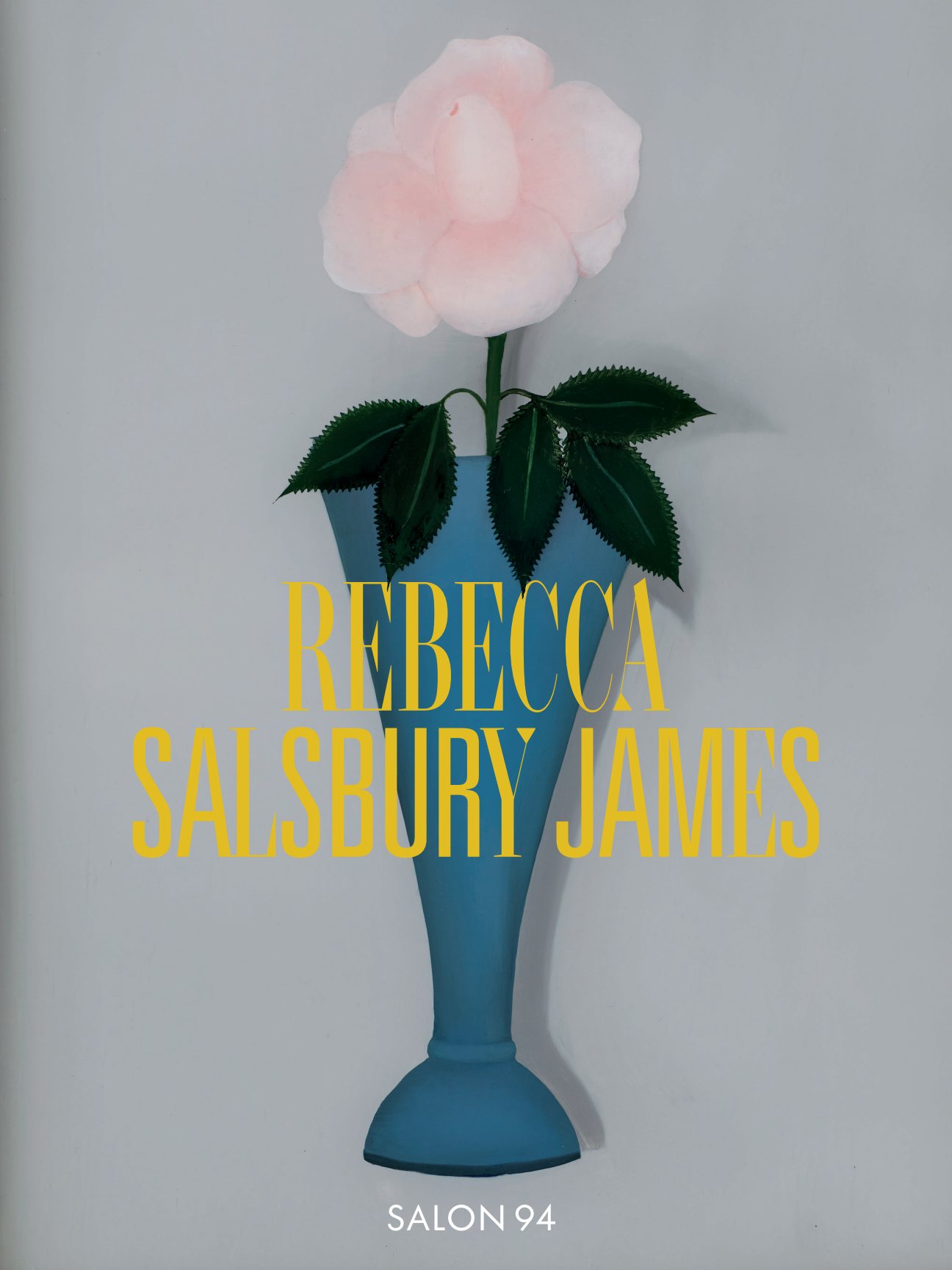
REBECCA
SALSBURY JAMES
SALON 94

Alfred Stieglitz
*Rebecca Strand*, 1922
Palladium contact print
on original Stieglitz mount

Framed Dimensions:
24 ¼ x 20 x ⅓₄ inches
(61.6 x 50.8 x 4.5 cm)
Artwork Dimensions:
9 ½ x 7 ⅜ inches
(24.1 x 19.4 cm)

# BELOVED WEEDS, BOUQUETS, AND A BIRD

"In Taos, New Mexico, where I live, the native people accept what the desert, the mountains and the land impose. The older women stand quietly watching or waiting, shrouded in their black rebozos, for something that may or may not happen—small, quiet, devout figures in a lower landscape of smiting beauty."

—Rebecca Salsbury James, 1954

Discovering the crisp directness and mysterious beauty of Rebecca Salsbury James's paintings on glass, my friend Ann began collecting them on trips to Santa Fe twenty-five years ago. She carefully placed these rare works in her most private spaces—her bedroom, office, and powder room. The works of Salsbury James are mostly scattered and hidden across American museums, so it was in the privacy of Ann's home that we had the opportunity to marvel at these precious and equally intimate images: a Datura, rose, geranium, bowl of fruit, and imagined landscape with bird.

The reverse paintings on glass of Rebecca Salsbury James (1891–1968) are a perfect amalgamation of midcentury Southwestern folk art and its spiritual traditions and a burgeoning New York modernism. A "regional modernist," Salsbury James was a young and central figure in the Stieglitz circle in the 1920s and 30s and, upon leaving New York, became a celebrated figure of the Taos art community in the 1940s and 50s.

Salsbury James insisted that folk traditions be central to a modern approach to art. She had a lifelong fascination with the American vernacular and both collected examples of its craft and brought its ideals of simplicity and sincerity to her own work. Her embrace of painting on glass was thanks, in particular, to the American female craft tradition—an extension and refinement of nineteenth-century tinsel (colored foil) painting and mirror painting. Her revival and adoption of this traditionally female medium, as well as its frequent subjects of flowers and still lifes, was Salsbury James's modernist contribution to a usable past. Through today's lens, a feminist act.

One of her first works on glass, *Song without Words* (c. 1930), seamlessly depicts a simple, blue budvase holding a pink rose. With no evident brushstrokes, it demonstrates the precisionist skill of her contemporaries Charles Sheeler and Charles Demuth. Her photographer's eye is apparent in the shadow framing the vase. She also stands in dialogue with self-taught painters who intentionally chose not to use three-dimensional perspective.

Using no easel, she painted two-handed: glass held in her left hand, brush in her right. In a further sleight of hand, she meticulously painted the images backwards and in mirrored form—the details and accents applied first, the background last. Friend and painter Marsden Hartley marveled at this ability, as he, along with Arthur Dove and Duchamp, had tried to master the technique, but patience had failed them. Salsbury James's intense concentration and skills went unparalleled. With the exception of the colcha embroidery with which she worked late in life, Salsbury James devoted herself exclusively to this glass process.

Her story is as big as her paintings small. She was no stranger to theatre as the daughter of the creator of the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show. She was the best friend of Georgia O'Keeffe, muse to her first husband Paul Strand, model and secretary to Stieglitz, and from the late 1930s to her death, an infamous painter and rancher in Taos, as well as the self-appointed community scribe. As her father's archivist and biographer, she later embodied his swagger (and dressed his part, wearing denim, cigarette in hand) all while having adopted and refined a modest, yet exquisite signature style.

—Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn
April, 2024

Paul Strand
*Dunes Near Abiquiu,*
New Mexico, 1931
© Paul Strand Archive,
Aperture

# PLAYING ON THE EDGE OF MODERNISM: THE LIFE AND ART OF REBECCA SALSBURY STRAND JAMES

Rebecca Salsbury Strand James—or Beck, as she would have it—long played around the edges of modern art in America.[1] She held her own among titans and forged deep and mutually fruitful relationships with other prominent American artists, including acting as model and secretary for Alfred Stieglitz, who showed her work in his gallery; wife and model to Paul Strand; and confidant, colleague, and lifelong friend to Georgia O'Keeffe. She bravely forged an aesthetic through her reverse glass paintings that artistically set her apart from this group, cultivating a style that is unmistakably Beck. In a community of original, groundbreaking, boundary-pushing artists, she set out further off the beaten path by mastering a medium that few dared to wrestle. What is most remarkable, and what made me fall in love with Beck and her paintings, was her unwavering commitment to her own vision. Masterful, delicate, unyielding, Beck was an original who displayed the power and bravery to forge her own path in life and in art, and she did it in style.

During her lifetime she enjoyed some recognition by her peers and community, as well as several institutions, for her remarkable artistic skill and trailblazing persona; and though generally overlooked in comparison to many of her other contemporaries she is enjoying renewed critical attention by a new generation of enthusiasts as an important figure in the history of American art. At a time when women artists often struggled to find public representation, Beck exhibited widely, and to great acclaim. She exhibited at Stieglitz's gallery, An American Place, in 1932 and 1936; Denver Art Museum in 1933; New Mexico Museum of Art in 1934; Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center in 1939; Legion of Honor in San Francisco in 1951; Palace of the Governors (now the New Mexico History Museum) in Santa Fe, and the Harwood Museum of Art in 1952; Santa Barbara Museum of Art in 1951; Martha Jackson Gallery in 1954; Museum of International Folk Art in 1963; and Currier Gallery of Art in 1964.

As a curator who works closely with Beck's artwork, I tend keep an eye out for it, and have come to know intimately the collections of Beck's paintings at the Harwood Museum of Art in Taos, the University of New Mexico Art Museum in Albuquerque, the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum and of course the New Mexico Museum of Art in Santa Fe—but her legacy is represented in museums across the country. On my last visit to the Baltimore Museum of Art I was especially excited to see her work, featured prominently in their modern art galleries, gleaming with that special quality of light that only reverse painting of glass can convey.

Her paintings are in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, Corning Museum of Glass, Tulsa's Philbrook Museum of Art, Atlanta's High Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, Denver Art Museum, Baltimore Museum of Art and the Colby College Museum of Art in Waterville, Maine.

Despite this broad representation, there are precious few of Beck's reverse glass gems accessible today. Scholars estimate that she produced between 175 and 200 reverse glass paintings in her lifetime, and about one hundred of those are currently identified in public or private hands. Part of the reason for this relative scarcity is, of course, the delicate nature of the work. The fact that many of these works may not have survived the decades since their production is not surprising given the fragility of glass. More so, the relative rarity of Beck's work in public circulation comes from her remarkable generosity to institutions and individuals. Many of the paintings in public collections were gifted directly by Beck herself, and many others were specifically dedicated to friends and loved ones, gifted to them as personal mementos. Those not gifted away were purchased by private collectors from one of the many popular exhibitions Beck launched during her lifetime.

As an artist she developed a unique artistic vision and style, and chose a medium that distinguished her from the other modernists in her circle. Her embrace of reverse glass painting, primarily a folk or decorative technique, presented a challenge to established concepts of high art that still privileged oil painting on canvas and sculpture, and challenged boundaries between high art, craft, folk art, and modern art in ways that many in the arts did not begin to seriously challenge until the postmodern moment. Her embrace of folk art aesthetics and techniques, which she started in the 1930s, is deeply forward-thinking when considered through the lens of feminist challenges to media hierarchies coming to a head in the 1960s.

[1] For the remainder of this essay I will refer to Rebecca James as Beck, as this is what she liked to be called in life, as well as to avoid any confusion with Nathan Salsbury, Paul Strand, or William James.

Paul Strand
*Rebecca Salsbury James, New Mexico*, 1930

# BIOGRAPHY

The paradoxes of Rebecca Salsbury Strand James's background formed the roots of her fantastical character. She was an American born in London in 1891; her parents were in England bringing the spectacle of the American West to Europe. Her father, Nathan Salsbury, was the producer and manager of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Of all the members of her family, Beck was closest to her father, evidenced through her insistence on keeping "Salsbury" part of her name over the course of her two marriages. She clung most tightly to this sense of identity rooted in the fantasy of the Wild West.

Beck would cement her relationship with the West in 1933 when she moved to Taos, New Mexico, where she established herself as a cultural grande dame. She quickly immersed herself in the artistic and social scene; her distinctive appearance, with striking, prematurely grey hair, and her outgoing, warm, and often rambunctious nature made her a standout, even within Taos's community of strong characters. She cultivated a "woman of the West" persona and aesthetic, smoking, drinking whisky, and wearing denim. O'Keeffe complained that Beck drank and smoked too much. Beck didn't care. She was as at home at a saloon card table as she was in the studio, and she could hold her own. An active social figure, she placed herself at the center of Taos society, publishing *Allow Me to Present 18 Ladies and Gentlemen and Taos, N.M., 1885–1939* in 1953, serving as a fiscal supporter and occasional curator for the Harwood Museum of Art, supporting many local artists, and maintaining a close friendship with O'Keeffe.

After a 1932 trip to Mexico with Paul Strand, the photographer she married in 1922, during which Strand created his famous Mexico Portfolio, the two quietly divorced, prompting her relocation to New Mexico. There, Beck married the love of her life, rancher Bill James, in 1937. Akin to the story of O'Keeffe in Abiquiu, the life Beck built for herself in Taos allowed her to live on her own terms, away from the artistic and professional pressures of New York and the controlling influence of others over her life. In the 1960s Beck received two crushing blows from which she was never able to recover. In 1967 Bill passed away and she developed crippling rheumatoid arthritis, making it impossible for her to continue to work in the technically demanding and precise media to which she had dedicated her artistic career. On July 8, 1968, she died the way she lived: on her own terms.

# THE STIEGLITZ CIRCLE AND AMERICAN MODERNISM IN NEW YORK AND NEW MEXICO

Though Beck's heart belonged to the West, her upbringing was entirely East Coast. Upon the Salsbury family's return the United States, they settled in New York, where her mother, Rachel, held regular salons. But Beck's wild and free spirit could not be confined to the society salons of New York. She yearned for the new, the experimental and forward-thinking, and for a lifestyle that would challenge the status quo. Fate would provide just the opportunity for her to claim her place among the upper echelons of one of New York's most exciting and novel groups of free thinkers. During a fortuitous evening, photographer Paul Strand met Beck and the two spent the night discussing radical new developments in the arts that were taking place in the city. Strand later asked Beck if she would like meet his mentor, Alfred Stieglitz, a major American gallerist, photographer, and a man who would become one of the most important figures in early American modernism. She saw her opportunity and grabbed it. The two immediately headed straight for Stieglitz's gallery for an evening that would change the direction of Beck's life.[2]

Stieglitz was a champion of American artists whom he promoted though the three galleries he operated in New York between 1905 and 1946. The careers of Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, Rebecca Salsbury James, and Andrew Dasburg are all closely tied to Stieglitz. This group included some of the most forward-thinking artists working in the country at this time. Each strived for new visions of what art could be; many embraced media such as photography—or, in Beck's case, reverse painting on glass—that defied existing conventions of fine art. Among this group of artistic revolutionaries and strong characters, Beck found her intellectual and creative tribe.

Artists in Stieglitz's circle were interested in developing a uniquely American art at a time when American art was still not taken seriously on the international stage. For a man who never set foot in New Mexico, Stieglitz had a profound effect on the arts in the state. For a group of artists dedicated to treading new paths, New Mexico offered the new horizons they were seeking—philosophically, culturally, and geographically. Many of the artists Stieglitz championed looked to the West for an authentically American subject matter, and for Beck, a woman whose family history was rooted in the fantasy of a wild, free, romantic West, it was fate that so many American modern artists came to find inspiration in New Mexico. But Beck found more than that; she found the freedom to recreate herself, and she gave that gift of herself to New Mexico through the legacy of her work and the life she built there.



Beck first visited New Mexico with Strand in 1926; Strand first photographed Pueblo Indian ruins at Mesa Verde in Colorado, and the couple spent time in Taos. Beck joked to Stieglitz that being in New Mexico was like being in an exhibition of paintings by Marsden Hartley, one of the first of the Stieglitz Circle to make work in New Mexico.

In 1929, Beck and O'Keeffe made their first trip to New Mexico together, a joint venture of two iconically free-spirited woman. The two returned to Taos the following summer with Strand and John Marin, another prominent painter of the Stieglitz Circle. Strand wrote to Stieglitz: "The summer has been a grand one so far...a summer of much work. Beck has done some ten nice glass paintings." By this time New Mexico had already become a hub for artists, poets,and writers thanks to Mabel Dodge Luhan, herself a part of Stieglitz's social circle in New York and a fierce advocate for modern art in her own right. Luhan was devoted to pushing American modernism forward. She ran a vibrant salon out of her Taos home, Los Gallos, and was an avid art critic. Luhan spent her life encouraging artists and experienced the best modern art the world had to offer through her sponsorship of artists in Europe, New York, and New Mexico. She knew quality, vision, originality, and talent when she saw it, and she saw it in spades in Beck's work on glass. Regularly publishing her own art criticism, Luhan declared categorically that Beck's paintings on glass were perhaps the most exquisite productions in that technique of any artist. She was not alone in her enthusiastic appreciation of Beck's skill with this medium, with Stieglitz prominently featuring her paintings on glass alongside Strand's photographs at his An American Place gallery as early as the spring of 1932.

[2] At the time Stieglitz was showing at the Anderson Gallery. With the closure of the gallery 291 in 1917, Alfred Stieglitz found himself without a public platform for the first time in thirty years. In 1921 he was invited to show his work at the Park Avenue gallery and auction house Anderson Galleries. The exhibition, a retrospective of 145 photographs created from 1886 to 1921, featured the first public showing of Stieglitz's composite portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe. This led to a series of exhibitions organized by Stieglitz within Anderson Galleries, eventually culminating in the creation of the Intimate Gallery, a small space he rented within the auction house's building. There he showcased the work of a group of American artists, including photographer Paul Strand and painters Charles Demuth, Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, and O'Keeffe. *Anderson Galleries and the Intimate Gallery*. The Alfred Stieglitz Collection. (n.d.). https://archive.artic.edu/stieglitz/anderson-galleries-and-the-intimate-gallery/

[3] Stieglitz opened the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession at 291 Fifth Avenue, New York on November 24, 1905, and closed the gallery in April 1917. Stieglitz borrowed rooms in the Anderson Galleries building in Manhattan for exhibition of his own and O'Keeffe's work in 1924 and in 1925 Stieglitz operated the Intimate Gallery in Manhattan, located in rented space in the Anderson Galleries building at 489 Park Avenue. In June 1929 Stieglitz closed the Intimate Gallery. From 1929–1946 Stieglitz directed An American Place gallery at 509 Madison Avenue, New York.

# REVERSE GLASS PAINTING

After settling in New Mexico in 1933, Beck came into her own as an artist and continued to master reverse painting on glass, an unconventional and technically rigorous technique. Reverse painting on glass is a type of painting in which the artist takes a piece of glass and works on the back of it. The fact that the painting is seen through glass means that colors must be applied to the glass pane in reverse order. A technically demanding process, reverse painting on glass requires details and highlights to be painted first, with foreground carefully laid on top and background added to fill the picture plane. The process is painstaking and requires an extraordinary ability to plan your moves several steps in advance, think strategically, and possess almost surgical dexterity.

Beck was not the only American modernist to incorporate glass painting into her oeuvre, but she was the only one with the tenacity to make it her primary medium. She brought fierce determination and dedication to painting in this challenging method that no other artist was able to truly master, let alone stick with their entire career. In 1916 and 1917, Marsden Hartley made a series of paintings on glass, many of them floral still lifes similar in composition and execution to Beck's. When Hartley heard of Beck's interest in working with this technique, he warned her that his own endeavors with the technique had "nearly killed him." In her fierce, steadfast, and determined way, she mastered what no man could, taming this wild medium and cultivating a distinctive refined style and beauty within her work.

There are conflicting accounts of how Beck came to work with this medium. Some have suggested that Beck became interested in reverse painting on glass when she saw O'Keeffe's use of glass palettes. Seeing the other side of the pane of glass O'Keeffe used to hold and mix her paints, she would have been struck by the luminosity, sharpness, and flatness of the surface and wanted to bring those aesthetic qualities into her own work. Others have suggested that it came from an article that Kandinsky wrote about this particular media, and his own stunning paintings on glass. Another suggestion was that she picked up this style of painting from Hartley, who had experimented with the technique in the 1910s. Beck would have been familiar with this portion of his work, and the composition of both their florals on glass bear a striking resemblance to one another.[4]

The truth of the matter is more radical. Beck came to this technique independent of the influence of other modern artists; her true inspiration came from reverse painting on glass as a vernacular New England folk art medium. She was able to look past the artistic trends popular at the time to find a well of inspiration in artistic traditions that were otherwise overlooked because of their folk and decorative connotations. Beck had the vision to look past high art/low art dichotomies, the determination to insist on the validity and power of all media she found interesting, and the artistic skill to bring a fresh and striking aesthetic to a long-established artistic technique.

This supposition is also supported in part by what she left behind from her own personal collection. Beck was an avid collector of modern art, and donated her collection of work by Hartley, Strand, Marin, Gaston Lachaise, and O'Keeffe, among many others, to the New Mexico Museum of Art in Santa Fe. Part of that bequest included a vernacular New England reverse painting on glass by an unknown artist. Showing a wreath with two birds, this is the sort of thing she would have picked up in New England and kept her all her life. In addition to showing her source of inspiration, its inclusion in her bequest underlines her commitment to finding beauty and aesthetic originality in what others have overlooked, and to breaking through existing fine art/folk art dichotomies.

[4] For more on early speculation into Beck's influences in this medium, see Van Deren Coke, *Taos and Santa Fe: The Artist's Environment, 1882–1942* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press), 1963.

Rebecca Salsbury James
*Song Without Words, c. 1930*
Reverse painted glass

Framed Dimensions:
14 x 11 x ½ inches
(35.6 x 27.9 x 1.3 cm)
Image Dimensions:
11 ⅝ x 8 ⅝ inches
(29.5 x 21.9 cm)
Inscribed on verso

# HER WORK

The artworks in this presentation offer a robust survey of the major themes Beck explored in her work on glass, and offers a fascinating look at the development of her style and technique over time. Yet another contradiction that makes up the dazzling anomaly that is Beck: her paintings possess a sense of quiet precision and meditative serenity that is at odds with her wild and brazen persona. The subject matter ranges from meticulous still life painting to contemplative elemental themes and compositions that serve as a foundation for a new way of seeing.

First and foremost, they are radiant. Beck's choice of working with reverse glass allowed her to demonstrate her painterly precision and bravado, at the same time creating work with a luminosity and brilliance few other media can provide. She brought attention to surface and fine detail to the already striking formal qualities of reverse glass painting. This technique allowed her to flaunt her affinity for simplicity in form and show off her technical skills as a painter by creating uniform surfaces with tight brushstrokes, complementing the smoothness of the glass itself. Under scrutiny, it is often impossible to detect the brushwork beneath the glass on many of Beck's pieces, as if the paint were laid down with complete flat uniformity.

Her reverse glass paintings are a perfect marriage of folk form and modernist aesthetic principles. The clean precision of her brushwork and the pristine simplicity of her composition, as well as her focus on more everyday subject matter, echo Precisionist paintings of the early twentieth century. Given how close Beck was with two of the most important photographers of the time, Strand and Stieglitz, it is not surprising that we see the influence of modern photographic aesthetics at play in her compositions. Her close-cropped, clearly rendered representations of natural forms are at home the photographic work both men produced and exhibited, and which had a resounding impact on modern artists' ways of looking at the world around them. The almost mechanical uniformity and completely flat surfaces of Beck's paintings also recall photographic aesthetics.

*Song Without Words* (c. 1930) is a striking example of the elegant simplicity characteristic of Beck's early work on glass. Still finding her footing with this challenging medium, the composition remains pared down and static. Made the year of her first visit to New Mexico, the subject is likely one of the artificial flowers commonly used as decoration in small chapels and churches across the northern part of the state. Both Hartley and O'Keeffe were drawn to painting these same artificial flowers in their own works. The shadow that closely outlines the edge of the vase adds dimension to the composition while also calling attention to the shallowness of the space Beck is creating.

Shells were a popular theme for Beck, with *Shells on the Sand* (1935) and *Seashells on the Sands* (c. 1935) as excellent examples. The tight cropping of the picture frame, pulling the shells up the surface and monumentalizing the otherwise modest natural forms, is a hallmark of modernist compositions. This visual trope has roots in photographic ways of seeing made popular through the artwork of Stieglitz and Strand. The heroicizing close look at an otherwise often overlooked element of nature was an aesthetic approach Beck shared with O'Keeffe, who made similar compositions of shells. What sets Beck's work apart is that while O'Keeffe often painted the world she saw literally—a shell is a shell, not a metaphor—Beck was open to more poetic interpretations of her work, with a shell standing in for the elements of water and all that we conceptually tie to it. She made several series, including her work with shells, inspired by the major elements: earth, air, fire, and in this case, water.

*Pansy Bouquet* (1939) and *Datura* (1940) show the remarkable technical strides Beck made with reverse glass painting following her earlier experiments with the medium. Notably more dynamic, textured, and intricate than her earlier *Song Without Words*, these show a level of bravado rare in reverse painting on glass. *Pansy Bouquet* more closely recalls earlier centralized floral still life work, arranged in vases against a shallow or in this case empty backdrop. The composition recalls Hartley's floral still life painting on glass, but Beck brought a level of mastery and finesse to the texture and color of her flower petals that no other modernist painter was able to achieve on glass. The Datura is a common flower that grows wild in New Mexico. O'Keeffe made these flowers famous with her monumental depictions of them. Here, Beck seems more interested in showing the plant as it grows in nature, a departure from the tidy, smaller still life arrangements of her earlier floral work.

*Summer Fruits* (1941) most strikingly recalls the vernacular New England glass paintings that inspired Beck to pursue this technique. Many of the decorative glass paintings that would have been popular as early-twentieth-century domestic decoration depicted similar still life arrangements, though Beck brings a level of technical elegance to the nuanced surface texture of her fruits and leaves that elevates this painting to the realm of fine art. Suspended, isolated in an empty space, the individual fruits and flowers push to the surface, and are set apart in a way that allows for aesthetic contemplation of Beck's skill with articulating the surfaces of flowers, bananas, and leaves, that recalls the visual delight of Dutch still life painters of centuries before.

The poetic and psychological underpinnings of Beck's paintings are often revealed through her titles. *Peace #3* is a stunning example of her late work, where Beck began to include complex environmental backgrounds into her compositions. The bird, resting by the seaside, can be interpreted as part of an elemental theme that runs through much of her later work. The bird, and the wind that blows the shrubbery to the left of the scene, suggest the element of air, with the inclusion of the ocean bringing in the elemental force of water.

# REBECCA SALSBURY JAMES: CHRONOLOGY

**1891**

**Winter**
Rebecca "Beck" Salsbury born December 21 in London, England. Beck's father, Nathan "Nate" Salsbury, founded Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, which was touring Europe at the time.

**1892**

**1892**
The Salsbury family moves to New York City 's Upper West Side and spends holidays and summers in Long Beach, New Jersey.

**1902**

**Winter**
Nate Salsbury dies, age 56. His death profoundly impacts Beck.

**1905**

**Fall**
Attends Ethical Cultural School, where she writes poems and plays, and also joins the basketball team.

**1911**

**Spring**
Graduates from ECS and enrolls in ECS Teacher's College.

**1915**

**Spring**
Graduates ECS's Teacher's College as Valedictorian. She is hired as a kindergarten teacher, and writes and illustrates two children's books.

**1919**

**1919 – 1920**
Paul Strand meets Beck during a party given by collector Jacob Dewald in New York City. Later, she meets Alfred Stieglitz, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Marsden Hartley. She and Strand spend the summer at Stieglitz's family home on Lake George, New York with O'Keeffe.

**1921**

**Summer**
Beck takes up pastel drawing and painting. She models for Stieglitz's portrait photography. Additionally, she works for Stieglitz as a secretary and archivist.

**1922**

**1922**
Marries Strand on January 8th. That summer, the couple is arrested while swimming nude in a lake. Stieglitz pays for their release.

**1923**

**1923 – 1927**
Makes regular trips with Strand to the Southwest, including Taos, New Mexico and Denver, Colorado. Visits Isabel and Gaston Lachaise in Georgetown, Maine, where she discovers reverse painting on glass and gives one to Strand's parents. She begins collecting folk art.

**1928**

**Fall / Winter**
A selection of her pastel drawings is exhibited at the Opportunity Gallery, New York.

**1929**

**Spring / Summer**
Spends several months in Taos with O'Keeffe. Beck teaches O'Keeffe how to drive and ride horses. She completes her first reverse paintings on glass.

# REBECCA SALSBURY JAMES: CHRONOLOGY

**1932**

**Spring**
Beck first exhibits her reverse paintings on glass at Stieglitz's final gallery, An American Place, New York. Her work is well received by critics and visitors.

**1933**

**Winter**
Divorces Strand and moves to Taos permanently. Has a one-person show at the Denver Art Museum.

**1934**

**Summer**
Has a solo exhibition at the New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe.

**1937**

**Spring**
Marries William "Bill" James. The couple buys a home together, which they named "Casa Feliz."

**1941**

**Spring**
Introduced to Spanish Southwestern art and colcha embroidery by Jesusita Perrault. Begins depicting landscapes, religious symbols, and narrative scenes in her work.

**1942**

**1942 – 1952**
Continues reverse painting on glass. Exhibits work at the Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, California and Santa Barbara Art Museum.

**1953**

**1953**
Writes and publishes biographies of her friends and acquaintances, including Jesuita Perrault, Mabel Travis, and Bing Abott, titled *Allow Me to Present 18 Ladies and Gentlemen and Taos, N.M., 1885–1939.*

**1954**

**Summer**
Final exhibition of reverse paintings on glass at Martha Jackson Gallery, New York. Jackson sold 9 works of the 35 exhibited.

**1955**

**1955**
Due to arthritis, Beck stops reverse painting on glass and exclusively creates colcha stitch embroideries.

**1967**

**Summer**
James dies of a heart attack at the age of 68. This tragic loss deeply impacts Beck.

**1968**

**Summer**
Broken-hearted at the age of 77, Beck commits suicide on July 8th in Taos.

Rebecca Salsbury James
*Shells on the Sand*, 1935
Reverse painted glass

Framed Dimensions:
12 ¼ x 15 ¼ x ⅞ inches
(31.1 x 38.7 x 2.2 cm)
Artwork Dimensions:
9 x 12 inches
(22.9 x 30.5 cm)
Titled and signed on verso

Rebecca Salsbury James
*Seashells on the Sand*, c. 1935
Reverse painted glass

Framed Dimensions:
12 ¼ x 15 ¼ x ⅞ inches
(31.1 x 38.7 x 2.2 cm)
Artwork Dimensions:
9 x 12 inches
(22.9 x 30.5 cm)
Inscribed on verso

(Previous page left)
Rebecca Salsbury James
*Pansy Bouquet*, 1939
Reverse painted glass

Framed Dimensions:
28 3/8 x 22 5/8 x 1 inches
(72.1 x 57.5 x 2.5 cm)
Artwork Dimensions:
24 1/2 x 18 3/4 inches
(62.2 x 47.6 cm)

(Previous page right)
Rebecca Salsbury James
*Taos Geranium and Taos Blue Sky*, 1936
Reverse oil on glass

Framed Dimensions:
19 5/8 x 16 3/4 x 1 1/8 inches
(49.8 x 42.5 x 2.9 cm)
Artwork Dimensions:
14 3/4 x 11 3/4 inches
(37.5 x 29.8 cm)

Rebecca Salsbury James
*Datura*, 1940
Reverse oil on glass

Dimensions:
23 3/4 x 18 5/8 inches
(60.3 x 47.3 cm)



Rebecca Salsbury James
*Summer Fruits*, 1941
Reverse painted oil on glass

Framed Dimensions:
17 ⅛ x 21 inches
(43.5 x 53.3 cm)
Artwork Dimensions:
16 x 20 inches
(40.6 x 50.8 cm)
Signed, titled, dated and
inscribed on verso

Rebecca Salsbury James
*Peace #3*, 1951
Reverse painted glass

Framed Dimensions:
18 ½ x 22 ½ x 1 ¼ inches
(47 x 57.2 x 3.2 cm)
Artwork Dimensions:
15 ½ x 19 ½ inches
(39.4 x 49.5 cm)
Titled and signed on verso

# REBECCA SALSBURY JAMES INDEX

Rebecca Salsbury James
*Song Without Words*, c. 1930
Reverse painted glass

Framed Dimensions:
14 x 11 x ½ inches
(35.6 x 27.9 x 1.3 cm)
Artwork Dimensions:
11 ⅝ x 8 ⅝ inches
(29.5 x 21.9 cm)
Inscribed on verso

Rebecca Salsbury James
*Shells on the Sand*, 1935
Reverse painted glass

Framed Dimensions:
12 ¼ x 15 ¼ x ⅞ inches
(31.1 x 38.7 x 2.2 cm)
Artwork Dimensions:
9 x 12 inches
(22.9 x 30.5 cm)
Titled and signed on verso

Rebecca Salsbury James
*Pansy Bouquet*, 1939
Reverse painted glass

Framed Dimensions:
28 ⅜ x 22 ⅝ x 1 inches
(72.1 x 57.5 x 2.5 cm)
Artwork Dimensions:
24 ½ x 18 ¾ inches
(62.2 x 47.6 cm)

Rebecca Salsbury James
*Datura*, 1940
Reverse oil on glass

Dimensions:
23 ¾ x 18 ⅝ inches
(60.3 x 47.3 cm)



Rebecca Salsbury James
*Seashells on the Sand*, c. 1935
Reverse painted glass

Framed Dimensions:
12 ¼ x 15 ¼ x ⅞ inches
(31.1 x 38.7 x 2.2 cm)
Artwork Dimensions:
9 x 12 inches
(22.9 x 30.5 cm)
Inscribed on verso

Rebecca
Salsbury James
*Taos Geranium and Taos Blue Sky*, 1936
Reverse oil on glass

Framed Dimensions:
19 ⅝ x 16 ¾ x 1 ⅛ inches
(49.8 x 42.5 x 2.9 cm)
Artwork Dimensions:
14 ¾ x 11 ¾ inches
(37.5 x 29.8 cm)

Rebecca Salsbury James
*Summer Fruits*, 1941
Reverse painted oil on glass

Framed Dimensions:
17 ⅛ x 21 inches
(43.5 x 53.3 cm)
Artwork Dimensions:
16 x 20 inches
(40.6 x 50.8 cm)
Signed, titled, dated and inscribed on verso

Rebecca Salsbury James
*Peace #3*, 1951
Reverse painted glass

Framed Dimensions:
18 ½ x 22 ½ x 1 ¼ inches
(47 x 57.2 x 3.2 cm)
Artwork Dimensions:
15 ½ x 19 ½ inches
(39.4 x 49.5 cm)
Titled and signed on verso

# DAVID WISEMAN

Though decades apart, David Wiseman and Rebecca Salsbury James share a passion for nature and a commitment to American craft and beauty. A visit to David's sprawling LA Elysian Park workshop is to go back in time with spacious areas devoted to a trade: porcelain slip-casting, mold making, enamel laying, bronze pouring, etc. Behind glowing kilns and foundry furnaces stands a warehouse room stacked high with wax and plaster molds of plant species —their flowers, leaves and branches, succulents, mushrooms, critters and creatures —real and imagined, cast and hand-sculpted. Lunch breaks among artisans are taken together on a long picnic table under sycamore trees and a carefully curated garden of rare but local species; his garden doubling as his "nature laboratory."

For the past four years, he has imagined the seasons through the Chinese myth of the Monkey King and its fantastical characters of the Flower Fruit Mountain. From this fable, with its whimsical foliage, moons, rivers, and creatures, Wiseman has carved and cast new sets of resin + bronze chairs and stools, marble + bronze tables, and bronze + glass + porcelain + lacquer + crystal pendants and mirrors—introduced for the first time at TEFAF New York. His fresh combinations of materials and new patterns are both elaborate and highly refined. After years of working together on commissions, it is our great pleasure and delight to present Wiseman's newest series to our art and design communities.

—Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn

David Wiseman (b. 1981) is a leading American designer among his generation. His work draws inspiration from his fascination with the natural world, global decorative arts traditions, and a reverence for honoring timeless craft techniques. Far from reproducing historic design, however, he breathes new life into interiors and environments. Porcelain cherry blossom ceilings, bronze patterned filigree folding screens, and polished marble and terrazzo inlay furniture affirm and perpetuate the relevance ornament and beauty can play in contemporary architecture and life.

Wiseman's sculpture, furniture, and site-specific installations derive from a deep, personal engagement with nature, its rhythms, and he is driven by creating works that have enduring quality and permanence—an attitude that is increasingly rare. He occupies a unique position in the world of contemporary design, bringing together fabrication, technique, studio practice, and craft at the highest levels. Wiseman's works are primarily unique objects made in his studio in Los Angeles, CA.

Wiseman has made site-specific installations for public institutions, international brands, and private collections. His work is included in the permanent collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Rhode Island School of Design Museum, and the Corning Museum of Glass.

# DAVID WISEMAN
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David Wiseman
*Turkey Tail Stool*, 2024
Bronze
17 x 11 x 10 inches
43.2 x 27.9 x 25.4 cm
(DW 37)

David Wiseman
*Supernova Stool*, 2024
Bronze and resin
18 ½ x 14 x 14 inches
47 x 35.6 x 35.6 cm
(DW 32)

David Wiseman
*Arrowhead Asanoha Pendant*, 2023
Bronze
11 ¾ x 5 inches
29.8 x 12.7 cm
(DW 34)

David Wiseman
*Chair - Fall*, 2023
Bronze
35 x 14 ½ x 16 inches
88.9 x 36.8 x 40.6 cm
Edition 1 of 12 plus 4 APs
(DW 29)

David Wiseman
*La Lechusita*, 2023
Bronze and porcelain
26 x 16 x 8 ½ inches
66 x 40.6 x 21.6 cm
Edition 5 of 24 plus 4 APs
(DW 24)



# CREDITS

ESSAY BY:
CHRISTIAN
WAGUESPACK

Christian Waguespack is Head of Curatorial Affairs at the New Mexico Museum of Art, where he has served as Curator of 20th Century Art since 2017. He has organized over a dozen exhibitions and conducts research on the Museum's collection focusing on modern art and art of the American Southwest; he has lectured widely on various aspects of American Modernism and Southwest art history across the country. His exhibitions at the New Mexico Museum of Art have included broad surveys of southwestern art history, modern and contemporary American art, and deep dives into the careers of historic artists and art groups from the area, bringing fresh and timely new looks at the regional art of the last century, as well as coordinating the travel of world class exhibitions from institutions including the British Museum and the National Academy of Design in New York to Santa Fe.

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Reverse painted glass

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Palladium contact print
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# DAVID WISEMAN + REBECCA SALSBURY JAMES

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