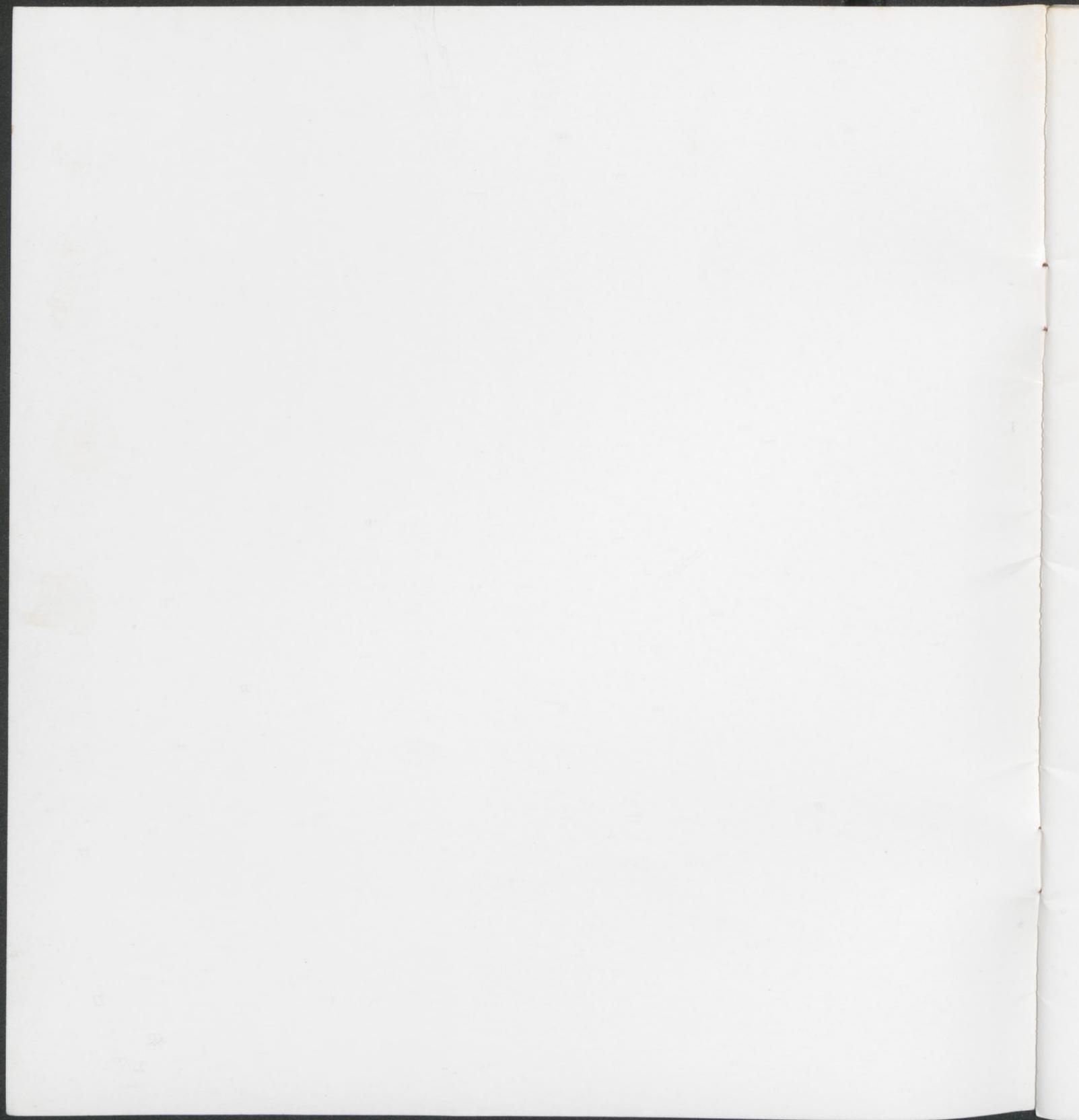


RECENT ABSTRACT ART BY MASTERS OF THE SIXTIES



Recent Abstract Art By Masters of the Sixties

Selected from Meredith Long & Company, Houston.

J. Earl Rudder Exhibit Hall
Texas A&M University
September 24-November 12, 1981

Exhibition organized by
Texas A&M University Art Exhibits

Recent Abstract Art
By Masters of the Sixties

Selected from Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

Exhibition organized by
Texas A&M University Art Museum
November 17, 1981
Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas

Cover: DAN CHRISTENSEN, *Ambar*, 1981, acrylic on canvas, 66"x84½"

INTRODUCTION

Enjoying "Recent Abstract Art" probably will be a challenge to most of the Texas A&M community. This exhibition, which captures a specific segment of American art history between 1960 and 1981, features recent works by masters of Post-Painterly Abstraction of the 1960's, and also includes works by younger artists who continue to develop new ideas in painting. The challenge in enjoying this exhibition comes from the fact that the objects in the exhibition are not attractive *per se*; that is, they are absolutely abstract, containing no recognizable figures, and the imagery that does exist in the paintings conveys no readily recognizable meaning. These reasons which would seem to render the objects in this exhibition unattractive are the very reasons which give these objects significance. To understand their significance, it is first necessary to have some sort of historical perspective.

We will not start with Cezanne, a major influence on virtually all 20th Century painting. We will, instead, begin with the recent past, American Abstract Expressionism, also known as The New York School. In 1947, Jackson Pollock made a breakthrough in abstract painting, developing his mature "all-over" painting style. In this manner of painting, Pollock employed unconscious control of the paint and brush. This "action painting" was spontaneous, impulsive, and most suited for the expressive needs of Pollock and other members of the Abstract Expressionists like Willem de Kooning, Hans Hoffman, and Franz Kline. To these artists the unconscious control of the action painting served to capture the inner, psychological being or human essence and produced images which, though abstract, capture the human emotion and struggle for existence.

A more metaphysical aspect of the New York School could be found in the work of Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Clyfford Still, and Ad Reinhard. Their painting was a premeditated work executed in large fields of color that tended to be fuzzy-edged or overlapping. These austere paintings were filled with profound metaphysical significance and with a sense of the human search for sublime confrontation. In short the painters of the New York School, whether painterly and spontaneous or cool and premeditated, were very much involved in portraying human emotion and interpretation of the sublime. To accomplish these goals, they readily used gesture, action, color, texture, and form.

In the late 1950's and early 1960's, many young artists began to see Abstract Expressionism more as a fashion than as an aesthetic ideal. Disenchanted with the tyranny they felt in the emphasis of the individual brush gesture, many turned to new directions. A large number turned to what became known as Pop (popular) Art. Artists like Robert Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol, and James Rosenquist took to painting images of standardized,

mass-produced goods. The slick, usually oversized, almost commercial paintings lent new significance to the everyday subject matter, e.g., Andy Warhol's painting, *One Hundred Campbell's Soup Cans*. Op Art and optical illusionism in painting, as in the work of Victor Vasarely, also came into prominence with the decline of Abstract Expressionism.

Unlike Pop Art and Op Art, which completely rejected Abstract Expressionism, the painting in "Recent Abstract Art" is a continuation of Abstract Expressionism. The nature of the featured works in this exhibition is most clearly articulated by American art critic Clement Greenberg (who did more to promote this art form than any other critic):

As far as style is concerned, the reaction presented here is largely against the mannered drawing and the mannered design of Painterly Abstraction [the Abstract Expressionists], but above all against the last. By contrast with the interweaving of light and dark gradation in the typical Abstract Expressionist picture, all the artists in this show move towards a physical openness of design, or towards linear clarity, or towards both. They continue, in this respect, a tendency that began well inside Painterly Abstraction itself, in the work of artists like Still, Newman, Rothko, Motherwell, Gottlieb...¹

The above quote came from the catalogue of Post-Painterly Abstraction, an exhibition organized by Clement Greenberg for the Los Angeles County Museum in 1964 (Pop Art still dominated the American scene at this time.). This exhibition featured thirty-one artists, the most well known of which were Ellsworth Kelly, Kenneth Noland, and Jules Olitski (all featured in our exhibition). The exhibition entitled "Systemic Painting," organized for the Guggenheim by Lawrence Alloway in 1966, featured several artists including Larry Zox, Kenneth Noland, and Ellsworth Kelly. Each of the names given to the painting by these artists had specific variations in meaning; the common factor in all was that painting had been reduced to an intellectual exercise in color and structure.

Hard-edge painting, as it is represented in this exhibition by Kenneth Noland, Robert Goodnough, and Ellsworth Kelly, has its origins in the 1920s and 1930s in the work of the *Bauhaus* painters such as Josef Albers and his series entitled *Homage to the Square*. The difference between the hard-edge painters in "Recent Abstract Art" and the older geometric tradition of the *Bauhaus* is the search for total unity in which there is no foreground or background. Color-field painters like Jules Olitski or Larry Zox and the 1960s Dan Christensen (not represented in this exhibition) reflect the influence of the work of Rothko and Newman, but these post-painterly works have none of the metaphysical significance of the New York School work. During the post-painterly period, painters sought only "physical openness" and the "linear clarity" of flat color. Unlike the emotionally packed painting of the Abstract Expressionists, this

work, according to art historian, Abraham Davidson, "suggests nothing beyond itself, requires no interpretation, encourages no extension of meaning or reading into on the part of the viewer."² In the post-painterly work of the 1960's, there is no longer any sense of foreground or background because the paint is usually stamped onto or stained into an unprimed canvas. In this exhibition, this can readily be seen in the work of Noland, Olitski, and Zox. This art, for the viewer, provides a very trying experience because it is difficult to find meaning in an object intended to have none. American art critic, Barbara Rose comments,

For the spectator, this is often all very bewildering. In the face of so much nothing, he is still experiencing something, and usually a rather unhappy something at that. I have often thought one had a sense of loss looking at these blank, empty things, so anxious to cloak their art identity that they were masquerading as objects. Perhaps, what one senses is that, as opposed to the florid baroque fullness of the *agust*-ridden older generation, the hollow, barrenness of the void has a certain poignant, if strangled, expressiveness.³

Even if there is no readily perceived attractiveness in this post-painterly work, there might be some significance to an aesthetic sentiment that has to deny all expression to say something.

By 1970, Post-Painterly Abstraction had exhausted the possibilities of minimal painting, and painterly surfaces began to appear in the work of younger artists. Although these paintings were still basically pure fields of color, the heavily modeled surface reflected the resurgent interest in a more painterly approach. Examples in the exhibition of this more painterly approach can be seen in the works of Stanley Boxer and the 1970s Dan Christensen.

The recent works by artists Darryl Hughto, Dan Christensen, and Donald Localio, included in this exhibition, clearly reflect the feeling that the painterly aesthetic has returned to painting in the 1980s. As one views the work of Christensen and especially Localio, it is clear that these paintings offer much more to the viewer than an exercise in intellectually contrived color and surface. Localio's work reflects the energy of a personal, deep-felt, emotion without having to imitate the painting of Willem de Kooning, under whom he has studied. Christensen's more metaphysical work, such as *Ambar*, employs a radiating Rothko-like color field onto which have been painted bold, painterly lines at visual tension with glowing planes and orbs of color.

As a means of providing a greater perspective, this exhibition also includes works by Robert Motherwell, Dorothy Hood, and Anthony Caro. The painting of Motherwell and Hood from the 1960s until today has continued to show the influences of the Abstract Expressionists, of which group Motherwell was a member. These works depict the need of the artist to convey mystical, coolly premeditated meaning in their work. The sculpture by Caro pro-

vides a three dimensional view of the aesthetic conveyed by this exhibition.

The challenge of "Recent Abstract Art" is thus to attempt to understand what has happened in art since 1960, rather than to seek pleasure of beauty from images we can recognize.

Joe R. Arredondo, Jr.
Coordinator of University Art Exhibits
Texas A&M University

Notes

1. Clement Greenberg, "Post-Painterly Abstraction," (exhibition catalogue), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1964.
2. Abraham A. Davidson, *The Story of American Painting*, New York City, Galahad Books, 1979, p. 153.
3. Barbara Rose, "ABC Art," *Art in America*, 53 (Oct.-Nov. 1965), 63.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

STANLEY BOXER

Harriedsnowplumbmistingsilence, 1980
oil on linen
82x90 inches

Pinkingseveredkeepinlist, 1980
oil on linen
80x30 inches

ANTHONY CARO

Table Piece CCVII, 1974
rusted steel
79x10x24 inches

Veduggio, 1974
rusted steel
115x24x17 inches

DAN CHRISTENSEN

Ambar, 1981
acrylic on canvas
66x84½ inches

Tormax, 1978
acrylic on canvas
69x42½ inches

Mexico, 1975
acrylic on canvas
91x80 inches

ROBERT GOODNOUGH

Gray, Gray-Green, 1976
acrylic on canvas
84x34 inches

One, Two, Three, 1968
serigraph print 59/150
21½x29½ inches

DOROTHY HOOD

Porthole Personage, 1980
oil on canvas
90x70 inches

Siyafa, 1974
oil on canvas
80x100 inches

DARRYL HUGHTO

Drawing Water, 1979
acrylic on canvas
69x45 inches

Jack in the Pulpit, 1979
acrylic on canvas
83x57 inches

Blue Bayou, 1978
acrylic on canvas
82x36 inches

ELLSWORTH KELLY

Images II, 1978
paper works
46½x32½ inches

Images IX, 1978
paper works
46½x32½ inches

DONALD LOCALIO

A Fall of Grace, 1981
oil on canvas
64½x50 inches

Untitled, 1981
acrylic on paper
30x36 inches

ROBERT MOTHERWELL

Rite of Passage III, 1981
lithograph 23/98
24¾x34 inches

Silver Music, 1976
Collage
72x24 inches

KENNETH NOLAND

Circle II Series, 1978
paper works
32½x21½ inches

Curious Course, 1975
acrylic on canvas
70x70 inches

Half Long, 1976
acrylic on canvas
58x120 inches

JULES OLITSKI

Contemplations III, 1980
acrylic on canvas
50½x91 inches

Natasha Quest IV, 1980
acrylic on canvas
21x24 inches

LARRY ZOZ

Red Nail, 1980
acrylic on canvas
42½x86 inches

Red Swing, 1980
acrylic on canvas
81½x36 inches

Stanley Boxer is one of those artists, who, having painted through the emotionally bereft period of hard-edge painting, emphasizing color and structure, has emerged in the 1980s with a successful, personal, more painterly technique.

Born in New York City, where he continues to reside and work, Boxer studied at Brooklyn College and the Art Students League. In the late 1960s, Boxer used a collage technique placing cloth and oil paint on a raw canvas.

Today, Boxer can, in effect, be called an easel painter. In a typical Boxer exhibition even the largest paintings in the show are of a modest size. The overwhelmingly large canvases so prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s are not seen in his exhibitions.

Even though Boxer's work is abstract, his textured forms and colors are drawn from themes in nature. His fields of color reflect a painterly touch, not in the sense of having returned to the ways of the Abstract Expressionists, but in a manner which implies that Boxer is personally and sensitively involved with the media and image produced (as opposed to the aloof relationships of many of the hard-edge painters to their media).

Boxer's painting returns to art the sense that human responsibility is a necessary ingredient for the production of a lasting work.

STANLEY BOXER **(born 1926)**

STANLEY BOXER
Pinkingseveredkeepinlist, 1980
oil on linen
80x30 inches



Anthony Caro is, today, probably the leading living sculptor employing ready made steel parts such as sheet metal and I-Beams. His influence is second only to that of David Smith who elevated welded sculpture to a fine art in the 1940s.

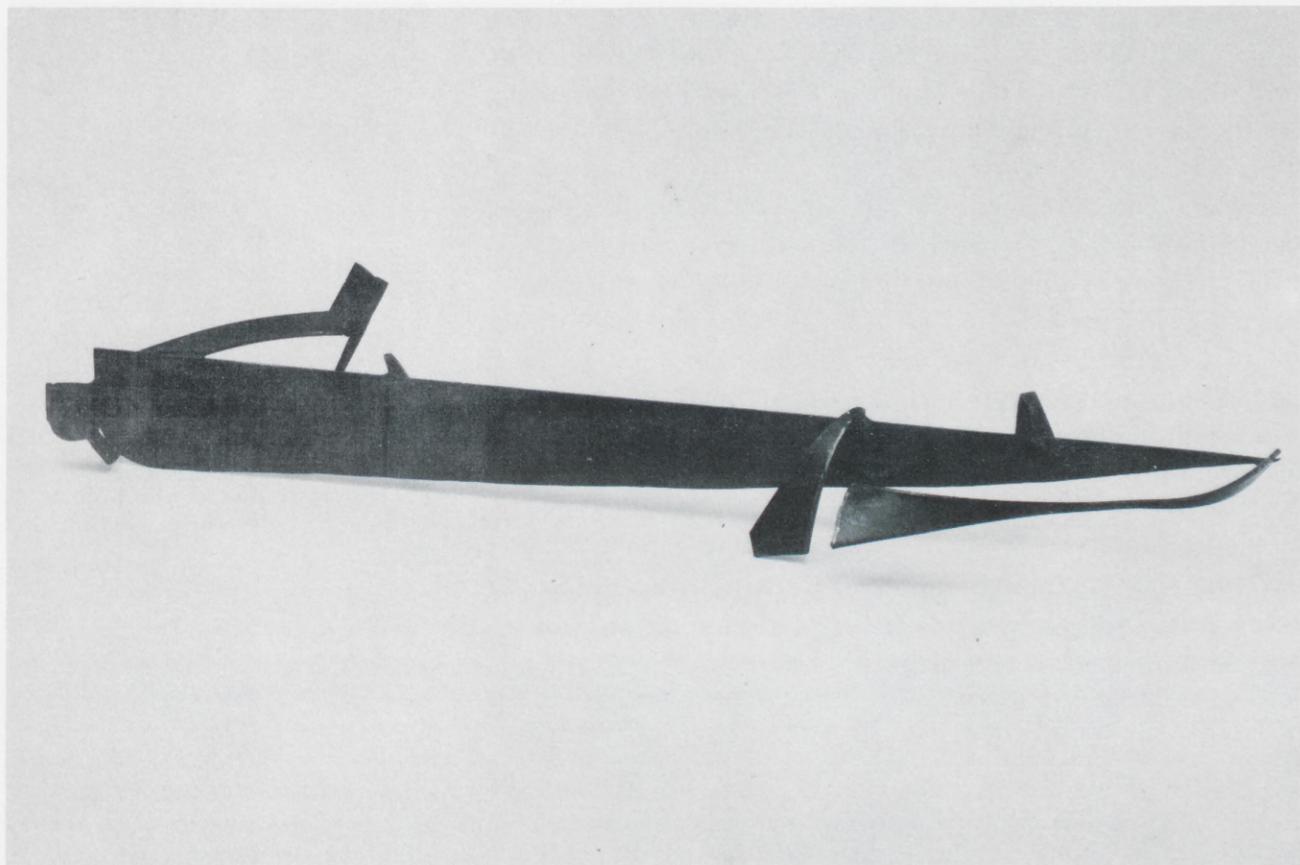
Caro was born in England in 1924. He studied under Henry Moore for two years. In 1959 while visiting America, Caro saw David Smith's work which caused a dramatic change in his work. This experience helped Caro evolve his early "tough" style of constructed sculptures.

Since 1966 Caro has been producing the "Table Top" sculptures which appear weightless. These works sit directly on the ground without pedestals and because of this are often described as both ground and space devouring. Unlike Smith or Moore, Caro prefers to have his sculpture exhibited in an enclosed space. Most of these sculptures are painted a single color.

There has been some criticism that Caro reduces his sculpture to nothing more than a visual experience, removing the tactile experience that one would experience in a Moore. This can be seen in an analogous manner to the painting of the hard-edge minimalists which removed the New York School emotions from the canvas leaving the unfeeling intellectual experience of color and structure.

Caro continues to live and work in London with many working visits to the United States.

ANTHONY CARO (born 1924)



ANTHONY CARO
Table Piece CCVII, 1974
rusted steel
79x10x24 inches

The recent works of Dan Christensen are a refreshing approach to the practice of color-field painting. The painterly and gestural tendencies of the Abstract Expressionists, anathema to most painters during the 1960s, are joyously embraced by Christensen in the 1980s. The canvas is still colored by thin layers of paint allowed to glow through subsequent layers. Over these fields, however, colorful gestural strokes of paint, resembling not-completed variations of the image in Motherwell's *Open* series, dance with each other.

Christensen was born in Lexington, Kentucky, in 1924, and is a graduate of the Kansas City Art Institute. Christensen's early work is highly geometric much in the manner of Victor Vasarely's work. This work was followed by a period of hard-edge painting employing bright blocks and slabs of color on the canvas.

From the beginning Christensen's work has emphasized color, form, and texture. His recent lyrical additions are yet another dimension to his work.

DAN CHRISTENSEN
(born 1924)



DAN CHRISTENSEN

Mexico, 1979
acrylic on canvas
80x91 inches

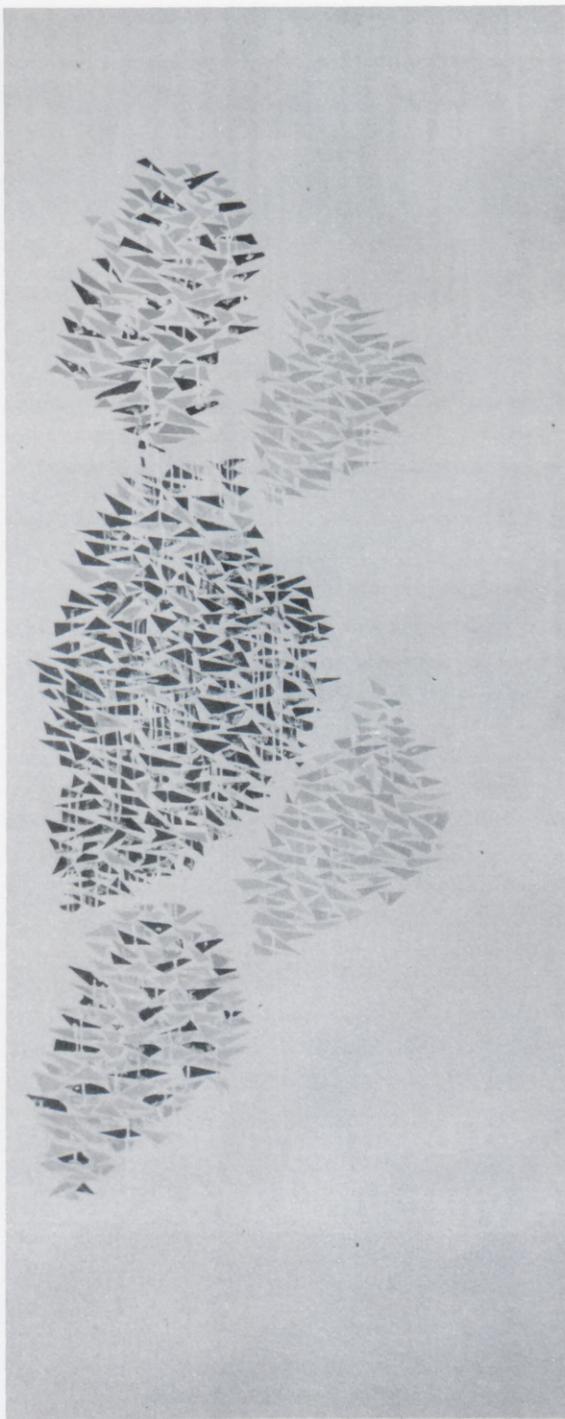
Robert Goodnough was born in Cortland, New York, in 1917. By 1947 Goodnough had joined the group of First Generation Abstract Expressionists and developed friendships with Jackson Pollock, Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko.

During the mid-1950s Goodnough's paintings reflected cubist tendencies, but were executed in a very painterly, gestural manner. During the 1960s Goodnough maintained a cubist approach to his abstract paintings, but began to express them using a synthetic hard-edge approach using fewer images and simpler, more purely abstract forms. The 1968 white on white paintings served as forerunners of his later pastel colored works.

Goodnough's recent hard-edge color field abstractions have been criticized, by those who look for hidden meaning, as too impersonal and lacking in subject matter. His paintings, which tend to be highly intellectualized, often fail to communicate that they do have a comprehensible structural plan that serves to explain their existence.

ROBERT GOODNOUGH (born 1917)

ROBERT GOODNOUGH
Gray, Gray-Green, 1976
acrylic on canvas
84x34 inches



Dorothy Hood is not only a native Texan, she was born in Bryan in 1919. She received her art training at the Rhode Island School of Design and the Art Students League in New York.

Hood did not become seriously involved with art until 1941. During the period from 1941 to 1961, Hood traveled in Latin America while living in Mexico. During this time she became friends with and came under the influence of Mexico's leading painters, Jose Clemente Orozco, Mathias Goeritz, and Pablo Neruda. During this time she also became interested in Taoism and Zen.

Though Hood first became known for her drawings, in the 1960s she painted almost entirely on canvases as large as 120" x 96".

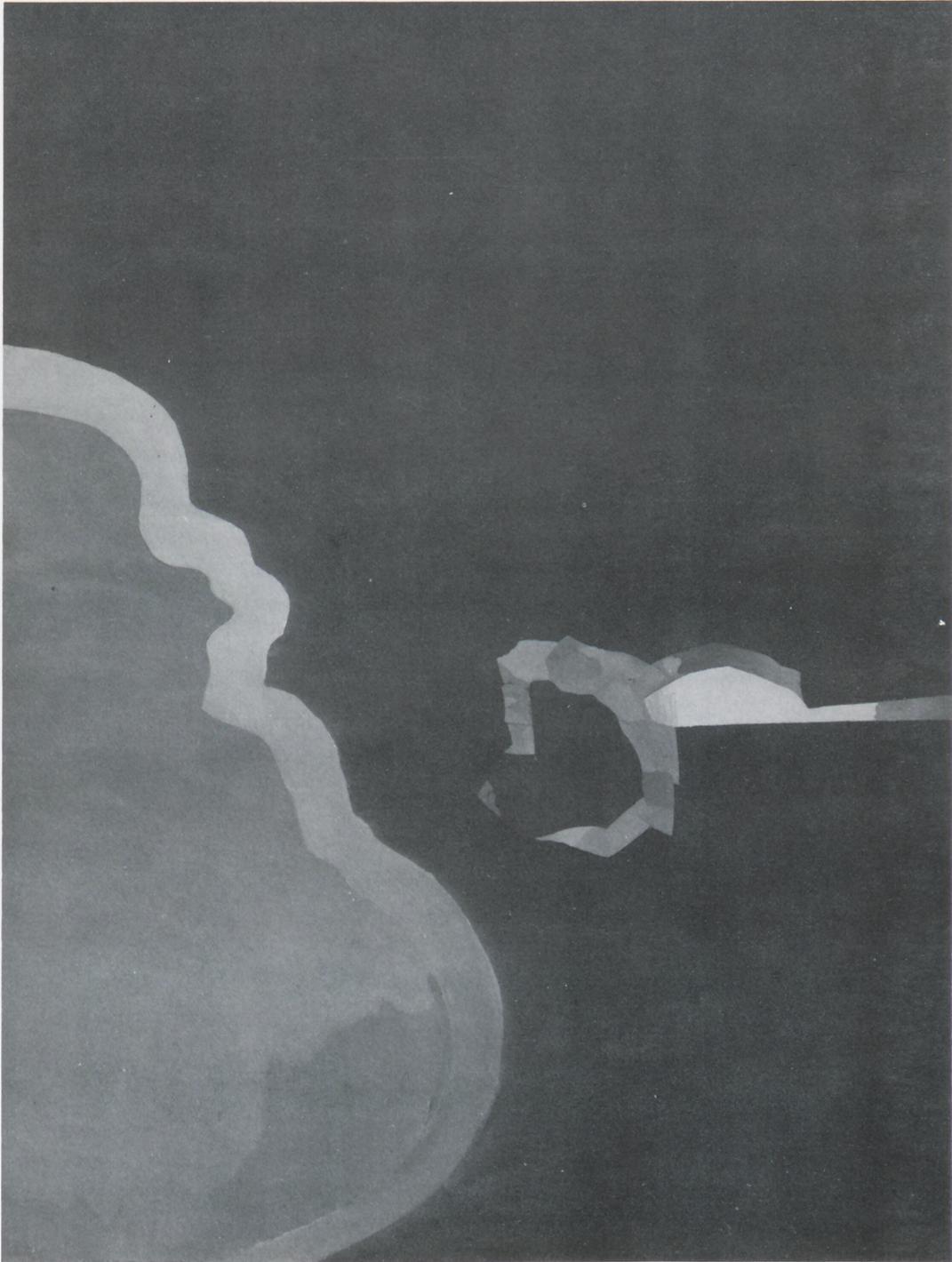
Hood has always been an individual painter, never belonging to a group. Though her paintings are reminiscent of the abstract color fields of Abstract Expressionists like Clyfford Still or Helen Frankenthaler, Hood's works reflect what might be called abstract surrealism or abstract mysticism. The influence of her interest in Taoism and Zen is very evident in her paintings which appear to portray other universes and even create, for the viewer, the sense of falling into a strange universe.

Hood has exhibited widely, including an exhibit in which she joined Jules Olitski, Anthony Caro, Stanley Boxer and others to explore the properties of clay as an expressive abstract medium.

Hood continues to live and work in Houston.

DOROTHY HOOD (born 1919)

DOROTHY HOOD
Porthole Personage, 1980
oil on canvas
90x70 inches



Darryl Hughto is a young artist and for that reason has had to contemplate seriously the new directions in painting after the period of minimal color-field painting. Hughto was born in Watertown, New York, in 1943, and has exhibited successfully since his first exhibit in 1971.

His earlier work showed an attraction to Olitski's paint handling techniques. The paintings at that time consisted of spiral-like atmospheres. In the mid-1970s the diamond began to make its appearance in Hughto's painting. These diamond paintings remind one of Noland's diamond-shaped band-painted canvases. In Hughto's work, however, there is a much more painterly approach to his color and gesture. Hughto has experimented placing his colorful-diamonds on various shaped canvases. He has used diamond-shaped, oval, and irregular canvases as well as the conventional rectangular, which are used in this exhibit.

Hughto lives and works in Syracuse, New York, where he continues to explore new areas and expressions in painting.

DARRYL HUGHTO
(born 1943)

DARRYL HUGHTO
Drawing Water, 1979
acrylic on canvas
69x45 inches

During the 1950s when Abstract Expressionism was at its height, Ellsworth Kelly emerged as a leader of the hard-edge school of color-field painters. Before returning to New York City in 1954, Kelly had lived and worked in Paris for six years. While there he had developed a non-objective, geometric imagery which used high value primary colors. This work reflected an influence of Piet Mondrian, Jean Arp, and Henri Matisse's cutouts. For an exhibit in France, Kelly created a series of panel paintings in which each panel carried a single solid color.

As with all the hard-edge painters, Kelly's work emphasizes a flat surface and a linearity of paints. Between 1954 and 1957, Kelly's painting concentrated on a restricted image limited to black and white. He soon restored the color and in the sixties painted shapes which were increasingly symmetrical.

Kelly, like many of the geometric painters, has produced paintings with shaped canvases, and he is also a sculptor.

Kelly was born in Newburgh, New York, in 1923. In the 1980s, Kelly lives in New York City and continues to be a subtle colorist.

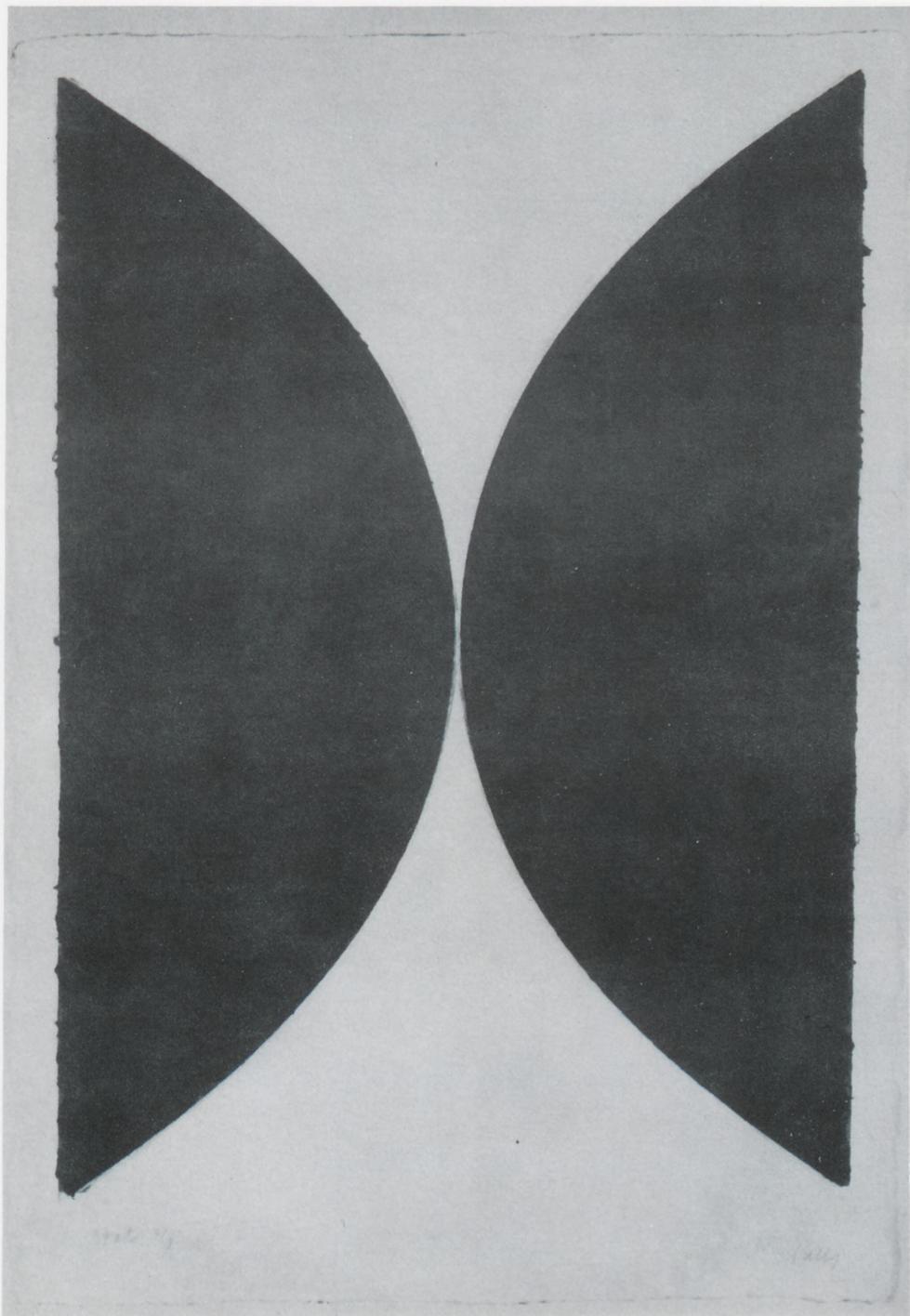
ELLSWORTH KELLY (born 1923)

ELLSWORTH KELLY

Images II, 1978

paper works

46½x32½ inches



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Donald Localio is the youngest artist in this exhibition and was certainly not a master during the 1960s. His painting, however, is an important addition to this exhibition in that it affords evidence that the post-painterly aesthetic of the 1960s did not bring about the cessation of expression in painting for all time.

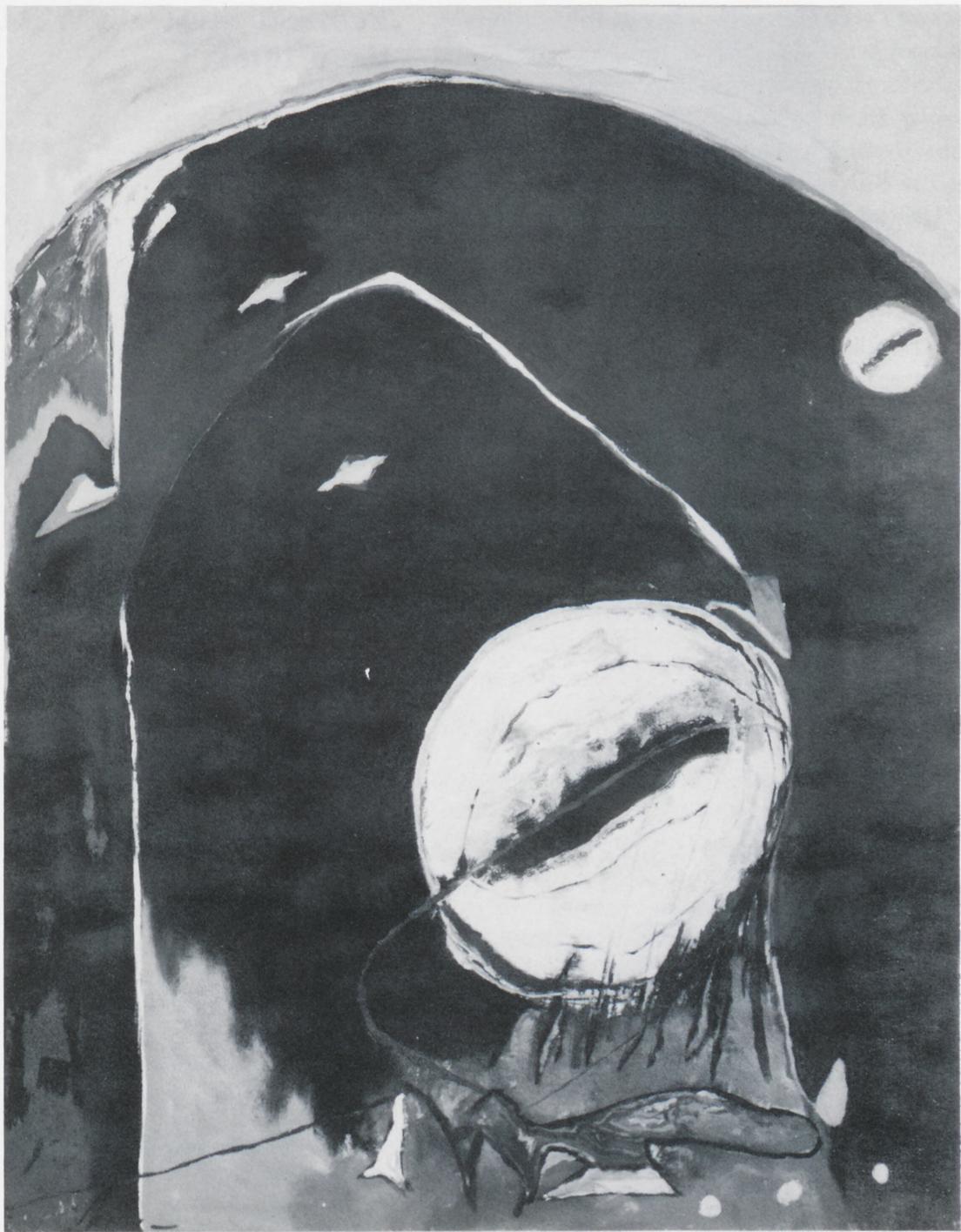
Born in Princeton, New Jersey, in 1954, Localio received his B. F. A. in 1978 from the University of Houston and his M. F. A. in 1980 from the Maryland Institute, College of Art in Baltimore. He has exhibited extensively and had several one-man exhibitions.

The boldness of Localio's painting clearly reflects the energy and emotion of the Abstract Expressionist aesthetic, which surely originates from the influence of Localio's friend and mentor, Willem de Kooning. Yet, his work is not restricted by this influence.

Localio, who has been a resident of Houston until recently, now lives and works in New York City.

DONALD LOCALIO
(born 1954)

DONALD LOCALIO
A Fall of Grace, 1981
oil on canvas
64½x50 inches



ROBERT MOTHERWELL (born 1915)

Robert Motherwell who was one of the early members of the New York School was also one of the most articulate. Motherwell's first interest was in philosophy. He received a degree in philosophy from Stanford University and in 1937 began graduate studies at Harvard.

After he met the Surrealist and Symbolist painters who had fled to the United States because of World War II, Motherwell abandoned his philosophy studies and took up art instead. He was particularly drawn to the work of Joan Miro. In 1941 he painted with Roberto Echaurren Matta in Mexico. He worked well with the Surrealists, but many of them considered his work too abstract.

After his return from Mexico, he met Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and Hans Hoffman and came under their painterly influence. In 1943 Motherwell was invited to exhibit in the gallery of Peggy Guggenheim, the principal promoter of the Abstract Expressionists. He thus established himself fully as a member of this group.

Though his painting emphasized gestural painting, it was a controlled gesture that dominated his often very large canvases. Motherwell felt that automatism in art, the process by which the unconscious directed the brush stroke, should be controlled lest the painter become a slave to it.

Early in his career, Motherwell began to employ the technique of collage in his art. According to H. H. Arnason, the tearing of paper became to Motherwell the equivalent of the immediate brush gesture in painting. Collage still remains one of Motherwell's art media, as can be seen in *Silver Music*.

Following the lead of the color field painters of the sixties, Motherwell produced his *Open* series consisting of a large color field on canvas with a minimal, often rectangular outline form imposed on the field.

Motherwell, who was born in Aberdeen, Washington, in 1915, today resides in Connecticut where he continues to produce his calligraphic paintings and collages.

ROBERT MOTHERWELL
Silver Music, 1976
collage
72x24 inches



Kenneth Noland, one of the most widely known hard-edge color-field painters, was born in Asheville, North Carolina, in 1924. Noland studied under Josef Albers and Ilya Bolotowsky at the Black Mountain College after his World War II service. He traveled and studied in Europe in 1948 and 1949 and when he returned he settled in Washington, D. C., to teach at Catholic University. In Washington, he met Morris Lewis and together they went to New York where they saw Helen Frankenthaler's paintings in which she stained her unsized canvas with brilliant hues.

This experience started Noland in pursuit of a personal artistic expression that would produce color painting predicated on Jackson Pollock's uniformity of surface and space.

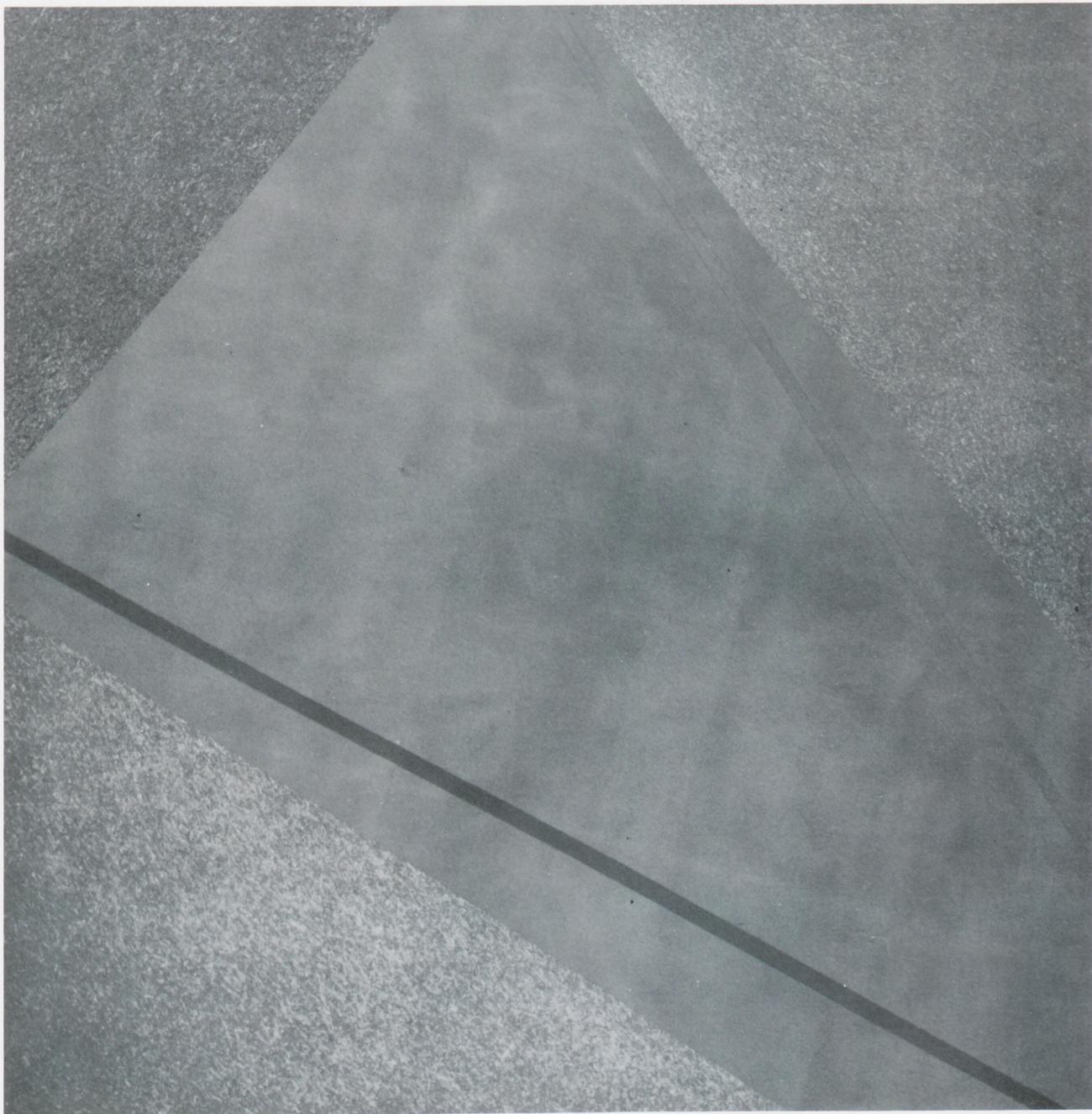
The circle or "target" paintings were his first successful paintings. In 1962 he started working on the "chevron" series which was followed by the "diamond" series of 1964, which used a shaped canvas format. These grew narrower and longer until the canvas consisted only of strips running horizontally on a long canvas.

In his recent work Noland has changed his structure to the use of diagonal areas.

KENNETH NOLAND (born 1924)

KENNETH NOLAND

Curious Course, 1975
acrylic on canvas
70x70 inches



JULES OLITSKI
(born 1922)

Unlike Noland and Kelly, the mature works of Jules Olitski are not hard-edge paintings. Olitski's painting is a sensuous play of pure color fields—sometimes heavily textured and more often thin and airy.

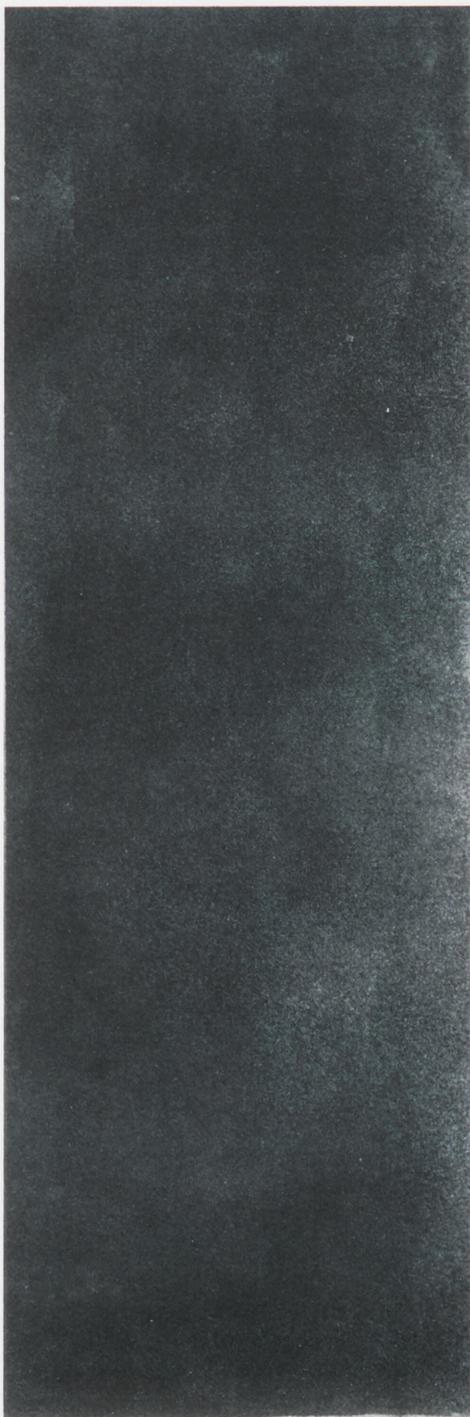
Jules Olitski was born in Snovsk, Russia, in 1922. He immigrated to the United States with his mother at the age of one.

After becoming a United States citizen, Olitski was drafted into the Army; in 1949 he used the G. I. Bill to visit and study in Paris. During this time Olitski worked on his "blindfold paintings." By painting blindfolded, he hoped to rid himself of an academic style and of everything he had known and learned to do easily.

An exhibit in Paris in 1951 shows Olitski's painting to be semi-abstract in bright spectral colors.

After his first American one-man exhibition in 1958, Olitski met and befriended art critic Clement Greenberg. His painting of this time was hard-edged and executed in intense colors. The large canvas fields of color did not come about until 1964. During a conversation with Noland and Caro, Olitski remarked that an ideal situation would be to be able to spray color into the air and have it remain there. His sprayed canvases began to be executed soon thereafter.

Today Olitski lives in New Hampshire where he continues to produce his rich fields of color.



JULES OLITSKI
Natasha Quest IV, 1980
acrylic on canvas
71x24 inches

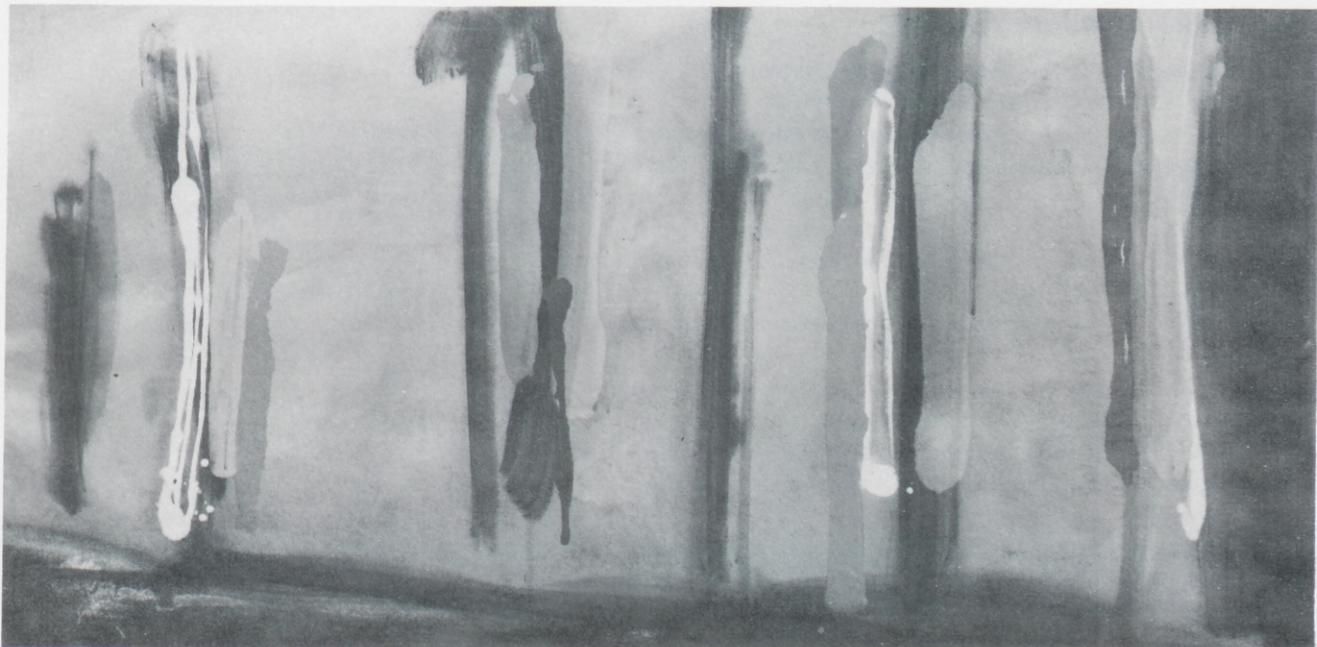
Larry Zox was born in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1936 and studied at the University of Oklahoma in 1954 and 1955.

Zox's earliest works are painted collages from 1959 through 1962. These works clearly reflect the Abstract Expressionist influence of Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline.

During the 1960s, however, Zox's work reflects the influence of the hard-edge color-field painters. During this period he produced the Rotation series, followed by the Scissors Jack series. In these paintings, Zox uses repeated geometric shapes as vehicles for his color. It is during this time that his paintings become noticeably brushier.

In his recent works the geometric aspect of his painting is eliminated. Zox is still working with a non-objective color field, but now his technique and painting are reminiscent of the work of Morris Louis. Zox lives and works in New York City.

LARRY ZOX **(born 1936)**



LARRY ZOX
Red Swing, 1980
acrylic on canvas
81½x36 inches

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