



Greenwich Decorative Arts <greenwichdecorativearts@gmail.com>

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**Fwd: GDAS Happy Thanksgiving 2020**

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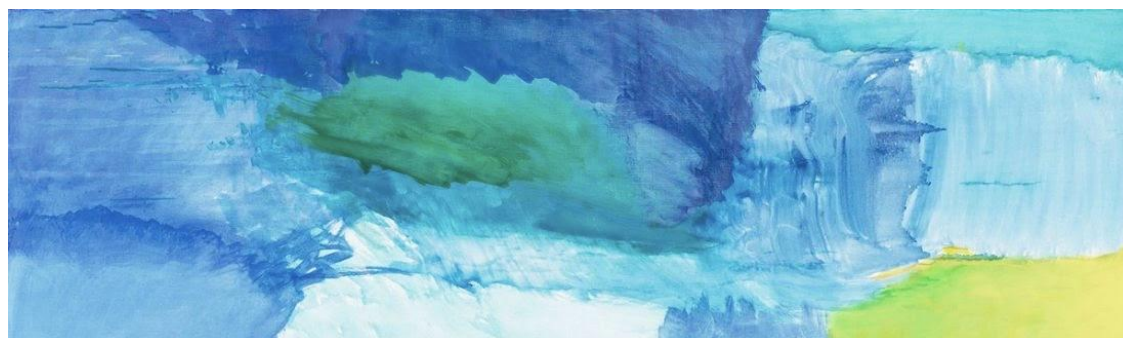
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GREENWICH  
*Decorative Arts*  
SOCIETY

*GDAS Happy Thanksgiving 2020*



Letter from President Cyndy Anderson

Dear GDAS members,

Here is our Thanksgiving gift to you- another beautiful piece by Karen Handal. Even in these uncertain times we are grateful for people who see and express the beauty of life through a variety of art forms. Our appreciation for Ocean Liners and the spectacular Wrightsman rooms at the Met has been enhanced by two fabulous lectures. What a joy to contemplate liners and collecting through better educated eyes!

We are grateful too for the special people in our membership. It is with great sadness that I note the passing of longtime member Lillian Johnson. She served the Society for over 14 years on the Hospitality Committee and for many of these years as Co Chairman. Her warmth and welcoming friendship brightened our days.

On behalf of GDAS, I wish all of you a happy and safe Thanksgiving.

Warmly,  
Cyndy



*"She Sweeps With Many-Colored Brooms"*

## *Emily Mason at The Bruce*



Emily Mason (American, 1932-2019). *Ask the East*, 1968.  
Oil on paper. © 2020 Emily Mason Studio

### *She Sweeps With Many-Colored Brooms*

She sweeps with many-colored Brooms—

And leaves the Shreds behind—

Oh Housewife in the Evening West—  
Come back, and dust the pond!

You dropped a Purple Ravelling in—  
You dropped an Amber thread—  
And now you've littered all the East  
With duds of Emerald!

And still she plies her spotted Brooms,  
And still the Aprons fly,  
Till Brooms fade softly into stars-  
And then I come away—

—*Emily Dickinson*

We have much to be grateful for as the celebration of Thanksgiving approaches.

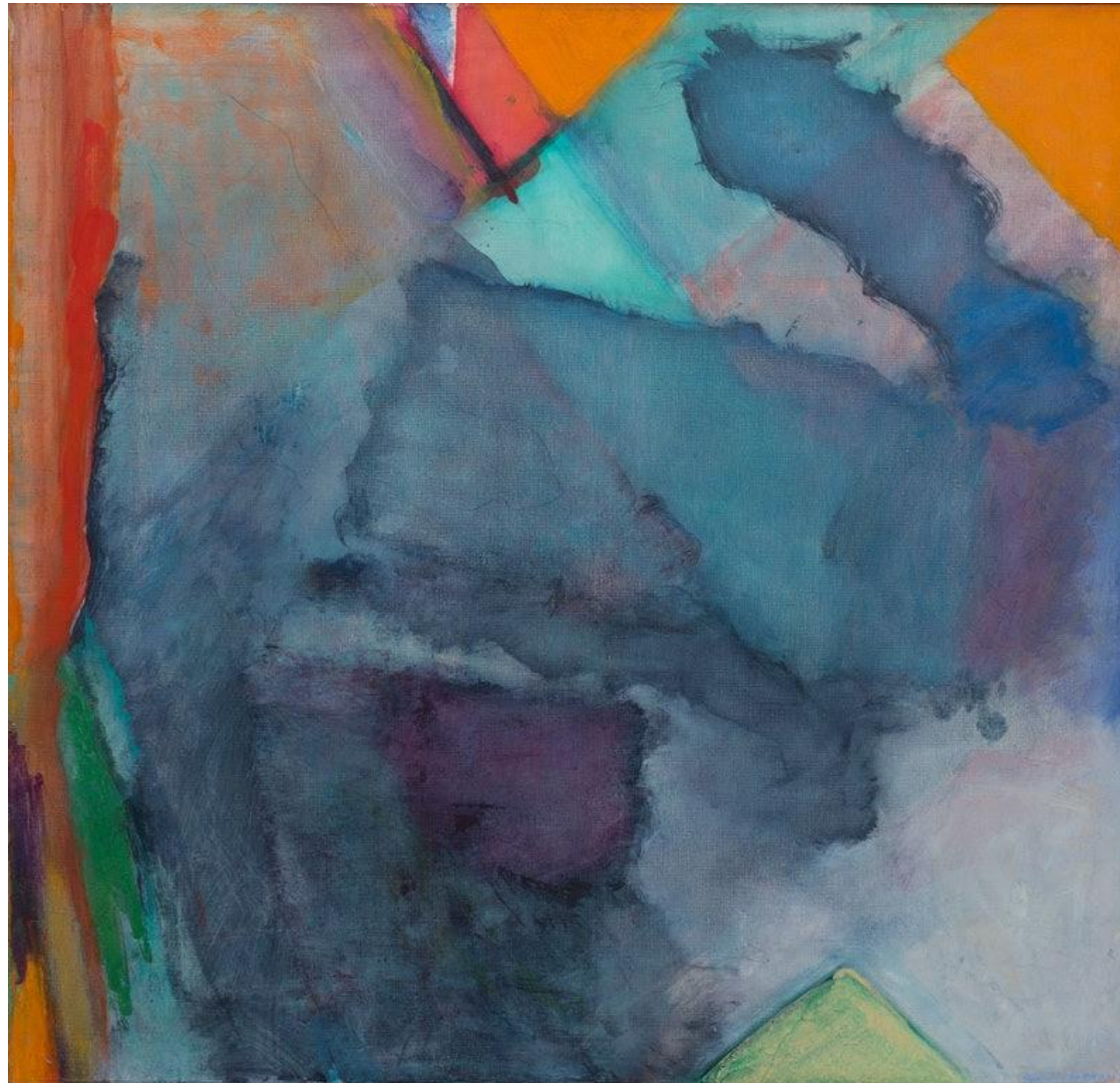
In the time of COVID-19 and our isolation, I cannot think of happier news to share than that our treasured [Bruce Museum](#) is opening an exhibition of artist Emily Mason.

The exhibition is entitled with a phrase from one of Emily Mason's favorite poems by Emily Dickinson, which, if you were so lucky, you might have heard Emily Mason recite at a gathering.

Dickinson's poem uses a "housewife" as the metaphor for the sun and the dramatic colors of the sunset as it "sweeps" across the horizon, leaving "shreds" of color everywhere. "Come back and dust the pond" suggests the reflection of the sunset on the water. "Till brooms fade softly into stars" is the final setting on the sun into night and then the poet "comes away" - she has watched this majestic beauty.

Sunrises and sunsets inspired many of Emily Mason's paintings.





Emily Mason, *Whose Fingers Comb the Sky*, 1978

***Of all the Sounds despatched abroad***

Of all the Sounds despatched abroad  
There's not a Charge to me  
Like that old measure in the Boughs—

That Phraseless Melody—  
The Wind does—working like a Hand--  
Whose fingers comb the Sky—  
Then quiver down—with tufts of tune—  
Permitted Gods—and me—

*Emily Dickinson*

Dickinson reveals an acute sensibility in this poetic tribute to the music of wind. Nothing brings such a “Charge” to her as the elemental energy of the wind, "whose fingers comb the sky."

I learned about Emily Mason years ago at a conference on Emily Dickinson, whose poetry of mystic sensibility and minute attention to the physical world of nature has always moved me. As a passionate gardener, I also was fascinated by Dickinson's deep love of plants and how they informed her writing. Last November, before the pandemic descended on us, I attended Marta McDowell's lecture at the New York Botanical Gardens on Emily Dickinson's Gardening Life.

Years ago, I was fascinated to learn of this painter with a bond to the poet I cherished.

Emily Mason was named after Emily Dickinson. When she was a young girl, her mother gave her a book of Emily Dickinson's poems. She named many of her paintings with phrases from her poetry. She was an observer of nature and a lover of plants, as Emily Dickinson was, and she felt what can only be called a spiritual connection to her. She died at 87 of cancer on December 10, 2019, on Emily Dickinson's birthday.



Emily Mason, *Semaphore*, 1991

The two Emilys - poet and artist - worked in abstraction. Dickinson tosses her phrases at you separated by dashes, which are like semaphores alerting you to pause! to linger! to listen to the multiple meanings in a phrase.



Emily Mason describes her process as follows: "I always begin a painting with a blank canvas and not any preconceived idea of what it's going to look like. I just sort of react. I can't predict it, so I let the materials suggest the next step and then take it from there. *It's a process of letting a painting talk to you. I want a painting to take me to a place I've never been.*" (Italics mine)

Both artists were famous for bending the rules, whether by reinventing meter and interposing dashes that interrupt the meter or reinventing the emotional possibilities of color. Using different mediums, both artists take us "to a place we've never been."





Emily Mason, *Until Just Then*, 1999

*Perhaps you'd like to buy a flower*

Perhaps you'd like to buy a flower,  
But I could never sell -  
If you would like to borrow,  
Until the Daffodil

Unties her yellow Bonnet  
Beneath the village door,  
Until the Bees, from Clover rows  
Their Hock, and Sherry, draw,

Why, I will lend until just then,  
But not an hour more!

*Emily Dickinson*

Emily Mason was born on January 12, 1932 to Warwood Edmund Mason, a ship's captain and later an executive at a shipping company, American Export Lines. She was influenced by her mother [Alice Trumbull Mason](#), an abstract painter and descendant of [John Trumbull](#) (1756-1843), one of the great history and portrait painters of his time.

As a child, Mason met many influential artists, including [Piet Mondrian](#), who was a friend of her mother, and [Joan Miró](#), who painted in a studio adjacent to Alice Trumbull Mason's.



Emily Mason working on *Midnight Slant* in her Vermont studio, 1986.

Photo: Jean E. Davis.

"From a family of artists, Emily was already swaddled in a mature experience of abstraction. After all, her sensitive works reveal her very personal arena of habits, desires, wishes, failures, dreams, and hopes. How wonderful it must be to paint without pretense, to be aware of, yet, free from the tyranny of fashion. How wonderful it must have been to be deeply informed by painting's lush antecedents, to accept one's own doubt, struggle, and the visitation of success—and to work with one's senses fully engaged. Encountering Emily Mason's paintings was not unlike encountering Emily herself." *Tribute by artist Eric Aho*

Emily Mason attended Bennington College and Cooper Union. After graduating from The Cooper Union in 1955, Mason was awarded a Fulbright grant to study painting in



Venice. It was there in 1957 that she married her husband of 62 years, artist [Wolf Kahn](#).

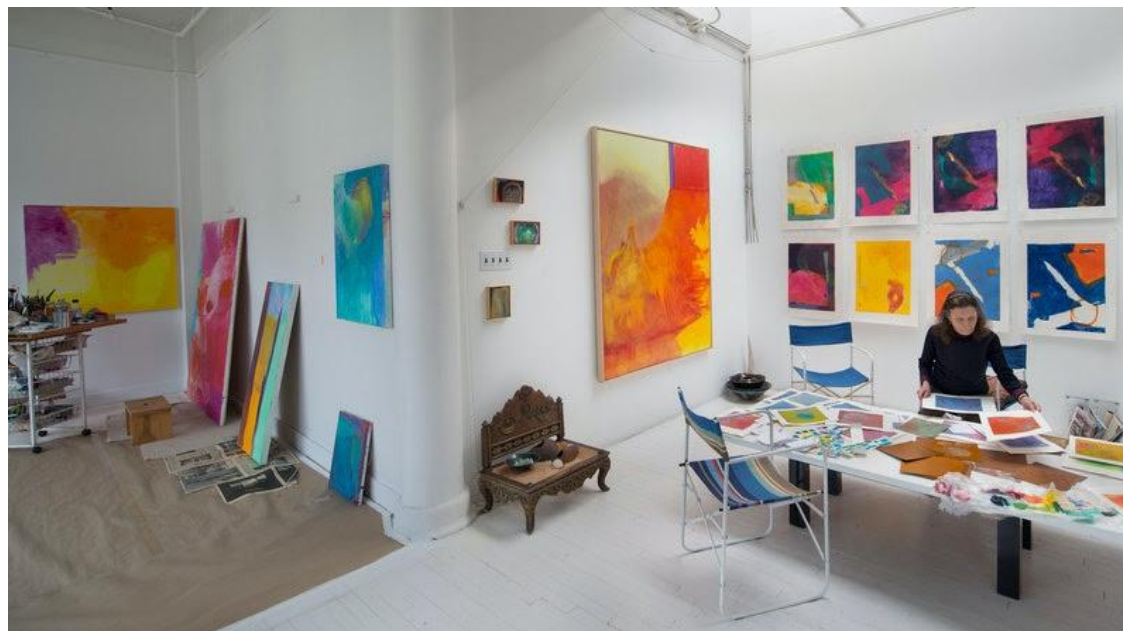


Emily Mason, *The Light in Spring*



"We saw spring come all in one trip" Mason wrote in 1957 describing her Italian journeys, "with the lush fields of wheat first a green fuzz to a thick carpet just outside of Roma...also saw the fruit trees all white and pink with blossoms and sprayed a bright theatrical blue."

She had been living in Venice with the man she would marry and falling in love with the watery city which she described as "more blue and beautiful each new day," a color that pervades so many of her paintings.



Emily Mason looking through her prints in her New York studio, 2015.

Photo: Gavin Ashworth.

"For nearly forty years, Emily Mason's studio was located directly above ours in an originally manufacturing neighborhood where our building gradually attracted a diverse array of creative people. She bought the entire 11th floor, intending to share it fifty-fifty with her husband Wolf Kahn as studios. Wolf was not interested in half a floor and poo-pooed her buying it as a bad investment. Emily would giggle with delight years later

when her real estate acumen was proven right. The south half of her floor instead became a greenhouse filled with orchids and other exotics that had to be trucked back and forth to Vermont each season...

Over the years we discovered that we shared with Emily an obsession with plants and nature; and we developed various traditions, like exchanging plants from our gardens, and going to the yearly Brooklyn Botanical Garden plant sale in the spring when the lilacs were in bloom. Emily gave us updates on the stature of a tulip tree sapling we'd dug up for her...One year, she brought us velvet gondolier slippers in fabulous colors that we still cherish." *Tribute by artist Peter Schlesinger and photographer Eric Boman*



Emily Mason, *Marrow of the Day*, 2005

*Alone and in a Circumstance*

Alone and in a Circumstance  
Reluctant to be told  
A spider on my reticence  
Assiduously crawled

And so much more at Home than I  
Immediately grew  
I felt myself a visitor  
And hurriedly withdrew

Revisiting my late abode  
With articles of claim  
I found it quietly assumed  
As a Gymnasium  
Where Tax asleep and Title off  
The inmates of the Air  
Perpetual presumption took  
As each were special Heir —  
If any strike me on the street  
I can return the Blow —  
If any take my property  
According to the Law  
The Statute is my Learned friend  
But what redress can be  
For an offense nor here nor there  
So not in Equity —  
That Larceny of time and mind  
That marrow of the Day



By spider, or forbid it Lord  
That I should specify.

*Emily Dickinson*



Emily working in her Vermont studio, in Brattleboro, 2018

Although this poem from which Mason takes her title "Marrow of the Day" transcends any single confining interpretation, Dickinson seems concerned with her dispossession not only of physical space but also of the privacy needed to write. She is concerned about the "larceny" of her time and mind and losing "that marrow of the Day."

Also, who hasn't been "Alone and in a Circumstance" ?



Both Emilys needed their alternate space within to create. Every spring, beginning in 1968, Emily Mason and her husband Wolf Kahn retreated from Manhattan to their hillside farm in Brattleboro and would stay through the peak foliage season.



After months of chemotherapy Emily made the decision to forgo any more treatments and leave for the final time to her Vermont studio. She always drew inspiration from her surroundings there.

She and her husband would ordinarily pack up their art studios and return to New York in late October, but this past year, battling cancer, Mason decided to stay in Vermont.

"The colors were so incredible, I just couldn't leave," she said. "And then in November, the world looked like one of Wolf's pastels."

She died in her Vermont home surrounded by family and friends.



Emily Mason, *March is Heard*, 1998

*Dear March – Come in*

Dear March – Come in –

How glad I am –

I hoped for you before –

Put down your Hat –

You must have walked –

How out of Breath you are –

Dear March, how are you, and the Rest –

Did you leave Nature well –

Oh March, Come right upstairs with me –

I have so much to tell –

. . . . .

*Emily Dickinson*

Wolf Kahn died twelve weeks later on March 15, 2020. They are survived by two daughters, Cecily Kahn and Melany Kahn and six grandchildren. The Miles McEnery Gallery in Manhattan, which represented both artists, has an exhibition of Kahn's work scheduled for January 2021.





Kahn and Mason in Venice in 1957 and in 1990





Emily Mason, *Caught Sunset Last*, 2006

***A House upon the Height —***

A House upon the Height —  
That Wagon never reached —  
No Dead, were ever carried down —  
No Peddler's Cart — approached —

Whose Chimney never smoked —  
Whose Windows — Night and Morn —  
Caught Sunrise first — and Sunset — last —  
Then — held an Empty Pane —

Whose fate — Conjecture knew —  
No other neighbor — did —  
And what it was — we never lisped —  
Because He — never told —

*Emily Dickinson*

Once again we are struck with the evocative images of Dickinson's metaphors. Is this a poem about her own seclusion? Maybe the house represents the mystery of a person's life? Or is it the House of God, whose mystery and immortality is never told and our fates cannot be known?

Emily Mason takes the lines "Whose Windows - Night and Morn - Caught Sunrise first - and Sunset - last -" for the title for her stunning painting.

I leave you to muse on its meaning.



"Emily persisted in working unfettered, pursuing her painterly passion for unfathomable sensibility despite it all. Furthermore, she also faced down the difficulties her generation's women artists had to work against since men, often their very partners, were encouraging a systematic preferential lane for themselves. Emily never sought to prove a point, never indulged in holding a rigid position. She is flying low and going far like the bird of I Ching." *Artist Lucio Pozzi*





Emily Mason, *Ahoy*, 2017

When I look at her work, my mind swirls with associations. The vibrations and forms evoke dreams, emotions, landscapes, seasons, music, memories and ephemeral feelings.

Both her husband Wolf and the late artist and critic Robert Berlind have compared her work to "the way a bird sings."

Artist, daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, Emily Mason led a full and rich life. She

was an inspiration to many artists as well as to viewers like myself who connect to the unexpected luminosity of her paintings and the spiritual quality she found in Emily Dickinson's poetry.

We are fortunate to have The Bruce Museum presenting her work for our inspiration.

In this time of Thanksgiving, we thank Executive Director Robert Wolterstorff and all the staff, board, docents, members and supporters of The Bruce Museum who share so much with us. We look forward to a time when we GDAS members can gather again in our museum. We are grateful indeed.

Karen Handal

*Musings on the Decorative Arts*

President Emerita

Greenwich Decorative Arts Society,

November, 2020



Emily Mason, *Where the Meanings Are*, 2016

*Thank you*

~The Bruce Museum Exhibition

“She Sweeps with Many-Colored Brooms”: Paintings and Prints by Emily Mason is supported by a Committee of Honor Chaired by Lily Downing and David Yudain, Mr. and Mrs. William Fitzgerald, Ellen Flanagan, Felicity Kostakis, Gale and Bob Lawrence, Cricket and Jim Lockhart, and Nicole Reynolds.

~The exhibition is organized by Robert Wolterstorff, The Susan E. Lynch Executive Director, Kenneth E. Silver, Adjunct Curator of Art, and 2020-2021 Bruce Museum Resident Fellow H.S. Miller. The exhibition will be accompanied by a virtual lecture series and other special events.’

~ The Brattleboro Museum and Art Center



- ~ The Brattleboro Reformer
- ~ The Brooklyn Rail: A Tribute to Emily Mason
- ~ "That Magical Thing: The Poetry of Emily Mason" Elisa Wouk Almino for the Miles McEnery Gallery

## POSTSCRIPT



*Buffet, 1972*

A happy note for this Thanksgiving celebration:  
Wayne Thiebaud celebrated his 100th birthday

on Sunday, November 15, 2020.

And he is still painting.



*Pies, Pies, Pies, 1961*

The painter of iconic desserts answers why he painted them:

"It's because I hadn't seen anyone paint those things, which I looked upon and found quite interesting and beautiful. If you really look at a lemon merengue pie or a beautiful cake, it's kind of a work of art, and that's what attracted me."



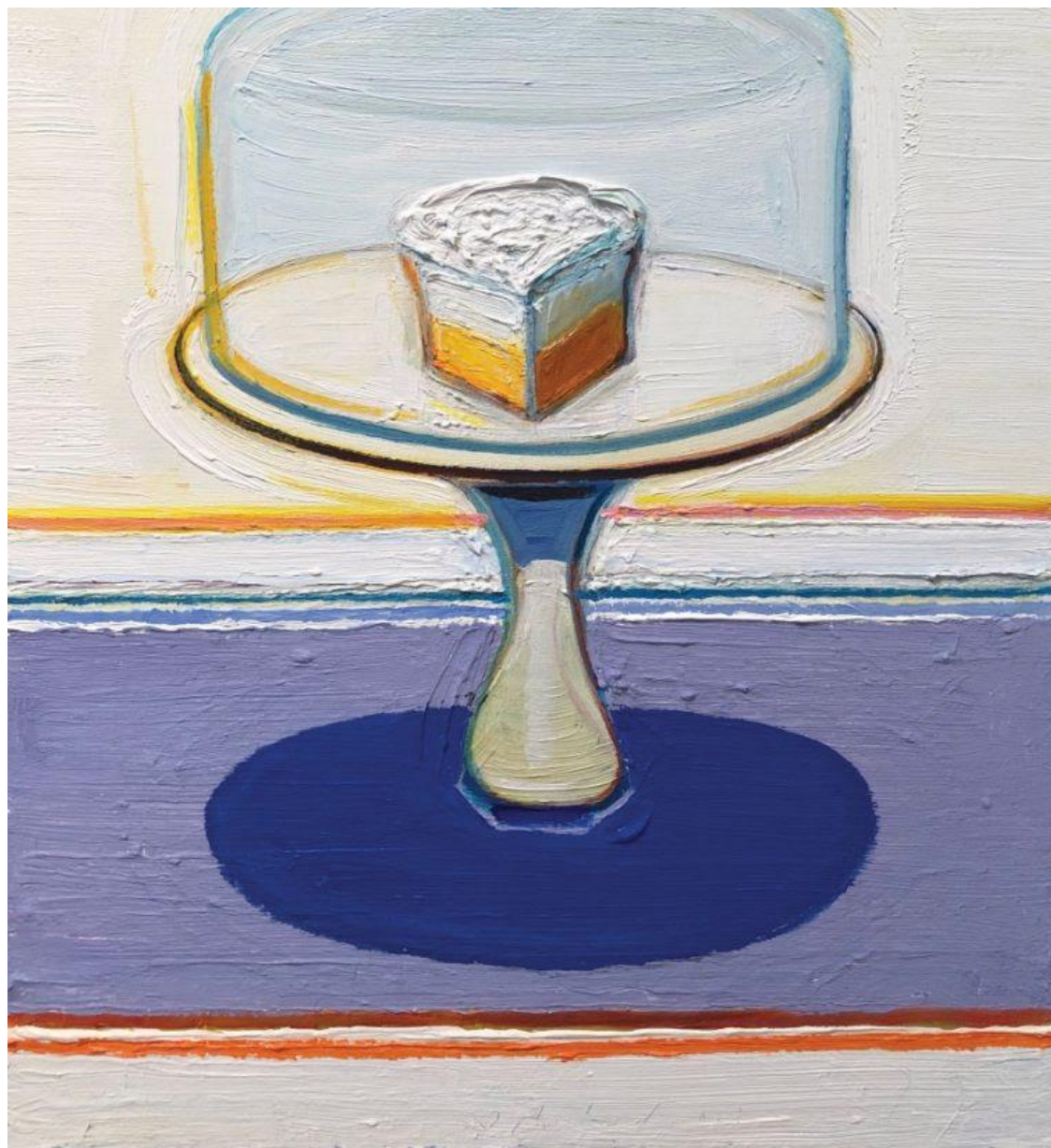


*Boysenberry Slice, 2019*

"Enjoy it when you have it but don't have too much" says Wayne Thiebaud on how to savor dessert while staying healthy at 100 years old.







*Sliced Pie Stand*

For his birthday he had "a slice of lemon meringue pie, which is my favorite. It was a wonderful kind of pie which my wife [Betty Jean Carr, who died in 2015] made."

For advice on longevity he says "stay healthy, have a nice life, read poetry, listen to

good music, and get exercise—which I'm going to do as we speak. I'm heading to the tennis court at the moment."



*Bow Ties, 1990*

Happy Birthday, Wayne  
and Happy Thanksgiving to all!

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