



To Miz-Pax Vobiscum
Hans Hofmann, American, born Germany, 1880-1966
1964, Oil on canvas, 78 x 84 inches
Collection of Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Museum Purchase

About the Artist

Hans Hofmann was born in Germany in 1880 and first studied painting in Munich at the age of eighteen. In 1904, he moved to Paris, where he became friends with Henri Matisse and other Fauve artists. Through them, he became acquainted with Picasso and other artists who were experimenting with Cubism. In 1914, he returned to Munich and opened an art school where he taught the contemporary ideas from Paris. His school became quite famous and many students came from abroad to study there.

In 1923, Hofmann married Maria (Miz) Wolfegg, whom he had known for twenty-three years. Their marriage lasted for the next forty years, until her death in 1963. In 1930 and 1931, Hofmann came to Berkeley, California, to teach during the summers. By 1932, he chose to stay permanently in the United States. In 1937, deciding that he did not wish to return to Europe, he opened his own school in New York.

During his years in New York, Hofmann taught many of the young American artists who would be the important leaders of Abstract Expressionism, including Helen Frankenthaler, Red Grooms, Louise Nevelson, Lee Krasner, and Larry Rivers. Though he was older, Hofmann also became friends with Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko and other young artists. With them he would participate in creating Abstract Expressionism, the first American art movement to be recognized internationally.

About the Art

The title, *To Miz-Pax Vobiscum*, means ‘may peace be with you.’ This work was painted the year after Hofmann’s wife’s death and is the second painting he did commemorating her life. The first was done soon after she died and is more somber, in tones of black and red on white. *To Miz-Pax Vobiscum* is a more joyful celebration of her life. He chose intense colors and powerful shapes to honor “the one who lived with my art and for my art.”

Additional Information

Hans Hofmann was influenced by Matisse and by Cubism, but as he worked he made innovations that were uniquely his own. He combined many different styles during his lifetime. Sometimes, he would use puddles and drips of paint with thickly applied rectangles of paint. Some of his paintings have titles that refer to landscapes and some have musical references. He claimed that his ideal was to form and paint as Schubert sings, and as Beethoven creates a world in sound. Perhaps we can compare this painting to music. As you look at *To Miz-Pax Vobiscum* imagine what music these brilliant colors suggest. Describe the mood of the music and the mood of the painting.

About the Time and Place

Americans were suffering under the Great Depression during the early 1930s. Hans Hofmann moved permanently to the United States in 1932, and in 1941 he became a U.S. citizen. One of the reasons Hofmann had decided to stay in the U.S. was the rise to power of Adolf Hitler in Germany during the years between World War I and World War II. Between 1941 and 1945, the U.S. fought in World War II.

During the early 1950s, television became a part of most American households, and the U.S. participated in another war, the Korean War. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, and the next year Martin Luther King, Jr., began organizing African-American citizens to protest discrimination. In 1957, the Russians launched Sputnik I, the first space satellite, and Americans immediately began to place more emphasis on space research and on the teaching of math and science in schools.

In 1961, Alan B. Shepard, Jr., became the first American to travel in space, and in 1963, about 200,000 American civil rights demonstrators, both black and white, staged a march in Washington, D.C. Demonstrations and marches were held in many other cities also as civil rights became a major national issue. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination in employment, voter registration, and public accommodations. Another Civil Rights Act in 1968 was designed to end discrimination in the sale and renting of housing. At the urging of President Lyndon Johnson, Congress also provided financial aid for the needy as part of his War on Poverty.

In spite of these changes, unrest in America's cities continued. In 1965, the year after Hofmann painted this work, American troops were sent to Vietnam.