

## Art in Review

### 'Stroke!'

'Beauford Delaney, Norman Lewis and Alma Thomas'

*Michael Rosenfeld Gallery  
24 West 57th Street, Manhattan  
Through March 12*

Believing that aesthetics trumped politics, the black artists Beauford Delaney, Norman Lewis and Alma Thomas held fast to their commitment to abstraction despite pressure from activists to pursue more accessible Social Realism. The three started out painting in figurative style, but turned to more abstract modes in the course of their careers.

Brought together here, their paintings from the 1960's and 70's make an arresting combo. Delaney (1901-79) left Greenwich Village to settle in Paris in the early 1950's and remained there until his death. His light-struck canvases, surfaces covered with tiny wriggling strokes of luminous colors laid on a solid ground, are exemplified here by "Untitled" (1970), in which all-over marks of yellow, magenta and off-white animate a pale lavender undercoat to give the effect of a first-class summer day.

Lewis (1909-79) was politically active and until the mid-1940's painted figurative subjects, the lives of black families and workers. Then, affected by the New York School and Abstract Expressionism, he developed a mode in which fields of glowing color are invaded by ghostly calligraphic forms that suggest groups of people in various arrangements. An impressive example is "Confrontation" (1971), a ground of fiery red that darkens at top and bottom, marched over by totemic icons that can't quite be read as figures.

Thomas (1891-1978), probably the best known of the three, is not represented in top form, but then her best work is hard to come by. A teacher by profession who didn't blossom as an abstract painter until late midlife, she became known for her broken lines of rich color arranged in geometric patterns, as in "Flowers in Spring" (1973), a formalized garden that sets staccato vertical stripes in deep purple, orange, olive green, baby blue, pink and others next to each other in an evocation of spring blooms.

As a trio, the artists play off one another to lyrical effect.

GRACE GLUECK