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WEEKEND FINE ARTS/ LEISURE

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ART IN REVIEW – PAGE E40

## **Louis Stone**

'American Modernist'

Michael Rosenfeld

24 West 57th Street, Manhattan

Through Jan. 11

Hardly anyone today knows who Louis Stone was. In his own time he never made much of a name for himself. Yet the Modernist abstractions he painted between 1938 and 1942 are undeniably fetching, even if they don't put him in a league with Arshile Gorky.

Stone, born in Ohio in 1902, studied at the Art Academy of Cincinnati. He married an heiress from Newark and the couple went to Europe, where they lived for a while in Cézanne's studio in Aix-en-Provence. In 1929 Stone studied with Hans Hofmann in Munich. Returning to the United States in 1933, the Stones eventually settled in Lambertville, N.J., a thriving, semirural artist community. All this is related in a fine catalog essay by Joseph Jacobs, curator of American art at the Newark Museum.

A reluctant self-promoter, Stone never found Manhattan gallery representation. Some people thought he practiced too many different styles, and you can see why: this show includes Constructivist-style compositions of severely simplified geometry; abstracted still-lives reminiscent of Braque; diagrammatic pictures that echo Picasso of the 20's; biomorphic imagery influenced by Surrealism; and jazzy orchestrations of percussive pattern, swooping line and curvy shapes that recall Kandinsky and Stuart Davis.

Rather than finding his own singular vision, Stone seemed happy to sample and remix formal possibilities made available by other artists. At heart, one feels, he was more a sophisticatedly playful designer than a deeply original painter. Maybe seeing more of his work would alter that impression.

-KEN JOHNSON

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**MICHAEL ROSENFELD GALLERY**  
**24 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019**  
**Ph 212.247.0082 Fx 212.247.0402**