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Paris, 1930, (Nov 7–21, 1930, Exposition d'Ary Stillman, Paysages & Compositions de Santa-Fe / Galerie Zak)

Ary Stillman (1891–1967) was an artist who, in spite of gaining recognition in his day, is missing from the annals of art history. Yet the works he produced have stood the test of time and offer contemporary audiences new perspectives on the prevailing styles and influences of the past. Following his own independent and wayward course, Stillman took cues from his surroundings—be it Paris in the '20s, New York in the '30s, '40s, and '50s, or Mexico in the '60s—and, while absorbing the stylistic innovations of these decades, translated them through his own particular vision to arrive ultimately at a unique, mature body of work.

In tracing the evolution of Stillman's art, one finds evidence of his early academic training in Russia, the lingering spell of Impressionism in Europe in the early part of the twentieth century, and the mid-century impact of Abstract Expressionism in America. However, in examining his earliest works, one discovers another story—the story of a young Jewish boy in Russia seeking to fulfill his dream of becoming an artist against all odds. In the course of his lifetime, Stillman overcame poverty, political turmoil, and failing health to pursue that goal. His legacy is not only the more than 1500 works that he left behind, but also the inspirational example of his life.

French Bridge, c. 1923–1924, oil on canvas,  
24 x 19 $\frac{5}{8}$  in., [Private Collection]





Self Portrait, c. 1920s, oil on canvas, 35½ x 28¼ in.,  
[Sioux City Art Center]





Girl in Red Dress, 1931, oil on canvas, 31 x 22 in., [University of Houston, Moores School of Music, The Ary Stillman Green Room]

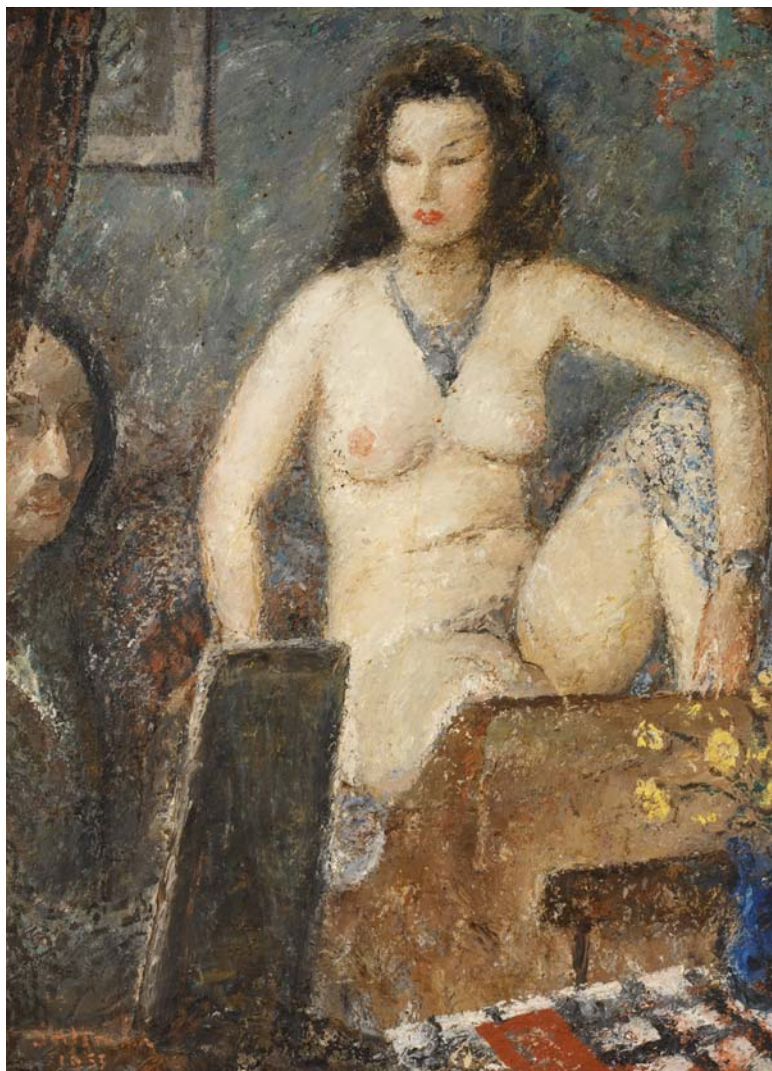
In 1907 Ary Stillman left Russia to immigrate to Sioux City, Iowa, where he spent his days working to support his family and his nights painting, all the while hoping to continue his artistic training. In 1919 he succeeded in moving to New York, and then, two years later, to Paris to further his studies. He soon earned a reputation on both sides of the Atlantic for his atmospheric landscapes, as well as his elegant portraits of women. Traveling to North Africa and Palestine, Stillman also created watercolor portraits of individuals from various cultures.



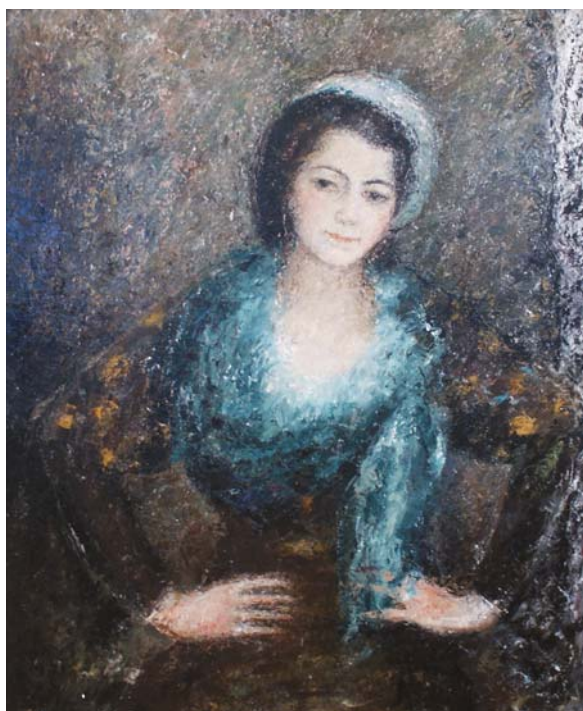
Palestine Head, 1925, watercolor, 13 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 10 in., [Private Collection]

“The watercolor portraits have a lightness of touch and luminosity — a lyric quality — that signals a quantum leap in creativity.”  
— Donald Kuspit





In the Studio, 1932, oil on canvas, 39 x 29 in., [Rhode Island School of Design]



Catherine, 1933, oil on canvas, 31 x 23 in., [Stillman-Lack Foundation]



World's Fair, 1940, oil on canvas, 29 x 39 in., [Private Collection]

In 1933, Stillman, sensing the shift in the political climate in Europe, returned to New York. There, he painted the familiar landmarks of the city and its environs, capturing the vibrant crowds and the cadence of urban life. He worked for the easel division of the WPA Federal Art Project and became a member of the American Artists' Congress. He also participated in numerous exhibitions, and his art was well received by the public and the press.

Interior, Summer Cottage, 1942, oil on canvas, 19 x 21 in., [Stillman-Lack Foundation]







Columbus Circle, c. 1940s, oil on canvas, 18 x 22 in., [Private Collection]



Coney Island, Three Horses, 1936, oil on canvas, 24 x 30 in., [Stillman-Lack Foundation]

"There is nothing exotic in his roster of subjects—deserted factories, 'Times Square,' 'Coney Island' or the cafeteria crowds—it is the individual reaction to these familiar themes set down in personal language that gives the work its particular quality."

—*The New York Journal and American*, May 7, 1939



NY no. 1, 1946, 8¾ x 11½ in., pastel, gouache, India ink, [Stillman-Lack Foundation]



Interplay 1, 1952, oil on canvas, 24 x 19½ in., [Private Collection]





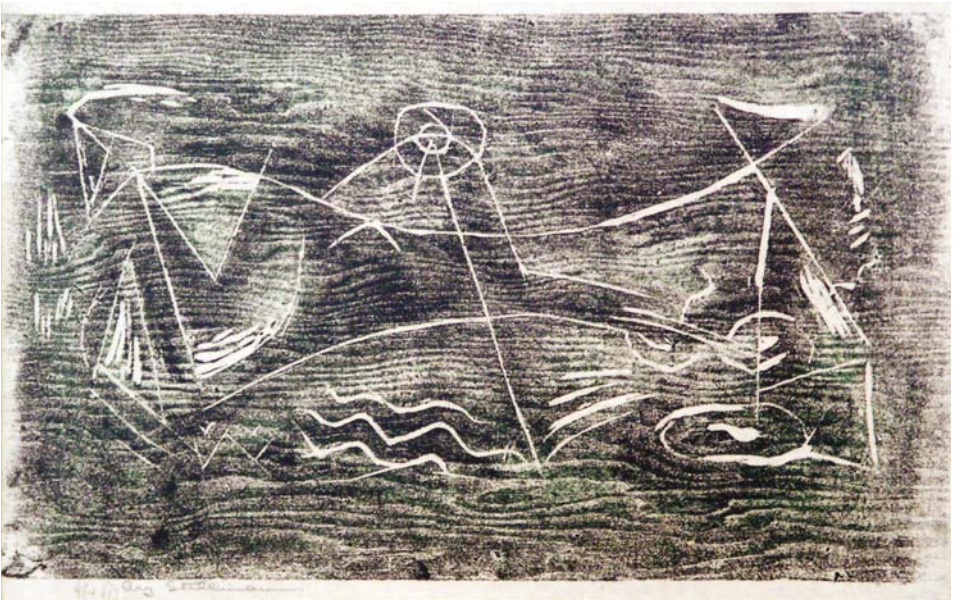
Walpurgisnacht, 1946, oil on canvas, 24 x 28 in., [Indianapolis Museum of Art]

Like many artists, Stillman was greatly affected by WWII, which led to a dramatic shift in his style. No longer representational, his art embraced abstract forms. As he explained, “For me, the world of surface realities is no longer paintable. For nothing is as it formerly seemed. It is not the surface of things—the look of things—that is real—it is that which is hidden beneath the surface—an inner reality of some sort, that is real.”

“... Ary Stillman’s paintings at the Bertha Shafer Gallery carry abstraction deep into its ‘romantic’ phase. For him, plastic rhythms are a means of evoking poetic content. Color, refulgent and suggestive, stirs the visual imagination to respond to something beyond the world of pure shapes.” —*New York Times*, January 27, 1952



Priscilla 24, c. 1948–1949, charcoal, pastel, and embossing, 12 x 9¼ in., [Stillman-Lack Foundation]



Untitled (Woodcut #12), edition of 3, 1953, 14¼ x 21½ in., [Stillman-Lack Foundation]



In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Stillman abandoned his realistic style. Striving instead to reveal an “inner reality,” he relied on psychic automatism, an approach that reduced conscious control of the creative process. In his experimental “white line” drawings, Stillman used an inkless pen, or some such tool, to impress the paper with invisible scribbles, which only emerged when he rubbed a flat stick of charcoal or pastel across the surface. He subsequently adapted this technique to the graphic arts, experimenting with color lithography and woodcut.



Abstract Print L1, 1950, lithograph 5/5, 16 x 11½ in., [Stillman-Lack Foundation]

“In Stillman’s prints and drawings, lines of light dance for dear life in the dark atmospheric space, abysmally infinite in contrast to the dervishing lines. A gnostic struggle is in process, with the moment of final illumination — the bursting forth of light to oust the threatening darkness — in doubt. Sometimes the white lines delineate masses suggestive of dark bodies. These abstract forms are enigmatic ciphers — hieroglyphs of the unconscious, as the surrealists and abstract expressionists called them. They are signs from the depths, animated by pure spirit.” — Donald Kuspit



Design on an Old Wall, c. 1960, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 18 in., [Private Collection]

Stillman moved to Cuernavaca, Mexico, in 1957. In failing health, he also spent time in Houston, where he received medical treatment. When he recovered, he embarked on one of the most prolific art-producing periods of his career, generating a new style that merged the various influences, interests, and experiences of his lifetime.

"What we see poured out before us . . . is the serious, often difficult, and sometimes beautiful work of a sensitive, tortured creative spirit. Ary Stillman was a man whose entire life was devoted to a search for truth, the outer and then the inner reality as he plumbed decades of recollections of things seen; expressed but above all felt."—*Houston Post*, February 27, 1972





Strange Flight #2, c. 1961–1966, gouache on paper, 15 x 22 in., [Stillman-Lack Foundation]



Symbols from a Temple, c. 1960, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 18 in., [Stillman-Lack Foundation]



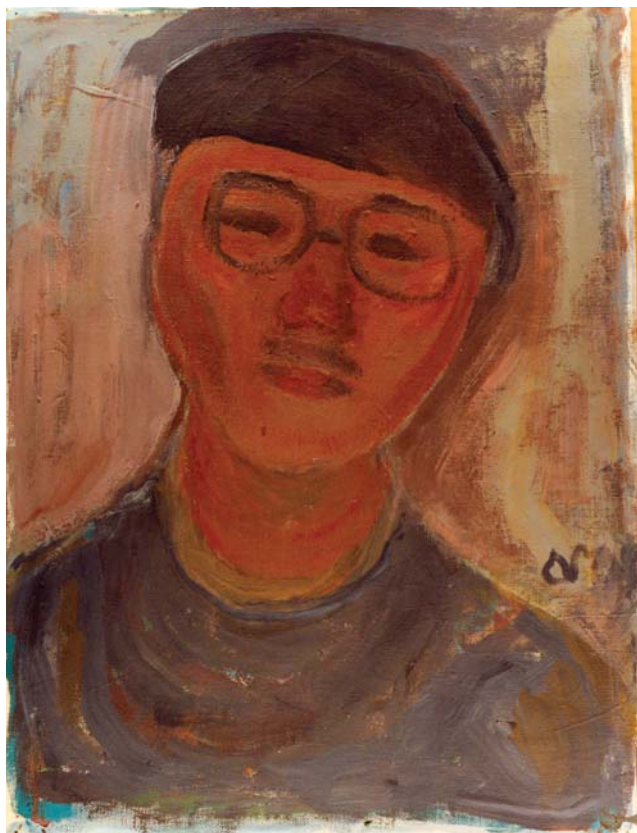
Houston, 1964, the artist with his 1956 painting *Prismatic Vision* (Nov 19-Dec 9, 1964, Ary Stillman, An Exhibition of Paintings/University of Houston)

## About Ary Stillman

Ary Stillman studied art at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vilnius, Lithuania; the Art Institute of Chicago; the National Academy of Design, New York; the Art Students League, New York; and the Académie Montparnasse, Paris. Galleries in Paris, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Houston, and several other cities have exhibited his art in more than 135 group and one-man shows. His works are in the collections of 47 museums and galleries, as well as in private collections.

For a complete listing of collections, exhibitions, and publications, and to view a database of more than 1500 works by Ary Stillman, please visit [www.stillmanlack.org](http://www.stillmanlack.org).





Self Portrait, c. 1960s, acrylic on canvas, 17½ x 13 in.,  
[Stillman-Lack Foundation]

## The Stillman-Lack Foundation

The mission of the Stillman-Lack Foundation is to promote, preserve, display, exhibit, advance scholarship, teach, and research the work of Ary Stillman. The Foundation was established upon the death of Ary Stillman in accordance with his express wishes, and its primary objective is to make the Stillman paintings and drawings accessible to the public. The Trustees feel that there is great value, aesthetic, philosophical, and educational, in viewing the development of a creative artist, step by step, from his earliest years to his final statements. Such a view is possible through the collection, which Ary Stillman bequeathed to the Foundation, including 700 representative paintings and drawings from each phase of his creative output.

For exhibition and acquisition inquiries, please contact:

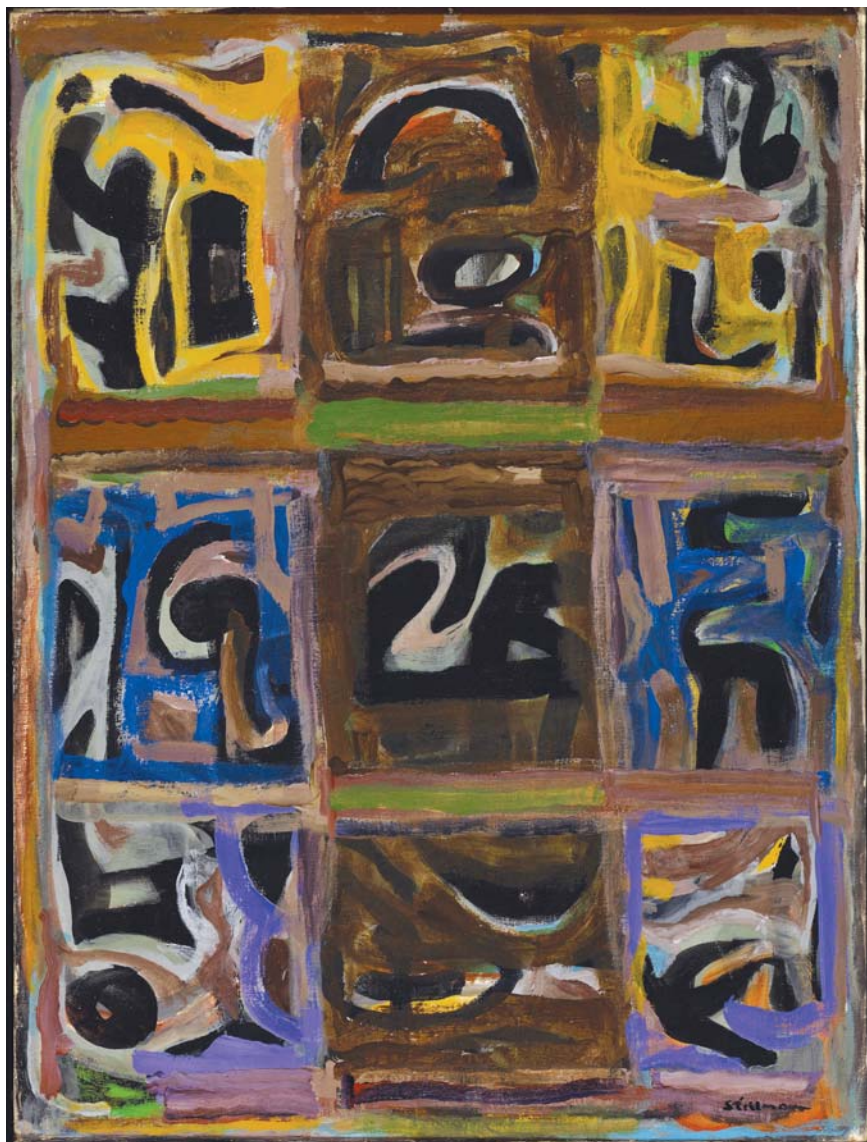
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Tapestry, 1965, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 18 in., [Stillman-Lack Foundation]

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Cover image

Corner of a Space Laboratory (detail), c. 1950–1953,

oil and acrylic on canvas, 24 x 18 in.,

[Stillman-Lack Foundation]

ISBN: 978-0-9790654-0-8

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