Beauford Delaney

American, b. 1901, Knoxville, TN, d. 1979, Paris, France

Delaney studied at the Massachusetts Normal School and moved to New York in 1929 where he settled in Greenwich Village. He took classes at Art Students League, studying with Thomas Hart Benton and John Sloan. Among the life-long friendships he established was one with Charles Alston, a seminal figure in the development of advocacy for African-American art and cultural advancement in Harlem. Delaney was selected to assist Alston on the Works Progress Administration mural project at Harlem Hospital.

In 1945, The Amazing and Invariable Beauford Delaney, a chapbook by Henry Miller, brought the artist considerable attention as a celebrated Greenwich Village curiosity. He had become an established figure when on his voyage to Paris in 1953 he happened to travel with Herbert Gentry. Like many artists featured in this exhibition, Paris offered an alternative to difficulties of living in New York. Delaney, who ultimately settled there, discovered a way of life less encumbered by racism and sexual bigotry.

In Paris, Delaney’s style of painting became free and looser. In New York, he had tended toward a more literal realism, accented with incised black outlines. The artist was noted particularly for his deft handling of light infused pigments and his expressive use of yellow.

Throughout the fifties Delaney exhibited in Paris, Spain, Italy and Germany. In 1960 he suffered a mental breakdown brought on by anxieties over money and exacerbated by his dependence on alcohol. By 1964 he had rebounded. Friends bought him a studio on the rue Vercing.torix and he showed his new abstract paintings at the Galerie Lambert. This was a prolific period, particularly in the volume of abstract works produced. He went on to make a number of significant portraits of various influential people in his circle. In 1978 the Studio Museum in Harlem mounted his first major retrospective. Delaney died the following year and was buried in Paris.



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