

The New York Times

Louisa Chase, Painter of Geometric Shapes and Body Parts, Dies at 65

By WILLIAM GRIMES_MAY 16, 2016



Louisa Chase in 1983. Credit Peter Bellamy

Louisa Chase, whose turbulent canvases, with their landscape-derived images and ghostly torsos and hands, made her one of the brightest young stars in the much-heralded resurgence of painting in the 1980s, died on May 8 at her home in East Hampton, N.Y. She was 65.

The cause was cancer, said her brother, Ben.

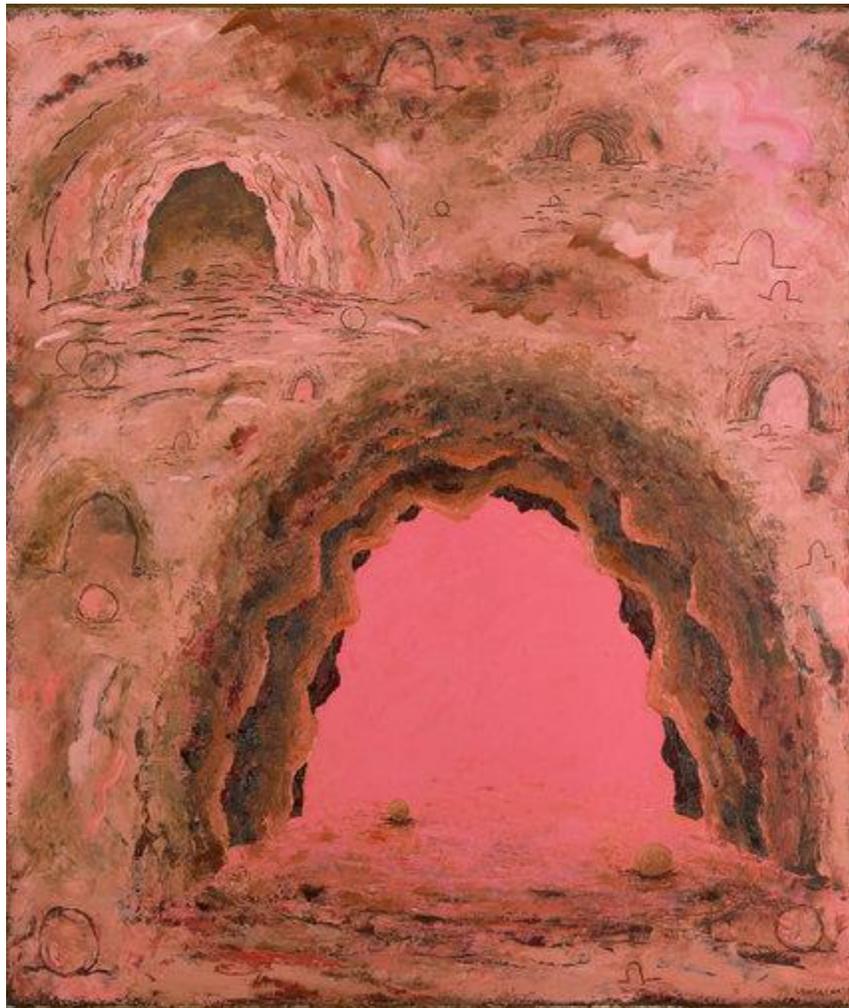
Ms. Chase arrived in New York in the mid-1970s, a pregnant moment when minimalism and conceptual art were loosening their grip, allowing new painters to come to the fore, many of them grouped in the mini-movement known as New Image Painting.

Her work was distinctive: cartoonishly rendered hands and torsos, floating on expanses of candy colors. In one series, she cast Christian saints, represented as headless figures, adrift on a sea of scattered geometric forms.

Critics and curators took note, recognizing affinities with the New Image style of visually arresting emblems superimposed on abstract, brushy grounds. Ms. Chase was given a solo show at Artists Space in 1975, and in 1979 her painting “Tears,

Ocean II” was included in the manifesto-like exhibition “American Painting: The Eighties” at New York University, organized by the critic Barbara Rose.

Her approach to landscape soon took on apocalyptic overtones. In her 1982 painting “Crevice,” slabs of upthrust rock tumbled against one another, with a pair of disembodied feet and ankles adding a ghostly human presence. The ragged archway of “Pink Cave,” weirdly repeated in smaller, mutated versions across the canvas, expressed sex as both promise and threat.



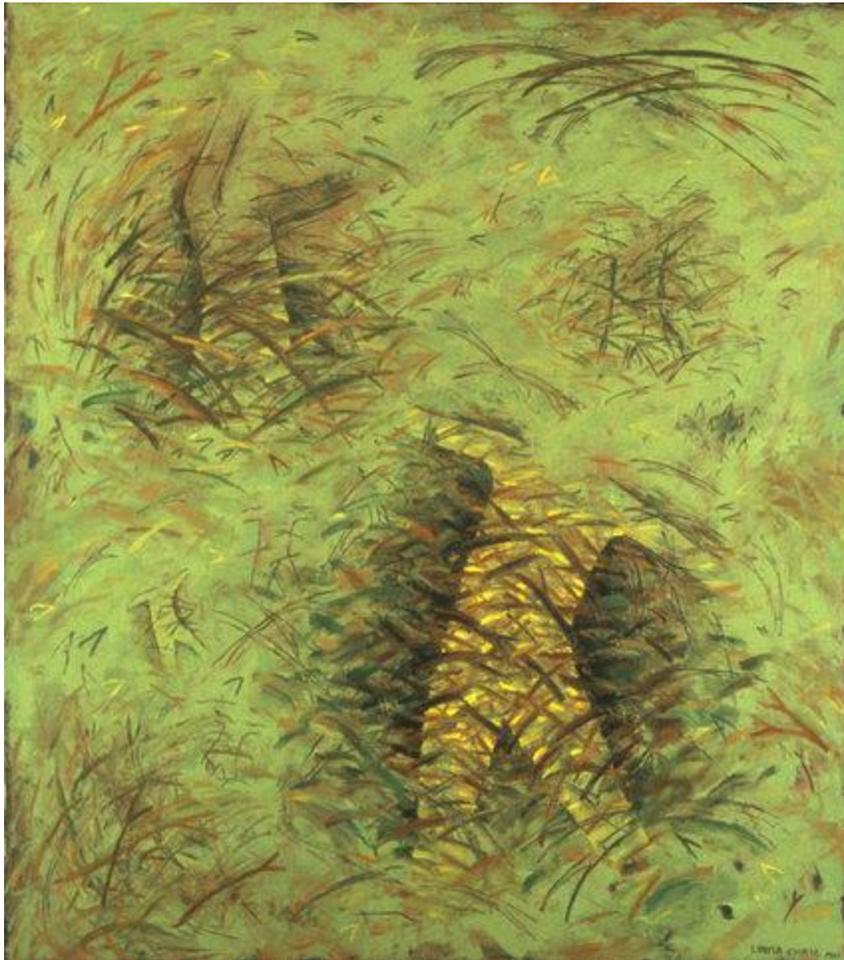
“Pink Cave” Credit Estate of Louisa Chase, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

“The forces closest to landscape are the closest to the internal forces that I am trying to understand,” Ms. Chase wrote in the catalog for “The American Landscape: Recent Developments,” a 1981 show at the Whitney Museum’s branch in Stamford, Conn. “The location is inside.”

In the mid-1980s, Ms. Chase began producing gestural abstract work in which the landscape elements and body parts of earlier paintings became enmeshed in

thickets of color and skeins of calligraphic lines. In a catalog interview for her 1991 show at Brooke Alexander, she called this “a ball of yarn sense of narration that went in and out of space.”

The work, which showed affinities with the swaggering style of Neo-Expressionism, won her new admirers. In 1984, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston organized a traveling exhibition, “New Currents: Louisa Chase.” The same year, two of her paintings, “Woods” and “Fire,” were included in the Venice Biennale.



“Woods” Credit Louisa Chase, New Museum, New York

Louisa Lizbeth Chase was born on March 18, 1951, in Panama City, Panama, where her father, Benjamin, a West Point graduate and Army major, was stationed. Her mother, the former Wilda Stengel, was a homemaker.

Louisa grew up in Mount Gretna, Pa., and attended George School, a Quaker institution in Bucks County, before enrolling in Syracuse University with the intention of studying classics. She found her way to art and earned a degree in printmaking in 1973.