With the layered blocks and the gestural lines, Chase created depth and space, which are the hallmarks of representation. She never painted objects in flat spaces and, therefore, never truly left representation.

- 1 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5, no.10 (1967):119.
- 2 Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 120.
- 3 Anne Lauterbach, *Louisa Chase*, exhibition catalogue, (New York: Brooke Alexander, 1991), 1.
- 4 Nancy Princenthal, "Louisa Chase at Brooke Alexander," *Art in America* 79, no. 11, (1991):151.
- 5 Nancy Princenthal, "Louisa Chase at Brooke Alexander," 151.
- 6 Duane Stapp, "Louisa Chase Robert Miller," *Arts Magazine* 57, no.4, (1982):44–45
- 7 Deborah Phillips, "Louisa Chase: Robert Miller." *ARTnews* 81, no.10, (1982):157.
- 8 Philips, "Louse Chase," 157.
- 9 Philips, "Louisa Chase," 157.
- 10 Philips, "Louise Chase," 157.
- 11 Lisa N. Peters, "Louisa Chase," *Arts Magazine* 57, no. 3 (1982):54.
- 12 Peters, "Louisa Chase," 54.
- 13 Stapp, "Louisa Chase Robert Miller," 44–45.
- 14 Stapp, "Louisa Chase," 44–45.
- 15 Stapp, "Louisa Chase," 44–45.
- 16 Holland Cotter, "Louisa Chase at Robert Miller," *Art in America* 74, no.6, (1986):123.
- 17 Cotter, "Louisa Chase," 123.
- 18 Justin G. Schuetz, *Certain Uncertainties: Chaos and the Human Experience*, Exhibition Catalogue, (Brunswick: Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 1996), 2.
- 19 Schuetz, *Certain Uncertainties*, 2.
- 20 *Louisa Chase Papers*, Box 21, "Writings, Journals 1987-1988," Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, 8.
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- 22 *Louisa Chase*, Exhibition Catalogue, (Kyoto: Foundation Kajikawa, 1991), n.p.
- 23 Richard Kalina, "Louisa Chase," *Arts* 63, no. 9, (May 1989):90.
- 24 Michael Brenson, "Works From Nature: Louisa Chase," *The New York Times*, February 17, 1989: C32.
- 25 Kalina, "Louisa Chase," 90.
- 26 Kalina, "Louisa Chase," 90.
- 27 *Louisa Chase Papers*, Box 21, "Writings, Journals 1987-1988," Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, 23.
- 28 *Louisa Chase Papers*, Box 21, "Writings, Journals 1987-1988," Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, 5.
- 29 *Louisa Chase Papers*, Box 21, "Writings, Journals 1987-1988," Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, 5.
- 30 *Louisa Chase Papers*, Box 21, "Writings, Notebook 1," Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, 3.
- 31 Brenson, "Works From Nature," C32.
- 32 Brenson, "Works From Nature," C32.

Gesture and Mark Making in Louisa Chase's Paintings, Drawings, and Prints

BEN GOODRUM

Louisa Chase emerged onto the New York art scene with her first solo exhibition at the Artist Space in 1975, while still enrolled in the MFA program at Yale University. At this time, the New York art world was saturated with primarily male artists working within Minimalist themes, such as Donald Judd's colored stacked block sculptures or Frank Stella's shaped canvases. Female artists such as Louisa Chase, Susan Rothenberg, and Elizabeth Murray made art that broke away from this status quo, opting for more abstract, figural, and representational styles in a deliberate return to similar tenets that defined the Abstract-Expressionist movement of the previous generation. Chase's early works, shown during the 1970s and early 1980s, dealt with subject matter ranging from landscapes, as seen in *Chasm*, 1983 (cat.21), figural representations such as *Untitled*, 1979 (cat.3), and weather phenomenon such as *Untitled*, 1982 (cat.14). In these early exhibitions, Chase created art that held viewers' attention through the size of the images, the vibrancy in color, and the simple, yet intimate, figural motifs. In a review of Chase's exhibition in 1986 at the Robert Miller Gallery, NYC, art critic Holland Cotter described this period of Chase's works as having a "visionary quality, that suggested fairy-tale illustrations as much as exercise in free association."¹ At this exhibition, Chase debuted some of her most gestural works that marked a departure from her earlier, whimsical abstractions, and which Cotter described as "the most charged up she has yet done."² Chase's fluid style was constantly adapted to fit her changing themes of representation. The wide scope of Chase's representational imagery is a testament to her ability to experiment and push the boundaries of her works both in content and technique. Each of Chase's works reveals evidence of her process in working out problems and finding the best mode of visual representation.

Chase framed her artistic practice as a "game" in an essay titled "Art in Miniature done in Closets, alias games alias art." According to Chase, the game occurs when the "artist has a feeling (vision), he uses the visual symbols (does not describe the experience) and with a little magic the feeling is transferred to the spectator."³ In Chase's early works, her interest in game theory is evident in the recurring representational motifs and figures in her work. In the early 1980s Chase stepped away and changed the "game" within which she would be operating. This progression led to Chase redefining her visual language to emphasize gestural movement and tactile mark making. Through subtractive methods, such as carving paint and creating woodblock prints, Chase revealed what lies beneath the surface of her works. In a journal entry that was included in the catalogue

for her 1991 exhibition at the Brooke Alexander Gallery, Chase described the power of "the physicality of the work, the gesture is so much closer to the unreliability of feeling than the symbolic depiction."⁴ There seems to be an apparent search in Chase's works for the most effective mode of communication with her spectator. Throughout her career, despite changes in her style, each work can provide further insight into the unrepresentable feeling that Chase imbues within each work. Through Chase's techniques, her presence is fresh within her works, even years after they were completed. The viewer is allowed glimpses into Chase's process as an artist and how she chose to represent her ideas.

Louisa Chase's painting practices progressed in congruence with a development in subject matter. *Untitled (Fire Study)* 1983 (cat.15), contains natural images of branches, hands, and flames expressed through rich, textured brushstrokes and imbued with a powerful visual energy. The composition of this painting radiates from a central pile of pronged branches that are both painted and scraped. Swirling whisps of yellow paint wrap around the central motif, weaving in front of and behind the thick black branches. Chase created depth in the painting through the over- and underlapping effect of the flames. There are visible layers of black paint where the branches foreground the yellow streaks of flames, with thin lines of yellow paint seeping out from beneath. In these instances of overlap, black pigment is pulled from the most concentrated sections, darkening the continuation of the stroke. In other sections, highlights of white paint lighten the work, disrupting the dominating color palette of yellow, orange, and black. The black base layer is emphasized by its extension to the edge of the canvas, farther than any of the other colors. The base layer of paint is revealed again where Chase has carved into the painting. In every instance of black, the viewer must determine whether it has been revealed through carving or through further application of black paint and wax. For example, flanking the central pile of branches are two smaller black branches and one silver branch, thinly painted on top of the orange and yellow layers that mix into the other colors. In contrast, the three silhouettes of hands in the upper left corner are carved into the painting with the unobstructed black base layer showing through. The application of orange paint for the middle layer of the painting fluctuates in shade, tint, and tone, contrasting with the black elements.

Several sets of hands rest above the swirling pillars of flame, each hand reaching out in the hope of connecting just out of the heat. These hands are a repeating motif in Chase's work, in her exploration of depicting the body. There is a familiarity and comfort for a viewer



Fig.10 Frank Stella (b.1936) *Empress of India*, 1965. Metallic powder in polymer emulsion paint on canvas. 6' 5" x 18' 8" (195.6 x 548.6 cm). Gift of S. I. Newhouse, Jr. 474.1978. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA. © 2023 Frank Stella / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, Photo Credit: Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.

accustomed to Chase's work in seeing the soft, rounded hands reaching toward each other and floating across the canvas. The silhouettes of hands in *Untitled (Fire Study)* are hollow, with only the outlines traced into the canvas. In other depictions of human body parts and figures in Chase's works, the body takes on a more complete form, with the shapes filled in. For example, in her early work *Untitled 1979* (cat.3), light blue swipes of paint move down the canvas and form a tactile figure. The limbs of the curving body seep into the flat beige background with the rough ridges of the body melting into the flat surface of the canvas. Chase's early work with sculpture is equally present in this work, with the low-relief layering of paint giving it a sculptural quality. Chase's distinct representational language united her works, but by altering the mode of representation, the motifs stay fresh from work to work.

Wave, 1982 (cat.2), which was made just one year before *Untitled (Fire Study)*, 1983, follows similar patterns of representation, with waves, hands, and a torso traced into a sea of gestural white and blue paint. The etched waves cascade around the canvas, implying the circulation and power of water. A thick swell of cascading deep-blue paint at the bottom right corner of the painting is created by the application, rather than removal, of paint. Similar to the effect in *Untitled (Fire Study)*, Chase

created depth through the layering of paint in *Wave*. The concentrated application of paint foregrounds a background mix of color and etched imagery. In these works, expressive gestural mark making aids Chase's depiction of worldly phenomenon as pictorial representations. Ted Holland of Hirschl and Adler Galleries, New York, described Chase's visual language and how "she didn't want to depict a storm she wanted to paint a storm; she didn't want to illustrate a fire she wanted the painting to be fire. [She was] much more interested in the pure phenomenon and expressing phenomenon versus creating an image."⁵ Chase's striving to articulate a phenomenon manifested itself in both elemental depictions of fire and water. The inclusion of a human figure in *Wave* and human hands in *Untitled (Fire Study)*, situates the natural phenomenon within the context of human perception. Chase's brushstrokes depicting flames are energetic and leap from one stroke to the next, consuming the canvas and the hands in a powerful inferno. The blue and white gestural marks in *Wave* appear to be frothing as the waves pour into each other, wrapping around the torso. Chase's painterly techniques not only communicate the idea of a fire or a wave, but also invite the viewer to experience a sea or a blazing inferno.

Louisa Chase experimented with techniques across her mediums, repeating ideas and working out details of color, composition, and mark making, through a variety of solutions. *FACE to ECAF Study*, 1985 (cat.5) and two similar small-scale works, *Untitled*, 1985 (cat.6) and *Untitled* 1985 (cat.4) are examples of Chase's dedication to her process. These smaller, simplified studies in gestural mark making and abstraction all address analogous depictions of the human form. These three oil-and-wax paintings contain two layers of paint, each with different colors or tones. The surface layers of paint are carved away, revealing long oval silhouettes of heads and ears with energetic marks that extend to the borders of the canvas. Chase created crevasses by dragging a tool through the paint, depositing the excavated material on either side in thin ridges. Each energetic scratch has a kinetic quality that begins and ends sporadically. The areas where the surface layers remain are the pauses between each rhythmic stroke of her tool, and the gestural marks crescendo in dynamic clusters above each jughead. Chase's presence as the creator of these gestural marks is still as vibrant and fresh on these paintings as when they were made.

The notable inclusion of text on this work spells out "face to face" with the bottom text mirrored. Chase directed the viewer to seek two faces in a composition of lines and gestures. The title also implies an intimate or serious moment of confrontation and/or conversation. The gravitas of the moment is captured with one face almost completely obscured by the scrawled-out surface. Ann Lauterbach described Chase's depiction of figure as a goal to "demystify herself," and that to do this "she would want to see if she could address the self not as subject but as object."⁶ The stark depictions of faces unmask any visual subjectivity and reveal the underlying components that compose the face as an object. The bare lines that form the conversing faces are stripped of emotion and autonomy, reduced to mere gestures. In a review of Chase's 1986 exhibition at the Robert Miller Gallery, New York, in *The Village Voice*, Bill Zimmer compared these works to an "existentialist crisis," writing that "one hopes this ubiquitous head isn't just a portrait of the artist, but the image is so driven that has to be the case."⁷ Zimmer's analysis draws attention to Chase's shift to bitonal compositions and bare portrayals of the human form. This reduction of form suggests an unveiling of self, down to the unadulterated outline of a face. Moving out of this period of blurred figuration and direct self-examination, Chase developed new applications for her physical treatment of paint.

The bright yellow, oranges, and reds of Louisa Chase's *Untitled* 1986-1987 (cat.13) explode off the canvas in a tangle of gestural marks and layering. The canvas extends out of its regular borders, with a portion of the left corner breaking the base of the canvas, with the right side cut away to create a shaped canvas. Frank Stella's Minimalist work, *Empress of India* 1965, (fig.10) shows how a shaped canvas can break a traditional rectilinear format and create geometric forms. Stella's repeating chevron shapes alternate in orientation but maintain a neutral color palette that varies in tone. The visual strength of the shaped canvas is emphasized by

pinstripes that push the shapes inward and outward. Chase's red extension of canvas continues onto the main yellow body of the canvas, creating a right angle creating a geometric foundation. The receding blue geometric puzzle piece located in the upper right counteracts this red base, forming an implied diagonal line pulling into the painting. These opposing geometric forms are an isolated pair in a sea of carved marks and layered paint. As opposed to Chase's color field works (cat.1), these geometric pairs seem to be working in tandem to ground the trenches of dug-away paint that flow across the canvas.

Chase's presence as an artist is notable in *Untitled* 1986-1987 (cat.13) due to the animated quality of the tangle of lines that encompass the frame. When viewing this work at close range, the lines become tracible, the pressure of the tool is evident, and the type and speed of the mark is decipherable. The indentations of yellow and blue paint hold the memory of the movements of the artist, once a performer. The repeated clusters of marks show isolated strokes as if each event took place over a period, only to be compressed into one moment on the canvas. This captured motion appears in numerous works by Cy Twombly 1928-2011, in which Twombly sends a "repletion flurry of lines – bulging curves or slashes – spilling diagonally down and across the surface" a language of "flow and fracture" as Kirk Varnedoe characterized, connecting to a "modern fascination with the cinematic decomposition of forms in motion," as can be seen in his gestural chalkboard work *Untitled*, 1970.⁸ Although Twombly's co-called, "Palmer method" lines are created in seemingly simple and almost understandable single motions, Chase's elaborate mark making seems more spontaneous and emotive. The depth of the tool reveals as much or as little as intended. In various points on the canvas the deep trenches are painted more deeply with blues and, in other areas, they are covered up by strokes of yellow and red.

The interplay of colors in *Untitled* 1986-1987 is integral to understanding the gestural mark in Chase's work. The surface layer of paint is a bright yellow that pulls away from the composition, only to be contained by the red square that grounds the work. The marks cut deeply into this bright surface and reveal a more introspective, receding blue. These colors counteract each other, much like the geometric forms, emphasizing the movement of the lines. Disrupting the thick layers of yellow and cuts of blue are loose, clumsy brushstrokes of red that blend the colors when pulled across the trawled-out lines. By using primary colors, Chase allows for the colors to blend and expand the color palette. Where the blue bleeds into the yellows, soft glimpses of green emerge. The red square layered over the yellow paint produces a luminescent orange corner. The red brushstroke smudges collide into the blues and yellows and produce the occasional spurt of purple. The spontaneous eruptions of combined colors emerge from the carved paint, as Chase created a tension between these free-flowing pigments and the rigidity of the geometric forms.

Chase appreciated the physical process of the work and gesture that calls back to a "subset of Abstract Expressionism" that Debra Bricker



Fig.11 Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) *Composition with Color Planes No. 3*, 1917, oil on canvas, 48x61 cm. The Hague, Netherlands. ©2023 Mondrian/Holtzman Trust, Photo Credit: © DeA Picture Library / Art Resource, NY.

Balkin described as “gestural abstraction which is meant to connote the bold brushwork that had first appeared in the canvases of de Kooning, Hofmann, Motherwell and Pollock.”⁹ Jackson Pollock’s work focuses on unleashing the physicality of the artist, which he described: “when I am *in* my painting, I am not aware of what I’m doing.”¹⁰ In the physicality of the process there is an aspect of performance that is captured in the painting. In the case of Pollock, as Nancy Jachec remarked, “the idea of gesture painting as really a form of self-portraiture was there from very early on,” paint on a canvas reflects a portion of the artist and their actions.¹¹ The performance and process created by Chase is a critical aspect of *Untitled* 1986–1987. Energy and personality are transferred through the gesture of the paintbrush and the performance of the artist. In *Untitled* 1986–1987 the carving away at the canvas and emphasized brush stroke hold the memories of the artist. In *Out of the Web Number 7*, 1949, Pollock’s performance is remembered by streaks of dripped paint and amorphous shapes. The layers activate depth with the placement of lines, each line of paint weaving on top of a united mass. Chase described Pollock’s negotiation of space as “accurate” and the application of paint as a “a ball of yarn sense of narration that went in and out of space.”¹² Chase’s layering of paint exposed through line creates a similar weaving between planes of existence and systems of space.

In a move away from the representational, Chase’s exploration of geometric shapes and gestural marks exposed an untapped wealth of texture and animated movement. In *Untitled* 1987, red, blue, and yellow

rectangles are arranged perpendicular to one another, reminiscent of post-and-lintel-style arches or gates. The primary colors are mostly confined to their geometric boundaries and although each grouping overlaps, the colors never blend or mix into each other. There appears to be no clear pattern of the color arrangement from grouping to grouping, rather, gates seem to rearrange themselves in both scale and pattern, creating depth and complexity. Through variation in scale, organization, and layering of shapes, each grouping maintains a level of individuality. The largest and most clustered grouping of colored shapes occurs in the center of the work, where blocks are stacked to create depth. Rhythm is created through repetition of the regular parallelograms surrounding the canvas. While the reds, blues, and yellows of these smaller shapes are just as full as the larger blocks, their size and isolation indicate a distance or depth. Aside from the main cluster in the middle and the two smaller forms, the rest of the blocks fall off the canvas, emphasizing both the scale of the canvas and the expansive effect from the repetition of shape.

A viewer familiar with Chase’s work would instantly recognize these block color field images as a distinct aspect of her vocabulary during the 1980s. However, a viewer less familiar with Chase’s work but with a background in the history of art might connect these repetitive blocks of color to notable Dutch artist Piet Mondrian, 1872–1944. Both artists appreciate the transformative quality of placing primary colors in geometric conversation, making Mondrian an ideal reference with which to understand Chase’s style. Like Chase, Mondrian’s color fields were an evolutionary step in his career, following the concentration of artists and architects in the de Stijl movement focusing on reduction to basic form and color to achieve pure abstraction. Mondrian’s grid paintings have since become synonymous with the de Stijl movement. For example, in *Composition with color planes*, 1917 (fig.11), the reduction of form effectively translates passive geometrical graphic continuity that Kermit Swiler Champa described as a “formidably active structural and pictorial force.”¹³ By varying size and color, Mondrian created movement. Chase’s *Untitled*, 1987 (cat.1) complicates this basic principle by confusing the two-dimensional field through mark and gesture. Chase’s art-historical reference provides the foundations for the distortion of the grid and an expansion in texture.

The gestural marks carved into the layers of paint disrupt the regular patterns of the geometric arch-like groupings and penetrate layer upon layer of gray buildup. The black lines are carved through the paint, with beads of residual wax and oil serving as a memory of what’s been excavated. Margaret Moorman reviewed the 1989 exhibition at the Brooke Alexander Gallery and proposed that, “such layering, coupled with the sincerity of Chase’s gestural marks suggests a search.”¹⁴ Chase seemed to be “searching” for something beneath the layers of paint, extracting pigment to reveal something intangible. Where the lines are concentrated, blues and blacks bleed through an energetic swirl of emotion and movement, as if the canvas has been bruised. The primary colors delicately rest both on top of and below the tonal marks of white,

gray, and black. Chase is playing a game with the viewer, daring them to discover how the marks could possibly exist. She has left behind clues of her process with thinly incised lines marking the borders of the blocks, only for her loose brushstrokes of color to break through these weak barriers. And, as if to mock the rigidity of the geometric separation of color and tone, a single drip of red paint is left in the bottom-middle of the painting, left to dry on top of the white surface.

The shift to geometric color fields took careful planning with a theory to drive her new mode of painting. After returning from a trip to Greece, Chase wrote in her journal that:

the mark making is to become essential – a language without the figuration – without the outline, marks build up – the simplicity of the red, yellow, and blue geometry interests me in its reconstructions – its exactitude can make it very specific – I don't think they will be crowd-pleasers but there is something in them that I can only connect to.¹⁵

This thought process highlights the intentions of her pivotal transition from figural forms to geometric patterns. It is important to note that Chase recognized the process of mark making as essential, the process of removing layers of paint allowing the marks to flow freely without the constraints of a specific form, such as hands or branches. The geometric forms take the spotlight for emphasizing depth and space. The exactitude and specificity that Chase discusses is evident in how these blocks are planned and arranged. In the three untitled pencil-and-watercolor works from 1989 (cats.7, 8, 11) and in *Untitled*, 1987 (cat.1), Chase methodically planned the layering of the blocks with pencil marks and incisions. These delicately placed color blocks show Chase's visual vocabulary and geometric systems that connect these different works. Chase's systematic process of creating these shapes can be examined through her appreciation of the mathematical process in which "the visionary mathematician first realizes his answer (the imagination as conjured in a daydream) then goes on backwards through the hypothesis to arrive at the problem."¹⁶ Perhaps the pencil lines and various drafts of the outlines of the color blocks are notes of her artistic process "working backwards through the hypothesis" to arrive at her preconceived arrangement.

Untitled (Spiders) 2003 (cat.12) is a novel work in this exhibition, as it is the only example of Chase's later work. The painting is composed of a blue-gray background with black, white, and silver paint tangled on top. The color palette is muted and does not contain any of the primary colors from her earlier, geometric works. Layers of paint are carefully applied to the surface rather than carved away, and the surface is flat when compared to earlier works. The layered lines of paint leave room for the deep recessive blue background to activate space and pull the viewer in. In a journal entry from 2001, Chase referred to her experience in creating a harmony between line and space, "I can push and pull the space – in and out from scribble, lines appear and retreat. I finally have



Fig.12 Louisa Chase, *Untitled (Bowl of Cherries)*, 2003, oil on canvas, 32" x 35." © Estate of Louisa Chase, courtesy Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York. Photo: Eric W. Baumgartner.

space to move in – to breathe."¹⁷ In these later paintings, Chase has mastered balancing gestural lines set within a broader representational composition, such as is suggested by a group of arachnids. The bodies of the spiders are shown through spherical clusters of black, with thin offshoot of lines serving as the legs. The black clusters fade into the canvas, where they have been smeared to create shadows and softer tones of black. The white and silver paint layered upon these figures contrast the dark bodies and seem to float above the arachnids. The gestural movement of these floating silver and gray lines perhaps denotes the skittering movement of the legs in action.

The reemergence of the natural world in Chase's work culminated in an exhibition at the Contemporary Museum in Baltimore in 2003, filled with organic subjects such as *Untitled (Bowl of Cherries)*, 2003 (fig.12) and *Flutter*, 2003 (fig.13). These works represent the themes of Chase's later visual style, which were described by Michael Salcman as "not quite abstract painting" that contain issues of "thought, composition, and facture."¹⁸ The works seem to carry an "emotional charge and a sense of rightness" and before her paintings a viewer could feel "beauty still applies."¹⁹ This maturation in Chase's style signal her taking a new approach to representation while still pushing the boundaries of expression. There is a deep sense of organic rhythm in Chase's repetition of gestural line that unifies these works.



Fig.13 Louisa Chase, *Flutter*, 2003, oil on canvas, 72" x 61 3/4." © Estate of Louisa Chase, courtesy Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York. Photo: Eric W. Baumgartner.

and uniformity of Twombly's spirals, making them seem more random and organic.

Mark making and gesture are a unifying technique within Chase's progression in art making and evolution in style. Her ability to command a canvas with spontaneous and performative gestures is balanced by her use of color and deep art-historical knowledge. Chase's art reflects her search for deeper, more profound expression beyond pictorial representations. Her works walk a line of representation and abstraction that create a tension between different mediums of art making. Chase's intentionality and physical presence on the canvas continue to push viewers of her work to see beyond the image to connect to the source that pushed her performative energetic gestures and marks. Within all of Chase's works there are recognizable elements of pattern, natural phenomenon, and geometry. These uniting themes contend with representing her own perceptions of the world as extensions of her own self. Chase worked to access the intersection between self and the perception of worldly phenomenon. To capture this transcendent relationship, Chase developed sophisticated techniques of art making. The tactile textures of Chase's marks have a fresh quality, as if the artist had just stepped away from the work. The immediacy of Chase's techniques compels the viewer to take time to engage with the gestural abstractions and meditate on the physical presence her works contain.

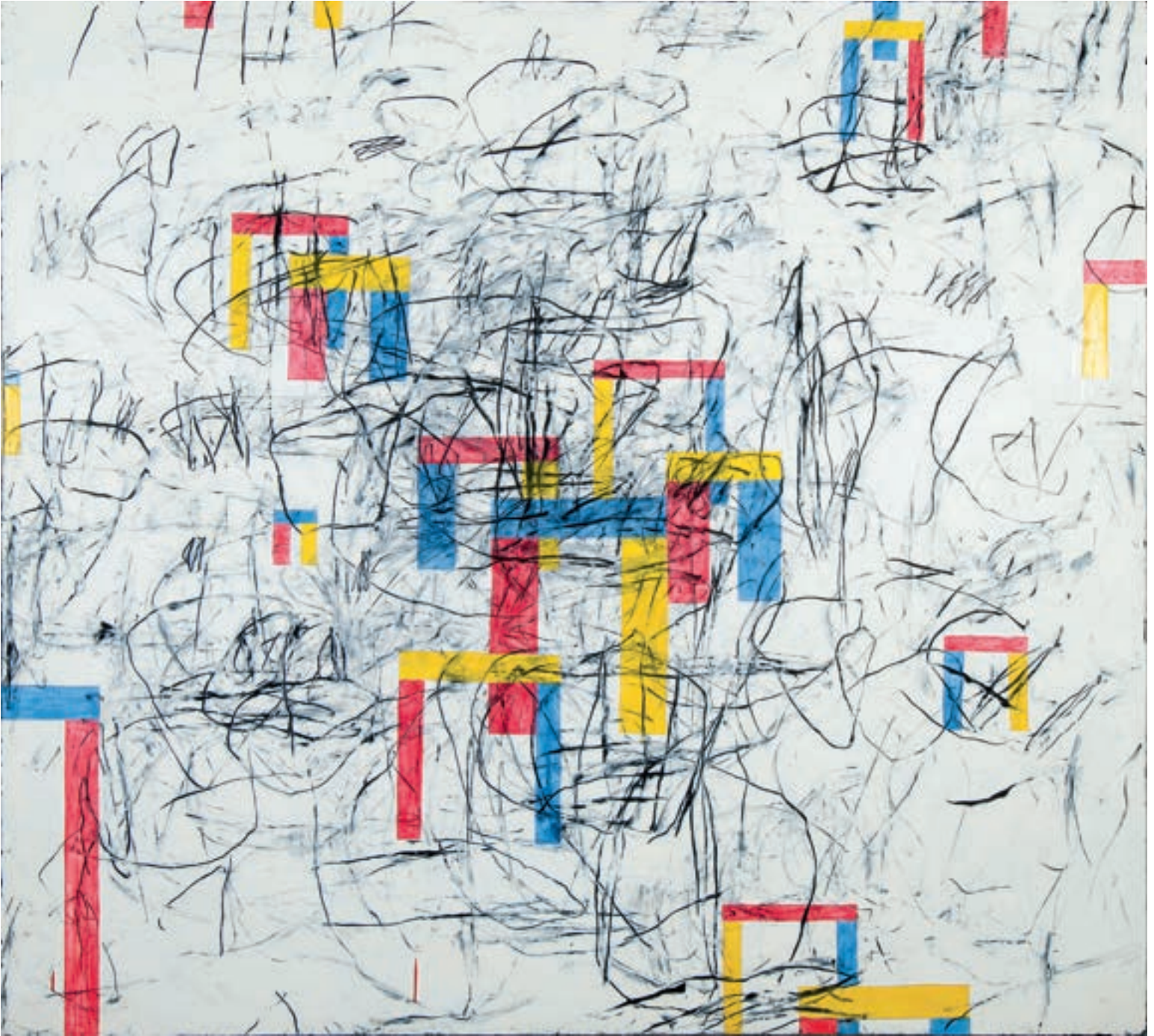
Even operating in the 21st century, Chase's swirling and repeating lines and paint strokes harken back to the history of Abstract Expressionism. Cy Twombly's famous style of gestural marks comes to mind, especially his Palmer method works done in the 1960s and '70s. Twombly's *Untitled* 1970 contains "three tense rows of loops, like coils of brittle wire extended in tangles, are stacked one above the other" that move across the page like calligraphic handwriting, representing the gesture of the artist.²⁰ Chase's *Untitled (Spiders)* carries a similar chaotic energy in the way the lines are layered, however, in Chase's painting, the mark of the brush and the application of pigment become far more important. The layering of colors creates implied space with a background, midground, and foreground. The black spiders exist sandwiched in between the base layer of blue and the flurry of white and silver marks. Twombly's emotive works have a stark quality, as if they were lifted off a chalkboard. In comparison, Chase's lines lack the rigidity

- 1 Holland Cotter, exhibition review of "Louisa Chase at Robert Miller Gallery, 1986," *Art in America* June, vol.74, no. 6 (1985):123.
- 2 Cotter, "Louisa Chase," 123.
- 3 *Louisa Chase Papers*, Box 21, "Writings, Journals, and Poems," Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, n.p.
- 4 Ann Lauterbach, "Louisa Chase Figure in a Landscape," in *Louisa Chase - Brooke Alexander, April 3-27, 1991*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Brooke Alexander, 1991), n.p.
- 5 Leepa-Rattner Museum of Art, "Louisa Chase: What Lies Beneath - Panel Discussion," YouTube video, 22:00, October 2, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kIOPQWygDs>
- 6 Lauterbach, "Louisa Chase," n.p.
- 7 Bill Zimmer, *The Village Voice*, April 1, 1986: 95
- 8 Kirk Vardedoe, *Cy Twombly* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 41.
- 9 Debra Bricker Balken, *Abstract Expressionism* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 50.
- 10 Nancy Jachec, *Jackson Pollock: Works, Writings, and Interviews* (Barcelona, Ediciones Polígrafa, 2011), 119.
- 11 Nancy Jachec, *Jackson Pollock*, 119.
- 12 Lauterbach, "Louisa Chase," n.p.
- 13 Kermit Swiler Champa, *Mondrian Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 61.
- 14 Margaret Moorman, "Louisa Chase: Brooke Alexander," *ARTnews* 88, no.6: 164.
- 15 *Louisa Chase Papers*, Box 21, "Writings and Journals, 1987-1988," Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, 1.
- 16 *Louisa Chase Papers*, Box 21, "Writings, Journals, and Poems," Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, n.p.
- 17 *Louisa Chase Papers*, Box 21, "Writings, Journals, and Poems," Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, n.p.
- 18 Michael Salcman, "Louisa Chase: New Paintings," in *Louisa Chase*, (Baltimore: Contemporary Museum, 2003), n.p.
- 19 Salcman, "Louisa Chase," n.p.
- 20 Vardedoe, *Cy Twombly*, 40.

Exhibition Catalogue

All works by Louisa Chase, Estate of Louisa Chase,
courtesy of Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York.

Photos: Eric W. Baumgartner



1. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Untitled, 1987 Oil and wax on canvas, 76 x 84 in.



2. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Wave, 1982, Oil on canvas, 72 x 72 in. Signed, dated, and inscribed (on the back):
WAVE / Louisa Chase / 1982.



3. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Untitled, 1979, Oil and wax on canvas, 40¼ x 48 in., Signed with initials and dated (at lower right): LC 79.



4. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),
Untitled, 1985, Oil on canvas, 11 x 10 in.



5. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

FACE to ECAF Study, 1985, Oil on canvas, 11 x 10 in., Signed and dated (on the back): Louisa Chase 1985.



6. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Untitled, c. 1985, Oil and wax on canvas, 11 x 10 in.



7. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Untitled, 1989, Watercolor, ink, pencil, and charcoal on paper, 19¾ x 23½ in. Signed and dated (at lower right): Louisa Chase 1989.



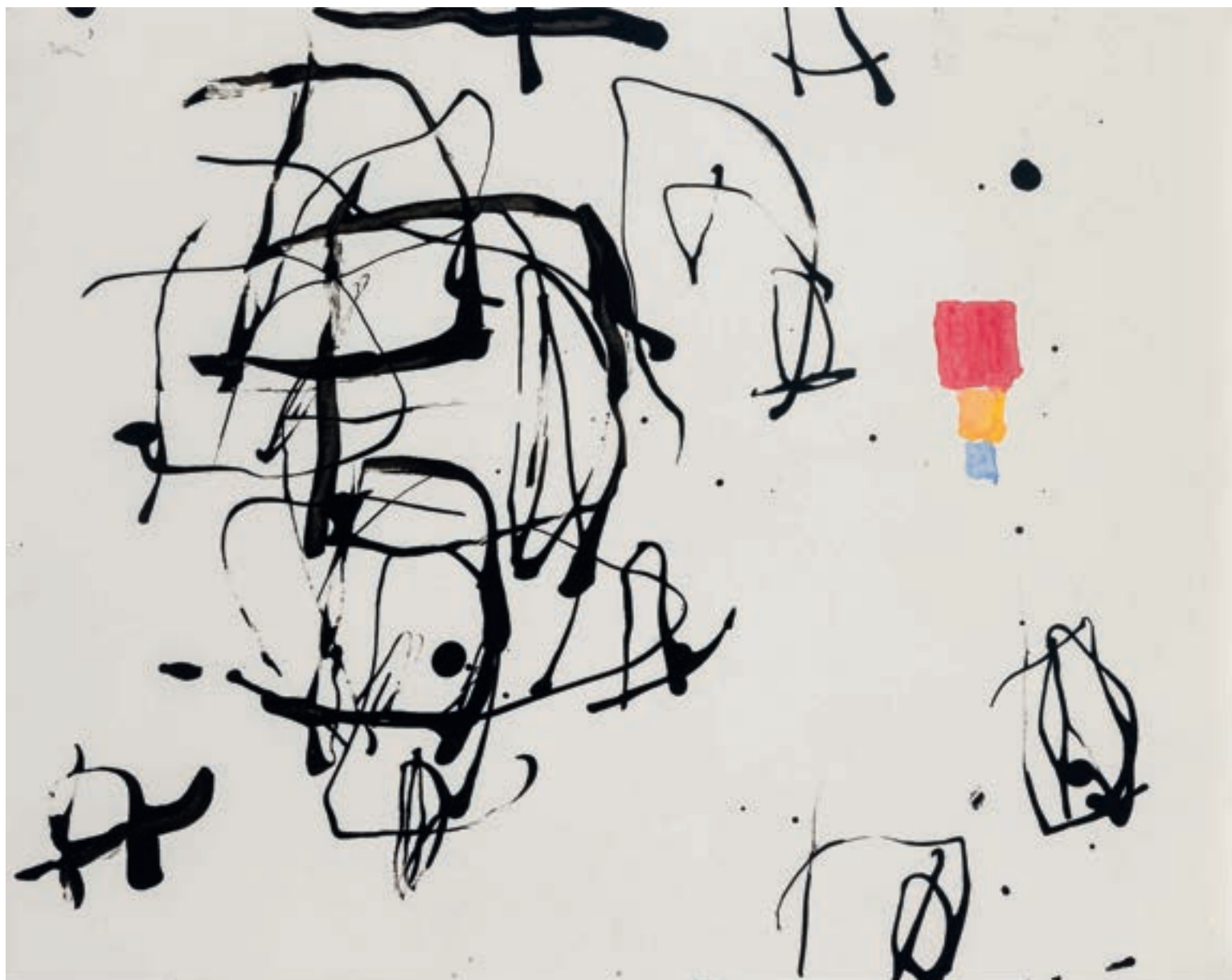
8. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Untitled, c. 1989, Ink, watercolor, pencil, and charcoal on paper, 23½ x 19¾ in.,
Signed (at lower right): Louisa Chase.



9. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Untitled (Hands), 1990, Color etching on woven paper, 35½ x 50½ in. (sheet).



10. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),
Untitled, c. 1988, Ink and watercolor on paper, 11 x 14 in.



11. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Untitled, 1989, Ink, watercolor, pencil, and charcoal on paper, 19 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. Signed and dated (at lower right): Louisa Chase 1989.



12. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),
Untitled (Spiders), c. 2003, Oil on canvas, 30 x 24 in.



13. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Untitled, 1986–87, Oil on canvas, 72 x 72 in., Signed and dated (on the back): Louisa Chase 1986–1987.



14. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Untitled, 1982, Oil on canvas, 16 x 14 in., Signed and dated (on the back): Louisa Chase 1982.



15. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Untitled (Fire Study), 1983, Oil and wax on canvas, 22 x 26 in., Signed and dated
(with initials, at lower right): L.C. 83; (on the back): Louisa Chase 1983.



16. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Sticks and Stones, 1975, Color lithograph, 14¾ x 18¾ in. Signed with initials (at lower right): L.C.



17. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Untitled (Cavern), c. 1984, Ink and watercolor on paper, 14 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Signed (at lower right): Louisa Chase.



18. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Untitled (Thicket), 1983, Color woodcut on Japanese fiber paper, 33 x 38½ in.



19. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Red Sea, 1983, Color woodcut with watercolor on Japanese fiber paper, 33 x 38½ in. Signed, dated, and inscribed (in margin, at lower left): A.P.; (in margin, at center): Red Sea; (in margin, at lower right): Louisa Chase 1983, Printed by Chip Elwell; published by Diane Villani Editions.



20. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Untitled (Black Sea), 1983, Color woodcut with watercolor on Japanese fiber paper,
33½ x 38¾ in. Printed by Chip Elwell; published by Diane Villani Editions.



21. Louisa Chase (1951–2016),

Chasm, 1983, Color woodcut on Japanese fiber paper, 26 x 30 in. Signed, dated, and inscribed (along bottom, at lower left): T.P.; (at center): Chasm; (at lower right): Louisa Chase 1983 Printed by Chip Elwell; published by Diane Villani Editions.

