

PAST/PRESENT

AMERICAN ABSTRACT ARTIST MEMBERS
HONOR THEIR PREDECESSORS

A M E R I C A N A B S T R A C T A R T I S T S

VOLUME 6 | 2023

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Past/Present

American Abstract Artist Members Honor Their Predecessors

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<https://americanabstractartists.org>

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Courtesy of the estate of Ward Jackson and Findlay Galleries, New York City

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ABOUT AMERICAN ABSTRACT ARTISTS

American Abstract Artists was founded in 1936 in New York City, a time when abstract art was met with strong critical resistance. During the 1930s and early 1940s, AAA provided exhibition opportunities when few existed. Its publications, panels, and lectures provided a forum for discussion and gave abstract art theoretical support in the United States. As a predecessor to the New York School and Abstract Expressionism, AAA contributed to the development and acceptance of abstract art in the United States. American Abstract Artists is one of the few artists' organizations to survive from the Great Depression and continue into the 21st century.

Today we continue the tradition with regular exhibitions in New York City, curated by noted critics or curators. Recently AAA exhibitions have traveled throughout the United States. *Blurring Boundaries: The Women of American Abstract Artists 1937–Present* is one such exhibition. Curated by Rebecca DiGiovanna, it traveled to nine museums and art centers in eight states over five years. Relatedly, *American Abstract Artists: Digital Prints, 2012–2019*, traveled to venues throughout the Midwest and Northeast. Additionally, we have engaged curators to organize digital exhibitions, which remain viewable online.

Our most recent in-person exhibition, *On Balance: New Work by American Abstract Artists*, curated by Mary Birmingham, took place in 2023 at Art Cake Gallery in Brooklyn. As with most of our exhibitions, it is accompanied by a catalog, all of which are accessible on the AAA website.

We continue to offer talks and panel discussions.

Please visit www.americanabstractartists.org for news and information.

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FROM THE PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE

Past/Present: American Abstract Artist Members Honor Their Predecessors is the sixth print Journal in the contemporary era of American Abstract Artists. For this volume we invited current members to write about a former AAA member, no longer living, who has inspired or encouraged them, or simply whose work they admire.

Thirty-two members responded, writing about 26 former members. In the instances where two current members write about the same artist, we are offered a fuller view of that artist. Cecily Kahn, for instance, writes personally about her “Granny,” who is Alice Trumbull Mason, an AAA founder and past president, while Kim Uchiyama addresses the formal concerns in Mason’s paintings. How fortunate we are to have these two viewpoints.

In another pairing, Sonita Singwi and Vera Vasek write about the color and light in Lynn Umlauf’s work—Singwi addressing two-dimensional work in paper and canvas; Vasek, relief and sculpture in Plexiglas. Other subjects include Piet Mondrian and Sol LeWitt, a modernist and a conceptualist, as well as two powerhouses, working well into their 90s, who passed only recently: Siri Berg and Katinka Mann. It is a rich compilation.

Past/Present is the first of our Journals to be printed on demand. We now take for granted color on every page, but in the not-too-distant past—even 2006, when the immediately preceding issue was published—color was meted out carefully. Taking advantage of print technology, we have published this fully chromatic, 88-page volume in print as well as an electronic version viewable online. Knowing our journal to be a niche publication within the (slightly) larger niche of art books, we hope the dual format will allow as many readers as possible to enjoy what we have produced.

—JOANNE MATTERA, CHAIR

—MARTHE KELLER

—STEVEN ALEXANDER

—JASON STOPA

—LAURIE FENDRICH

—KIM UCHIYAMA

—JULIAN JACKSON

—TAMAR ZINN

FROM THE AAA PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT

American Abstract Artists was founded in 1936 by a group of artists living in New York City. As the group enters its ninth decade we take note of the enormous changes technology, politics, and world events have had on creative practice. In many ways, as history repeats, 1936 was a time that mirrored our present decade. Political upheavals, civil unrest, the uprooting of individuals and families on the oppressed side of history are as prevalent now as they were prior to World War II.

The power of abstract art was seen as a threat to the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe. Aligned with revolution, modernist ideology, and democratic egalitarianism, its existence became a threat to authoritarian rule. All modern art was labeled “degenerate” by the Nazi party, and by association, the lives and families of the artists creating it were put at risk. Many avant-garde artists sought refuge in New York; Josef Albers was a founder of AAA, and later Piet Mondrian became a member.

The 1936 AAA mission statement reads: *American Abstract Artists (AAA) brings together visual artists working in America whose work falls within the realm of abstraction in its many forms and manifestations, puts their ideas and their work before the public, and provides a forum for the membership and invited guests to discuss, challenge, and defend the general and particular nature of abstract practice.*

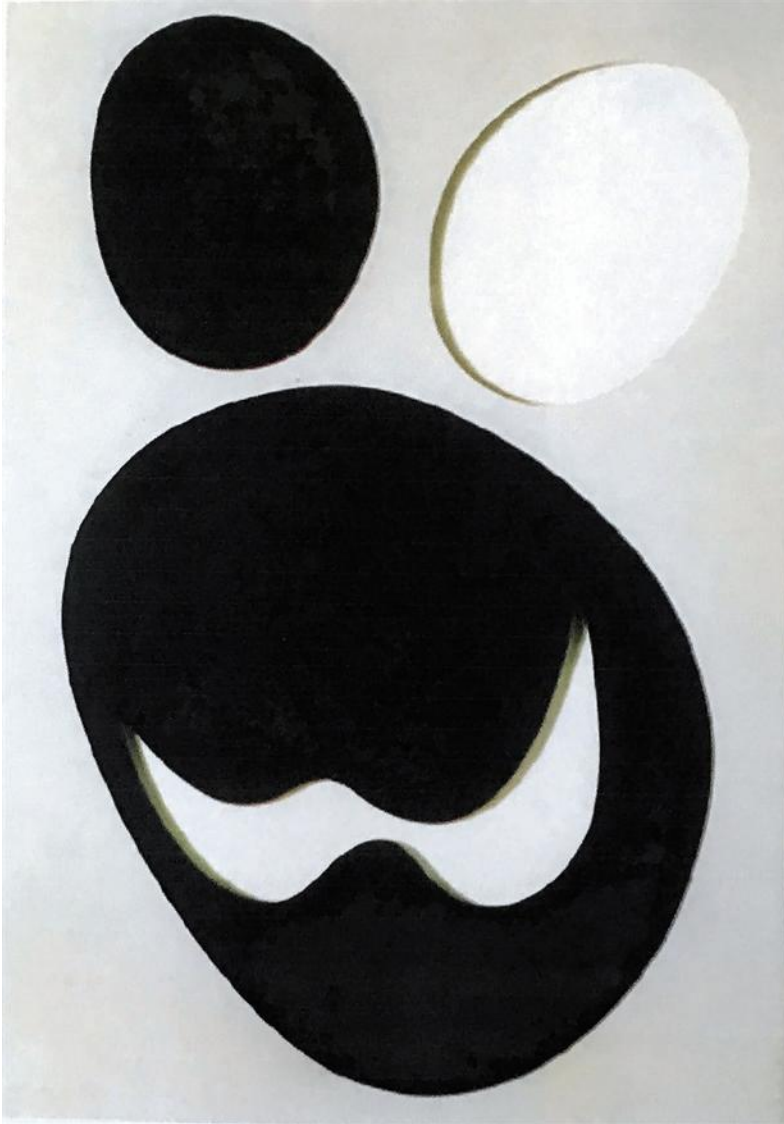
That simple and direct statement has allowed the group to grow, diversify, and remain influential and relevant. As the longest surviving artist group in America, our membership encourages the practice of abstraction in all mediums. We are committed to educating and preserving our rich heritage, and we thrive on the support and democratic structure of our group.

Thirty-two members contributed to the AAA Journal, *Past/Present American Abstract Artist Members Honor Their Predecessors*. Current members were asked to write about a deceased member they admired or who had influenced them. Through text and images, the trajectory of our lineage becomes apparent. Some contributions were personal, recalling friends, teachers, and mentors; others noted influence and admiration for artists they knew solely through their work. One member, Cecily Kahn, was able to remember her grandmother, Alice Trumbull Mason, a founding member and past president.

We would like to thank all of the members who contributed essays and images to this publication. Memory acts as an agent of history and holds us accountable for events some nations choose to erase. In the spirit of "artists supporting artists," through your memories our history lives.

—JIM OSMAN, PRESIDENT

—JOANNE FREEMAN, VICE PRESIDENT



Hans Jean Arp, *Two Heads*, 1929, painted wood, 47 × 39 inches
© 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

JEAN ARP

(1886–1966)

In 2000–2008 I did a series of *Poured Paintings* that came from pouring house paint on Mylar of different sizes and shapes and collaging these pieces onto canvas. The “cross pollination between painting and various other visual forms such as sculpture” that art historian David Craven observed in my work shares common ground with the work of Jean Arp.

Arp’s Dadaist wood reliefs, work that rebelled against the heavy influence of the Renaissance dictates, denied any compositional calculations; he revered spontaneity when assembling his sculptural collages. During the creation of my *Poured Paintings*, I rarely brushed the paint but instead explored house paint’s fluidity and the manner in which unchecked movement yielded surprising results. I was finding a new way to work through constructing random collage elements that reinvigorated the outcome of the image and gave it a colorful sculptural presence. I gained a great deal from my visual interaction with Arp’s once vanguard sculpture and bravery.

—PHILLIS IDEAL



Phillis Ideal
Sweepstakes
2000
poured latex acrylic paint, canvas
20 × 20 inches



Will Barnet, *The Blue Robe*, 1962, oil on canvas, 50 × 54 inches

Courtesy of the Will Barnet Foundation

This work is on loan to the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, hanging in the exhibition, *On This Ground: Being and Belonging in America*

WILL BARNET

(1911–2012)

I met Will Barnet at a dinner in Chelsea, where I was seated across from him at a narrow table. After a quick introduction of who and what you do, we launched into an easy exchange usually reserved for old friends. We talked about painting and what we were currently working on. Will was generous. He did not know my work but made a point of going to my gallery and seeing it. I was aware of his work, which was figurative when we met. I learned about his earlier abstract work as I became interested in his life. We shared an affinity for flat space and flat planes of color. Will's career spanned generations, and sitting across from him I was aware of the art history he had experienced. He worked as a printer, a painter, and an educator. His influence on generations of artists was enormous, but when I knew him he insisted on being in the present, excited about what was happening in the studio, interested in what I was doing, and always generous.

—JOANNE FREEMAN



Joanne Freeman
Cerulean 60
2021
oil on linen
60 × 45 inches



Herbert Bayer, *Articulated Wall*, 1985, Denver; 85 feet tall comprised of 32 prefabricated concrete pieces held together by an aircraft refueling mast in the center
Photo: © Karen Foreman

HERBERT BAYER

(1900–1985)

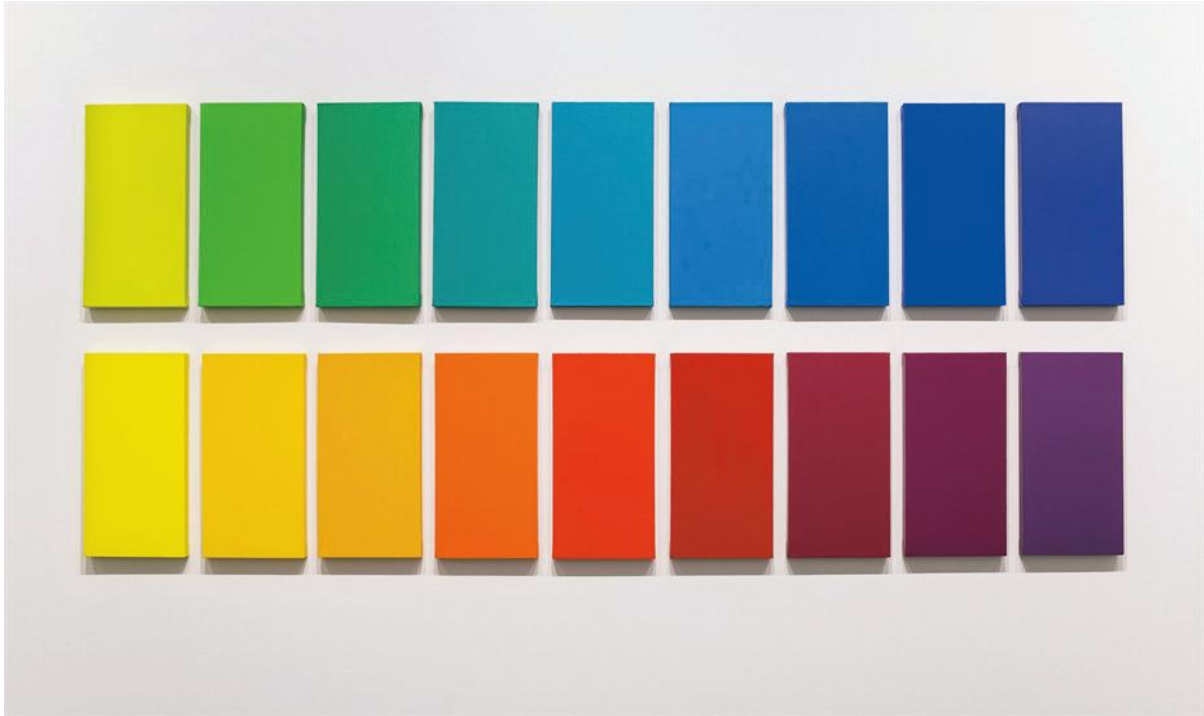
Between the two World Wars, Europe was a powerhouse for artistic experimentation. Combining graphic design and fine arts was in the true spirit of the Bauhaus, where Herbert Bayer studied and taught. He designed typefaces, graphics, and buildings, and personified the integration of all the arts. His legacy and versatility were big influences on me from my student years to my later years in Minimalism and Post-Minimalism.

I feel many parallels with Herbert Bayer's life and art. The artist fled Hitler's Germany for America, where he did graphic design for Container Corporation of America, but at the same time explored sculpture, photography, and architecture. I came to the U.S. from Crete, where I was influenced by its architecture and archeology, which led me to eventually create my indoor/outdoor installations. In sculpture, Herbert Bayer embraced verticality, whereas I turned to diagonals, but both of us were drawn to making site-specific art. Does all this stem from some kind of collective unconscious, or was it merely coincidence? Maybe a little of both.

—CRIS GIANAKOS



Cris Gianakos
Wanas Ramp
1990
Wanas Sculpture Park
Knislinge, Sweden
wood
8.5 × 8 × 97 feet



Siri Berg, *It's All About Color II*, 2010, oil on canvas (18 panels) 10 × 5 inches
© 2023 Siri Berg/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

SIRI BERG

(1921-2020)

In the early 2000s, I met Siri Berg at monthly meetings of an artists' group in downtown Manhattan. Siri exuded a magnetic aura of warmth and confidence.

Our paintings, with their individual color languages, share a sense of compositional balance and harmony. Siri possessed a unique ability to imbue color with order and meaning through her language of geometric abstraction and color field painting. It served as a source of security and identity for her.

Our studio practices aligned in several ways. Both of us pre-mixed color batches based on specific ideas and numbered each color, which later influenced placement. Ideas were distilled to their essential colors, and exploring nuanced ways of handling these hues was essential. Craftsmanship and intellectual challenges were integral to Siri's artistic approach—qualities that resonate with me.

Siri Berg's artistic legacy is (almost) all about color. It is my honor to follow her in membership to American Abstract Artists, contributing to a lineage recognizing the connections and influences that shape our artistic development.

—DEBRA RAMSAY



Debra Ramsay
The Colors of a Great Crested Flycatcher
2023
acrylic on MDF
16 × 48 inches



Nassos Daphnis, #7-82, *Transmitting Waves*, 1982, oil on canvas, 88 × 73 inches
Courtesy of Richard Taittinger Gallery, New York City

NASSOS DAPHNIS

(1914–2010)

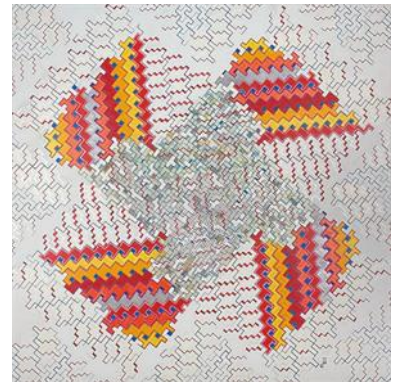
Decades have passed since I first saw Nassos Daphnis's work. My first acquaintance with it was in the 1980s at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York City. The paintings spoke to my aesthetic sensibility.

I found Daphnis's linear paintings to be purist and minimalist. The impressive work led to an interview with him for *Arts Magazine* (May 1983). We spoke often at the American Abstract Artists meetings and at coffee shops in Greenwich Village. Daphnis spoke of his artistic development. As an untrained artist, he began by painting camouflage patterns on Army vehicles. A visit to Greece changed his artistic development. The blinding sun made buildings look flat. He began painting flat geometric shapes on canvas. Although the mathematical movement of Geometric Abstraction dates back to Neoplasticism in early 20th-century Europe, it was that visit that changed everything.

Abstract Expressionism was the dominant art form in the 1950s. I admired Daphnis's commitment to an aesthetic vision that was clear and uncomplicated. His curvilinear paintings on white canvas are the work of a mature artist whose commitment to a purist aesthetic vision never wavered.

My admiration for his painting still stands strong.

—IRENE ROUSSEAU



Irene Rousseau
Visual Symphony-2
2021
oil on canvas
36 × 36 inches



Tom Doyle, *Samhin*, 1996, bronze from wood, 96 × 114 × 177 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Zürcher Gallery, New York/Paris

TOM DOYLE

(1928–2016)

I met Tom Doyle as an undergraduate, and it was in his classes that I really started to explore ideas and how to express them with materials. Later, as a studio assistant and friend, I got a closer look at Tom's way of approaching sculpture. His influence and sage advice ran from the prosaic, such as, "Be early on installation day so you get a good spot," to how to appreciate the beauty of wood. His deep knowledge of wood and how to construct sculpture with it seemed, at first, to be vocational, but in time brought a vitality to my work and an understanding that making was meaning. My understanding of the nature of a joint, "reading" the grain to create both visual and structural strength, and the use of color, both inherent and applied, all came from looking at Tom's work and talking with him for many hours about sculpture in general, for which I am grateful.

—JIM OSMAN



Jim Osman
Lark
wood paint and bark
2022
27.5 × 23.5 × 19 inches



Sam Gilliam, *Double Merge*, 1968, acrylic on canvas, dimensions variable
Installation view, DIA Beacon, New York, 2022
© 2023 Sam Gilliam / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Photo: Jeffrey Bishop

SAM GILLIAM

(1933–2022)

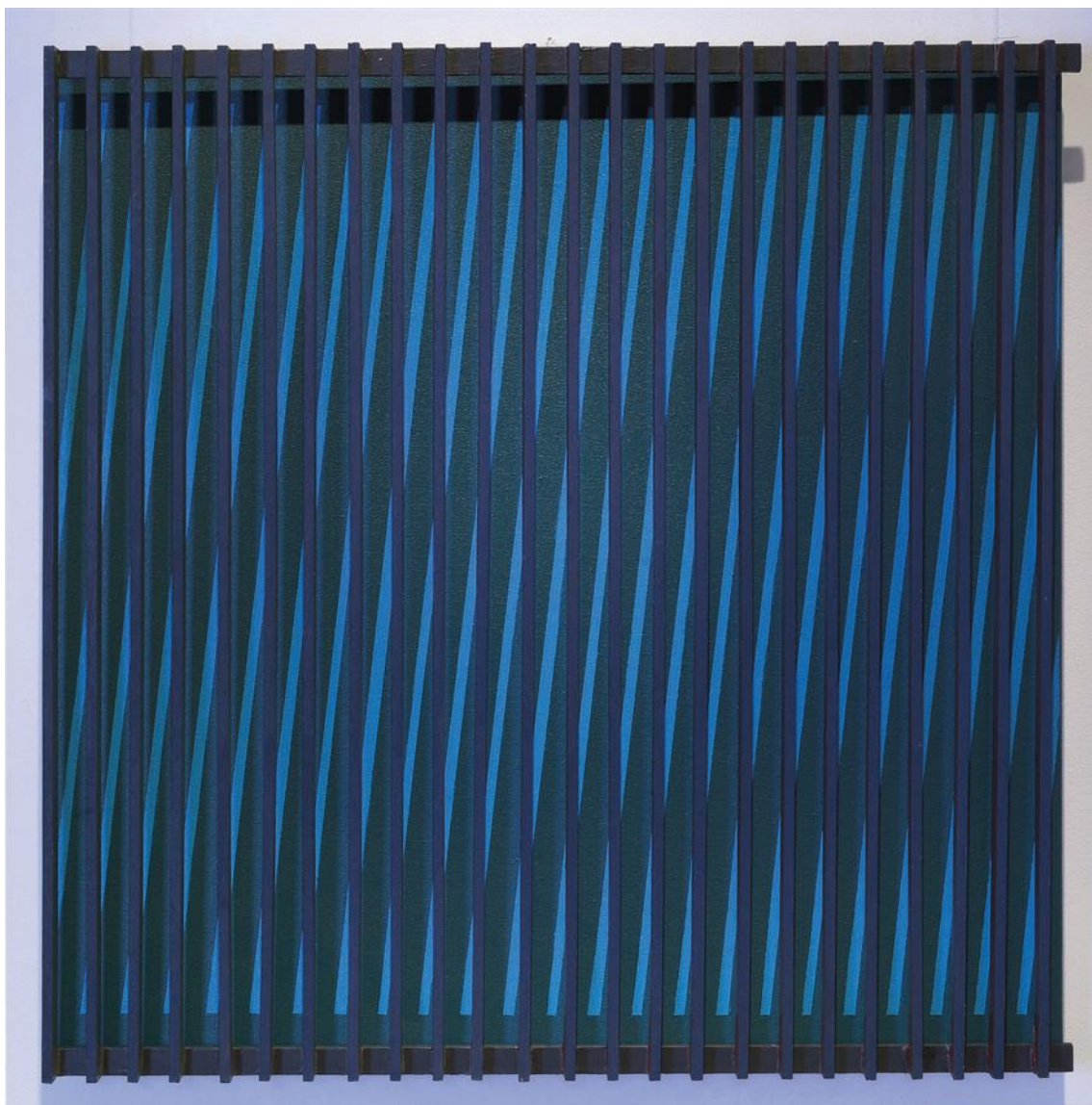
In 1972-73 at the Boston Museum School, I found myself in a fertile creative environment where abundant artistic influences were flying around the building and students were wildly responding in kind. At the time I was very interested in music and extending time and space in pictorial form. Initially I looked to Asian influences in the form of scrolls; subsequently I fell under the spell of John Cage and was painting musical sound marks in a typical figure-ground format. With Minimalism so prominent, I found the ground soon took over, yielding a unified extended field. These paintings on paper were typically two feet high and 20 feet long, executed over several tables interspersed with sawhorses, thereby becoming sculptural. In the process, I became aware of Sam Gilliam, whose work blew me away, but also confirmed that what I was doing was valuable. Gilliam has remained a touchstone in my private canon.

—JEFFREY BISHOP



Jeffrey Bishop
Scroll #8
1974

oil on shellac on Arches
24 inches × 240 inches



John Goodyear, *Blue and Black Kinetic Construction*, 1964, acrylic on canvas and wood, 24 × 24 × 4 inches
© Estate of John Goodyear; courtesy of Berry Campbell Gallery, New York City

JOHN GOODYEAR

(1930–2019)

John Goodyear was my art professor and mentor during my undergraduate and graduate education at Rutgers University. John's teaching and kinetic artworks have had an abiding influence on my art. His early 3D grid and pole paintings introduced a dynamic way of perceiving colors and shapes through motion. The grid painting, *Blue and Black Kinetic Construction*, becomes a dazzling array of shifting blues, purples, and blacks as a result of the viewer gently pushing the outside grid. John's playful manner of engaging the viewer instigates multiple ways of seeing and experiencing his artworks.

In 2016, I created *American Storm Tide*, a site-specific installation for a house on Governors Island in New York Harbor. The installation was comprised of red, blue, and clear acrylic layers, illuminated from within by argon and flashing neon lights to depict the movement of water. Thinking of John, I wanted the visitors to experience the motion of the tidal energy from various viewpoints.

In 2018, John endorsed my membership for American Abstract Artists, where he had been a member since 1976.

—LISA E. NANNI



Lisa E. Nanni
American Storm Tide
site-specific installation
Governors Island, New York
2016

colored glass tubing, colored acrylic,
Mylar neon and argon lighting,
transformers
room size: 192 × 84 inches



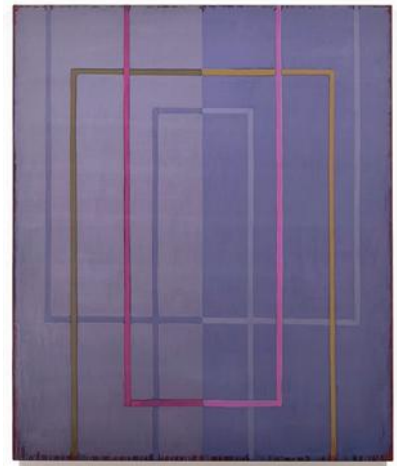
Marcia Hafif, *Black Painting/Ultramarine Blue, Burnt Umber*, 1979, oil on canvas, 84 × 79 inches
Courtesy of Fergus McCaffrey, New York City

MARCIA HAFIF

(1929–2018)

In the early 1970s, Marcia Hafif reinvented painting for herself, systematically and intuitively stripping away previous notions of style, composition, and meaning, to begin again from a most fundamental engagement with the painting language. The primeval activity of smearing colored substance on a surface became the conceptual core from which her work was built. She disregarded the trappings of technique to achieve a heightened focus on the raw mechanics of making, and the authentic unadorned beauty that resulted. For Marcia, this approach was not a purely theoretical strategy, but rather a direct enabler of utmost sensuality. The saturation and mutability of color, the opacity and viscosity of paint, the velocity and repetition of the brushstroke, the humming presence of the object, were her subjects. Marcia Hafif turned painting inside out to reveal the feeling that resides in its most human interior essence, a poetic endeavor as radical today as ever it was.

—STEVEN ALEXANDER



Steven Alexander
Source 3
2023
oil on linen
60 × 50 inches
Courtesy of Spanierman Modern
New York City



Marcia Hafif, *Italian Series-168*, 1967, acrylic on canvas 55.125 × 55.125 inches
Courtesy of Fergus McCaffrey, New York City

MARCIA HAFIF

(1929–2018)

As a young artist I was leery of hard edges and the seemingly effortless look of simple shapes. That changed when I encountered the work of Marcia Hafif. The first paintings I saw of hers were from her stay in Italy, 1962 to 1968. I immediately responded to Hafif's saturated color and rounded, evocative forms, which conjure the familiar—sometimes the body—while remaining abstract. Lingered in front of each painting, I began to appreciate the importance of her minute changes in contour and placement.

Hafif's paintings are tightly rendered with crisp edges, but they remain open to interpretation. One of the things I strive for in my own work is for the viewer to stop and ponder what they're looking at. For me, Marcia Hafif does just that.

—MARCY ROSENBLAT



Marcy Rosenblat
Sideslip
2022
pigment and silica medium on canvas
50 × 52 inches



Ward Jackson, *Piedmont II*, 1970-74, acrylic on canvas, 36 × 36 inches
Courtesy of the estate of Ward Jackson and Findlay Galleries, New York City

WARD JACKSON

(1928–2004)

I first came to know Ward Jackson as an archivist, rather than as a painter. While researching the AAA for an MFA project in the 1990s, I reached out to Ward, who maintained an office at the Guggenheim.

Ward generously met me for a long, schmoozy conversation about art, the Guggenheim, Hilla Rebay, and the AAA. We then began exchanging studio visits. I fondly remember an amusing moment during his first visit to my studio. At the time, I was painting the aerial landscape of the American West, where a rigid geometry had been imposed on the land through the post-Civil War Homestead Act. After carefully perusing my work, Ward sighed deeply, shook his head and offered: “Gail, I really admire your work—but, oh—that local color.”

For an artist with a deep commitment to rigorous geometry and non-referential color, it must have been hard to stomach my use of a natural palette. But Ward went on to propose me for AAA membership—and I developed an abiding respect for his exacting, yet exuberant work, and for his passion for art.

—GAIL GREGG



Gail Gregg
Kincaid
2003
encaustic on panel
36 × 36 inches



Nikolai Kasak, *Star of Positive and Negative Space*, 1949, painted wood and space, 27.5 × 23 inches
© The Estate of Nikolai Kasak, courtesy of Sammer Gallery LLC, Miami
Photo: Mariano Costa Peuser

NIKOLAI KASAK

(1917–1994)

Nikolai Kasak, born in Russia in 1917, was raised in what is now Belarus and studied figurative art in Warsaw. In 1945, to further his studies, he moved to Rome, where he first encountered the works of Mondrian, Kandinsky, and other modern Western artists. Thereafter, he produced innovative works that aligned with Mondrian's prophecy of the unification of painting, sculpture, and architecture and were specifically guided by Kasak's own *Physical Art* manifesto of 1945–46.

Kasak's constructions, begun in 1945, paralleled the works of his contemporaries in Argentina and Uruguay—Raúl Lozza, Rhod Rothfuss, Juan Melé—and were prescient of shaped paintings made in the 1960s and 70s, in particular, Frank Stella's *Polish Village* series. In 1950, Kasak was invited to join the Madí Art Movement based in Buenos Aires and exhibited with the group several times during the subsequent 11 years. In 1951, he departed Rome and was living in New York City by year's end. Kasak became a member of AAA in 1955 and remained an active member until his death in 1994.

—DANIEL G. HILL



Daniel G. Hill
Self-Obstructing Linkage
2022
MDF, polypropylene webbing,
zinc alloy buckles
24.4 × 36 × 69.5 inches



Lee Krasner, *Portrait in Green*, 1969, oil on canvas, 55.25 × 94.375 inches
© 2023 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Image courtesy Kasmin Gallery, New York City
Photo: Christopher Stach

LEE KRASNER

(1908–1984)

Lee Krasner became a member of American Abstract Artists in the late 1930s, 80 years before I joined the group. We both began as figurative painters and evolved into abstract artists. My transition happened in Brooklyn, Krasner's hometown, in the 1980s when I began processing the power and energy of her abstractions. I still look to Krasner for inspiration. In an interview, Krasner asserted, "The unconscious and conscious work in unison." That is spot on. To me that interplay is like a call-and-response in music. I start with intuitive mark making, pausing to look and question, with the goal being a dialogue between heart and mind.

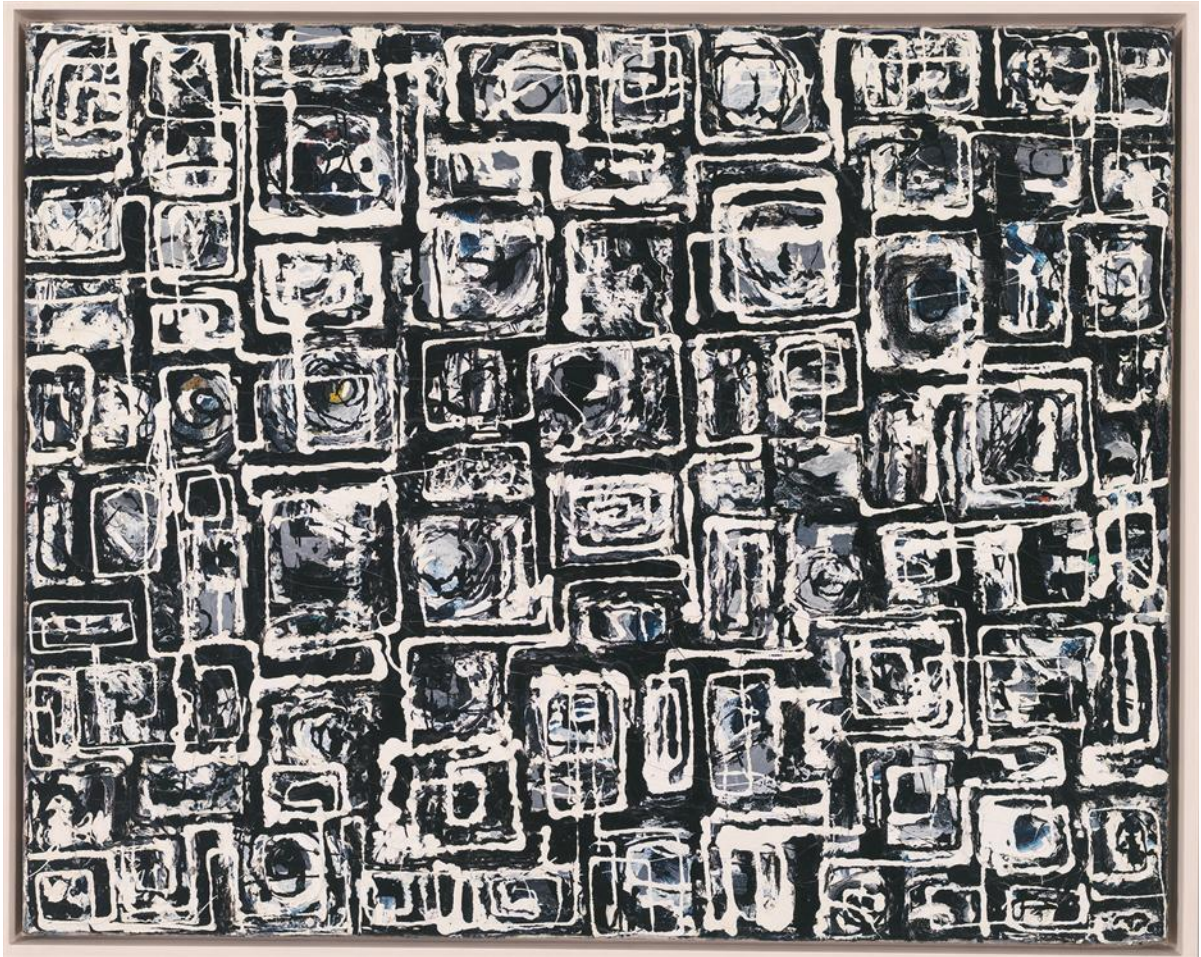
Krasner's 1969 oil, *Portrait in Green*, in the collection of The Pollock-Krasner Foundation, is a work that particularly speaks to me. In this large canvas, Krasner paints in aggressive, bold, charged gestures. I think that my painting, *Wound*, is executed in a similar spirit.

Krasner also said, "I like a canvas to breathe and be alive, being alive is the point." I could not agree more.

—PINKNEY HERBERT



Pinkney Herbert
Wound
2019
oil, mixed media on canvas
85 × 64 inches



Lee Krasner, *White Squares*, c. 1948, enamel and oil on canvas, overall: 24.062 × 30.125 inches
© 2023 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Whitney Museum of American Art/New York/USA, gift of Mr. and Mrs. B. H. Friedman
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LEE KRASNER

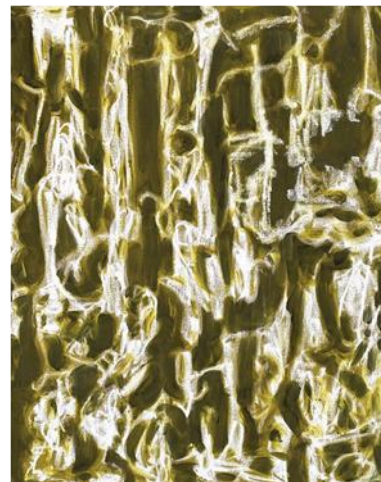
(1908–1984)

Lee Krasner produced 35 to 40 paintings between 1946 and 1949, which she titled *Little Image* paintings. In this work, she introduced what she called “non-composition,” where the action was not confined to the center but used corners and edges with equal weight. This non-composition read as a field.

Krasner used this all-over format as a loose grid resembling mosaics, but her marks and resultant shapes evoked natural forms. While she emphasized the two-dimensionality of the picture plane and her calligraphic shapes swayed and moved across the canvas, they also moved forward and backward, in an organic system of her own making. She acknowledged being influenced by automatism and used the continuous movement of drawing or writing as a personal kind of calligraphy. Her color, often a binary palette which in later years grew to be high-keyed, was both free of and built out from her marks and resulting forms.

With the *Little Image* paintings, Krasner became a non-objective painter. She continued to shift her approach to painting, never adhering to one signature style or medium.

—CLAIRE SEIDL



Claire Seidl
The Places You'll Go
2022
oil on linen
48 × 38 inches



Ibram Lassaw, *Arachne*, 1987, lithograph on Arches, 9.75 × 12.75 inches, edition no. 116/140
Courtesy of Julian Jackson

IBRAM LASSAW

(1913–2003)

In the mid-1930s, the young sculptor Ibram Lassaw invited a group of like-minded artists to gather in his studio to discuss and affirm their commitment to abstract art. At the time a homespun Regionalism dominated American art making, and the critical establishment, seeing abstraction as a European phenomenon, was hostile to American artists embracing it. These early meetings led to the founding of American Abstract Artists in 1936.

A prolific sculptor and graphic artist, Lassaw was a member of AAA for more than 50 years, and president from 1946-49. His work in steel or ink is characterized by a complex interweaving of pulsing, twining, linear elements suggestive of webs, maps, or calligraphy in space. I particularly respond to his personal sense of line, which seems to thicken or thin with the speed of thought, as in this lithograph, *Arachne*, included in the 50th anniversary portfolio published by AAA in 1987.

—JULIAN JACKSON



Julian Jackson
Cliff study 3
2022

ink and watercolor on paper
30 × 22 inches



Sol LeWitt, *Wall Drawing #380 (Figure C: Trapezoid; Figure D: Parallelogram)* at John Weber Gallery, New York City, 1982;
first drawn by Marthe Keller, Anthony Sansotta, John Shaw

© Estate of Sol LeWitt, 2023

Photo courtesy of Archiv Marzona, Berlin

SOL LEWITT

(1928–2007)

My early work was influenced by John Cage's chance methods of composition. In the 1970s, I made grids out of numerous pastel drawings in which I used chance to combine abstract landscape elements from my travels. When I moved to New York City in 1978, I learned about Sol LeWitt from Andrea Miller-Keller, my cousin, a curator and friend of Sol's. She knew I was already making art that had an affinity with LeWitt's work, so she introduced us. Happily, I was hired on the crew to produce his large-scale wall drawings according to his instructions. His concept was that an idea described in words can generate an artwork. Even if the artwork is erased, the instructions signed by the artist are the art itself. Such thinking allowed me to expand the art-generating system I had devised. It liberated me to make large-scale works without emulating the macho Abstract Expressionism of my art-school teachers. Detached from overt expressionism, but giving my body's reach and touch a voice, Sol's concept liberated me to expand the work almost infinitely.

—MARTHE KELLER



Marthe Keller
F'Aatrice a Casa
1995

acrylic on Sheetrock wall at
39 Walker Street, New York City
13 x 12.5 feet

Inset photo courtesy of Steven Harris



Vincent Longo, *Temenos*, 1978, etching, 29.875 × 22.25 inches
© Estate of Vincent Longo
Courtesy of Kate Davis

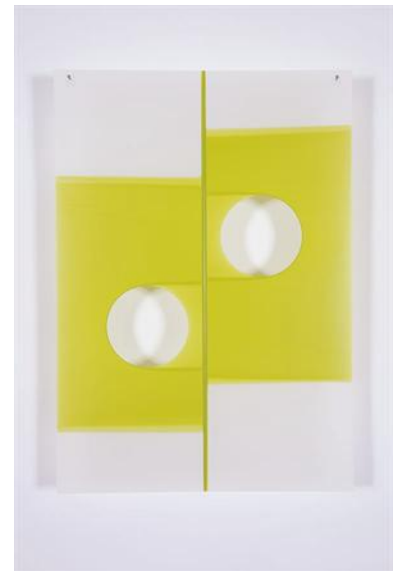
VINCENT LONGO

(1923–2017)

Vincent Longo's luminous paintings and innovative prints were an inspiration to me and so many of his students. We met at Hunter College where I studied printmaking with him in the 1980s. As I remember, he was always working while teaching—an etching plate percolating in the acid bath while he carved away on a woodblock. He taught us to understand the intrinsic qualities of etching and woodblock. Making prints was not about reproduction, but more about process, mark making, and experimentation. He didn't like to lecture nor was his teaching dogmatic. Rather, he reveled in his students' eccentricities.

Over time, Vinnie became not just a mentor but a colleague and friend. Late in life, while spending most of his time at his Amagansett home/studio, he told me that he missed the AAA group. I thought about how much community meant to him. He created community at the Hunter Printshop where students could work together, share ideas, and support one another. For me, friendships were forged that have lasted until today. We miss him too.

—MARY SCHILIRO



Mary Schiliro
Circuitous Dip
2012
acrylic paint on Mylar
30 × 18 inches



Katinka Mann, *Untitled*, n.d. (possibly 2018), iridescent epoxy resin with cutout, vinyl, 11 × 13 inches
Courtesy of Emily Berger
Both photos: Kevin Noble

KATINKA MANN

(1925–2022)

Katinka Mann was a painter/sculptor. Her work was inventive, complex, and wide-ranging, full of energy, color, and light. She worked in several mediums—including wood, aluminum, paint, resin, canvas, and color photography that often turned into sculpture—pushing them all forward. Mann cut and layered her materials, creating shapes that captured light and challenged depth perception. Sometimes her sculpture actually moved, sometimes it implied motion. A devotee of Taoism, she saw her work as a fusion of opposites and in the service of perceptual awareness. She endorsed flatness and yet defied it by setting up complicated, ambiguous relationships between depth and surface, foreground and background, positive and negative space, spatial and color relationships. Mann's irrepressible energy and joy in life and work is legendary and is present in her work. She was a mentor and a loving supporter of other artists.

I am deeply inspired by Mann's example and her aesthetic interest in creating light and energy from color, fusing opposites, challenging and encouraging perceptual awareness, and connecting with viewers of her art through materials. She lived a long and fruitful life and is deeply missed.

—EMILY BERGER



Emily Berger
Summer Night
2021
oil on birch panel
40 × 30 inches



Alice Trumbull Mason, *Bearings with Charted Yellow*, 1946, oil on Masonite, 28 × 23 inches
Private collection
© 2023 Emily Mason | Alice Trumbull Mason Foundation
Photo: Gavin Ashworth

ALICE TRUMBULL MASON

(1904–1971)

My grandmother was the painter Alice Trumbull Mason, whose work only became widely recognized after she died. I remember her as a loving grandmother who famously told my mother to “keep her head” and remember, “Art first!” when she was being courted by my father, who was a landscape painter.



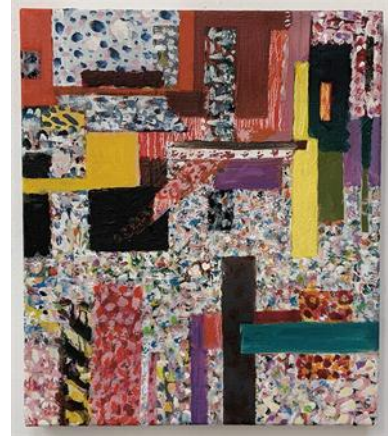
Cecily Kahn and her “Granny,”
Alice Trumbull Mason

She fervently believed pure abstraction should not represent anything other than itself. An inventive painter, she worked mostly with primary colors and a variety of grays that gave her paintings a sort of New England reticence.

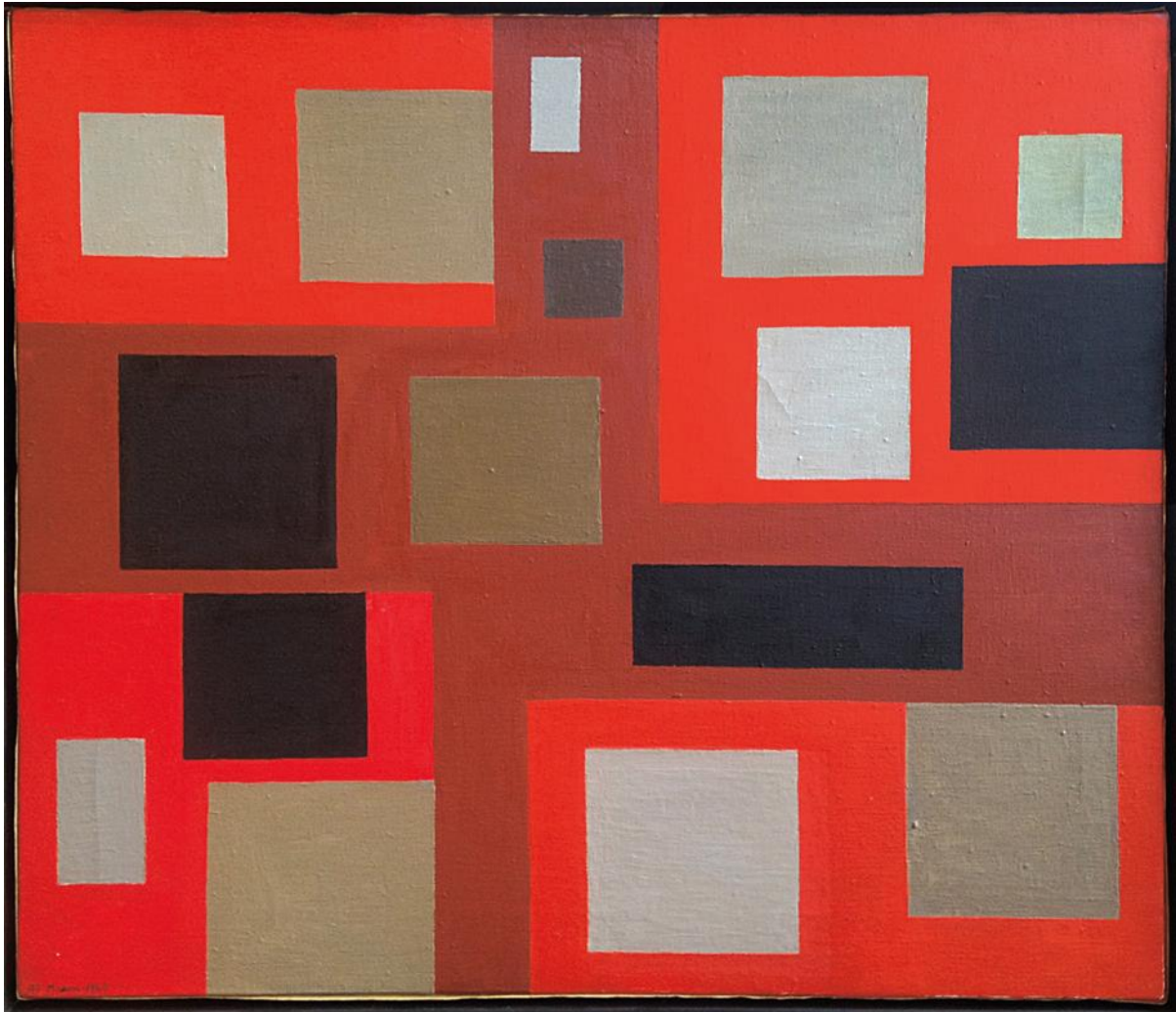
My father arranged for a show of my grandmother’s work at the Hansa Gallery in 1956, but during her lifetime she never had gallery representation. Membership in American Abstract Artists, where she served as treasurer, secretary, and then president, offered her a community of like-minded artists.

After she died, I helped clean my grandmother’s paintings with cotton swabs. Luckily, most of her paintings were small! A few years later The Whitney Museum held an exhibition of her work, and it looked as clear and strong as her ideas.

—CECILY KAHN



Cecily Kahn
Swipe
2023
oil on linen
14 × 12 inches



Alice Trumbull Mason, *#1 Towards a Paradox*, 1969, oil on canvas, 19 × 22 inches

© 2023 Emily Mason | Alice Trumbull Mason Foundation

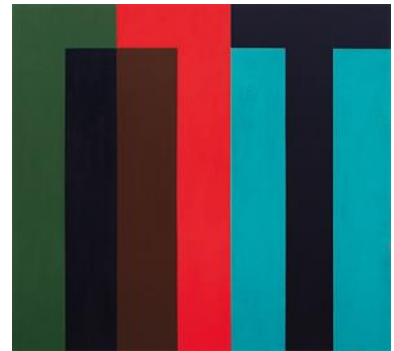
Courtesy of Emily Mason and Alice Trumbull Mason Foundation and Washburn Gallery, New York City

ALICE TRUMBULL MASON

(1904–1971)

Mason's rhythmic use of color brings an agile balance to her geometry. She limits her palette: Warm to cool grays morph from blue to green and gold to silver on red ground. Though characterized by a high-minded sense of plastic abstraction, a stated and all-important endeavor in her life's work, Mason's small paintings are surprisingly complex. Red corner squares delineate a negative cruciform shape in Venetian reddish-brown. A subtle chromatic shift in the lower left red square, bluer than the vermillion squares anchoring the other three corners, is unexpected. Black rectangles accent and pierce the picture plane but also appear to hover over it. The entire field feels energized by the pulsing push-and-pull of variously sized quadrangles, infusing measured action and musicality into the overall architecture. As figure and ground become interchangeable, the painting becomes a conundrum, perpetually enigmatic and indefinable. Mason's range and her economy of means are admirable. Aware of the infinite expression abstract painting can convey, she pushes against the boundaries of apparent simplicity.

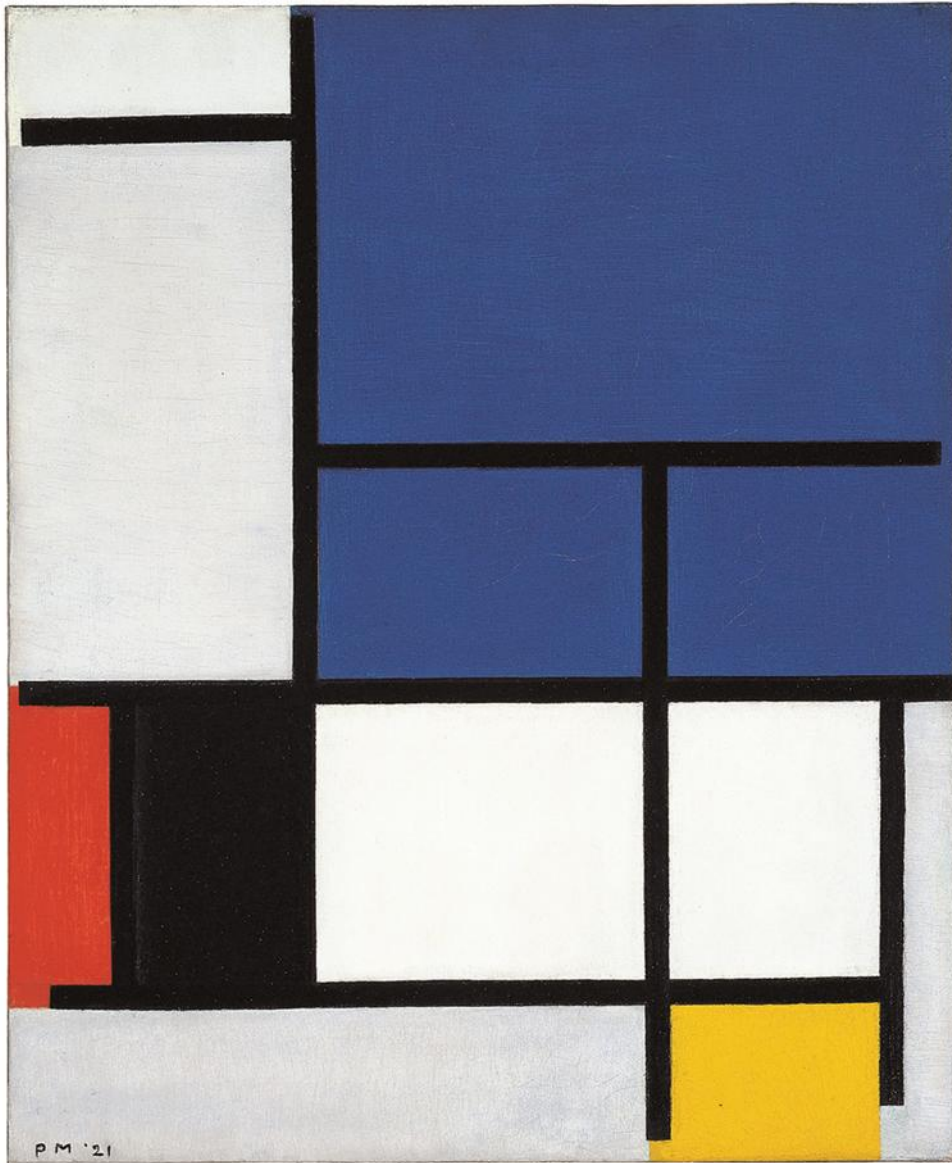
—KIM UCHIYAMA



Kim Uchiyama
Megaron 3
2022

oil on canvas
66 × 72 inches

Photo: Kevin Noble



Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Large Blue Plane, Red, Black, Yellow, and Gray*, 1921, oil on canvas, 24 × 18 inches
© Mondrian/Holtzman Trust

PIET MONDRIAN

(1872–1944)

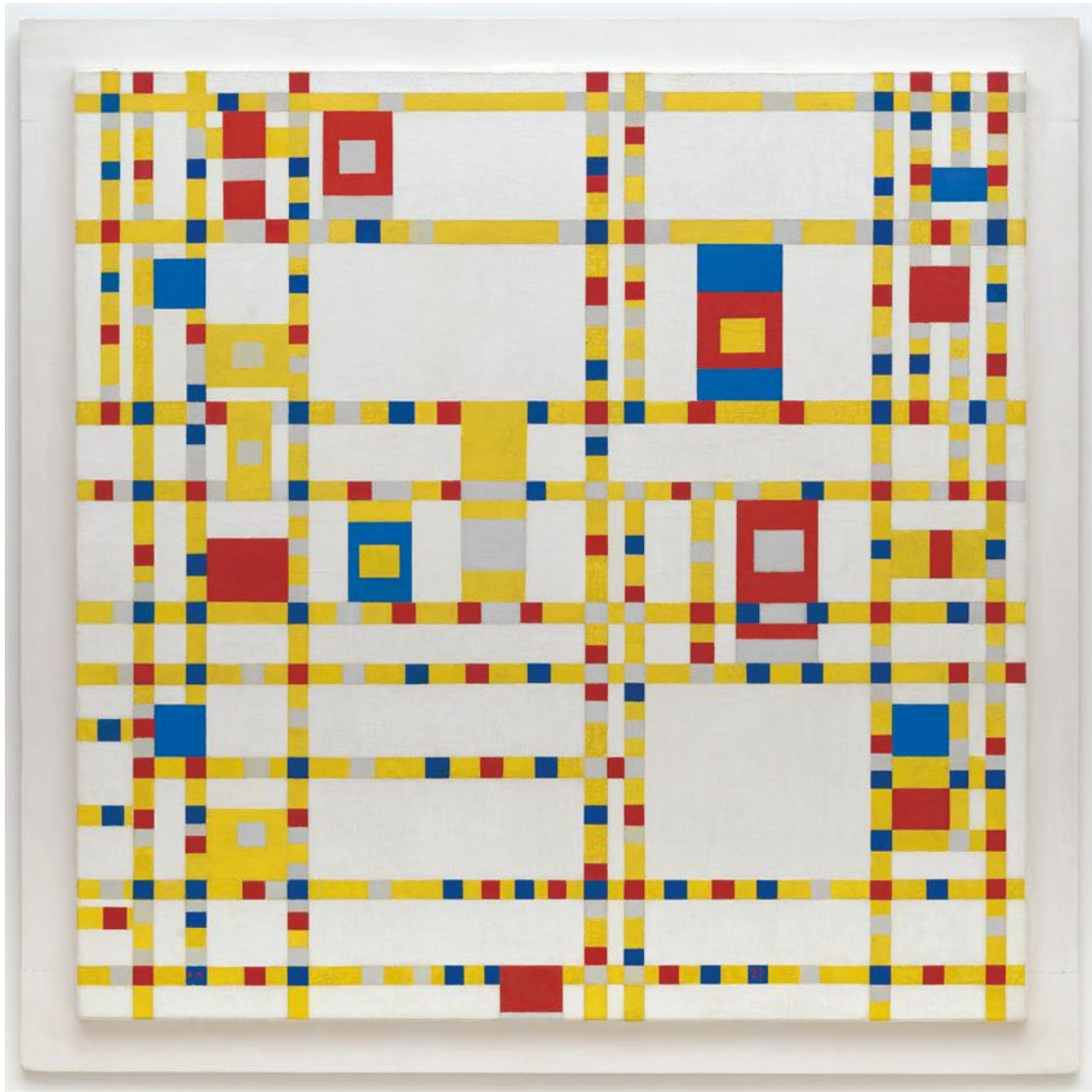
Growing up, I lived in southeastern Connecticut in a mid-century modern house that had been custom designed by a local architect. Mondrian's *Composition with Large Blue Plane, Red, Black, Yellow, and Gray* hung over the split-level staircase. My family was crazy for Modern Art, especially anything related to Mondrian. My two sisters and I had little Mondrian dresses, my favorite board game was Masterpiece and, looking back, it may have been inevitable that I ended up majoring in art history when I went to Tufts. Alas, that painting was not an original. It was a copy my father had made on Masonite, sized up to six by four feet to fit the wall above the stairs. He was a pretty good amateur painter and nicely captured Mondrian's dull surface and small, flat brush strokes. Eventually, he hung one of my paintings over the stairs and put the ersatz Mondrian in the basement, where it succumbed to flooding. When he died, my sisters and I inherited a couple of his Paul Klees and a Pablo Picasso.

—SHARON BUTLER



Sharon Butler
Stacked 2 (July 16 and 17 2019)
2022

diptych oil on linen
72 × 48 inches



Piet Mondrian, *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, 1942-43, oil on canvas, 50 × 50 inches

© The Mondrian Trust. Collection: The Museum of Modern Art

Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY

PIET MONDRIAN

(1872–1944)

Nearly a decade after my work shifted away from invented landscape toward abstraction, I immersed myself in the paintings of Mondrian, a seminal figure of early 20th-century art. His work appealed to me because even at its most austere, the geometry of his compositions was always rhythmic and energized. Within the parameters of a system comprised of networks of vertical and horizontal black lines and a very limited palette, Mondrian created compositions that pulsed with vitality and joy. While titles of paintings from the 1920s–30s (e.g., *Composition in White, Black, and Red*) eliminated language-driven associations in support of a universal visual experience, the work itself reflected the liveliness of the human spirit. After Mondrian abandoned the black-lined grid, what remained were small blocks of primary colors set in perpetual motion and paintings with titles that referenced the highly charged culture of New York. Nowhere is that more evident than in Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* from 1942–43. Between 2009 and 2013, I painted several iterations of a series that I titled *Broadway*.

—TAMAR ZINN



Tamar Zinn
Broadway 96
2012
oil on wood panel
24 × 24 inches



Betty Parsons, *Oglala*, 1979, acrylic on wood, 31 × 33 × 16 inches
© 2023 Betty Parsons and William P. Rayner Foundation
Collection of Beth Rudin DeWoody, New York
Courtesy of Alexander Gray and Associates, New York City

BETTY PARSONS

(1900–1982)

I knew of Betty Parsons through her New York City gallery and the artists she showed, abstractionists like Adolph Gottlieb, Hedda Sterne, Barnett Newman, and Agnes Martin. I didn't know that she herself was an artist. That changed when I saw a small geometric abstraction of hers on wood at the 2012 Armory Show.

Although she never exhibited in her own gallery, which ran from 1946-1982, Parsons did show elsewhere. At a time when the road was uphill for women, she was not only an influential dealer, but an exhibiting painter and sculptor. And her work was good! She painted bold abstractions whose compositional elements found their way into her sculpture, which was constructed largely from found wood and beach detritus.

In 1913, Parsons visited the Armory Show and was inspired by what she saw. I love that when I visited the Armory Show just about a century later, I saw Parsons' work and had the same response to it as she'd had to Modern Art: "It was exciting, full of color and life."

—JOANNE MATTERA



Joanne Mattera

Tutto 16

2022

acrylic on canvas

48 × 36 inches

Courtesy of Marcia Wood Gallery, Atlanta



Leo Rabkin, *Untitled*, 1982, collage on embossed papers, 11 × 7 inches
Courtesy of Jane Logemann

LEO RABKIN

(1919–2015)

Merrill Wagner introduced me to Leo in the 1980s at a public swimming pool. Leo was eager to learn about new artists. Our friendship grew into dinners, birthdays, exchanging works and ideas. Leo's embossed papers, fragments of colored cloth, wires, shapes turning on the wall with shadows were magic. He was a great inspiration. An enthusiast and past president of the American Abstract Artists, he always pointed to the importance of the group being democratic.

In 1985, I organized and curated the show, *Diversity-New York Artists*, for the University of Rhode Island with a catalogue essay by Aimée Brown Price. For the catalog I asked the 21 artists to submit any two pages of writings, drawings, or photographs.

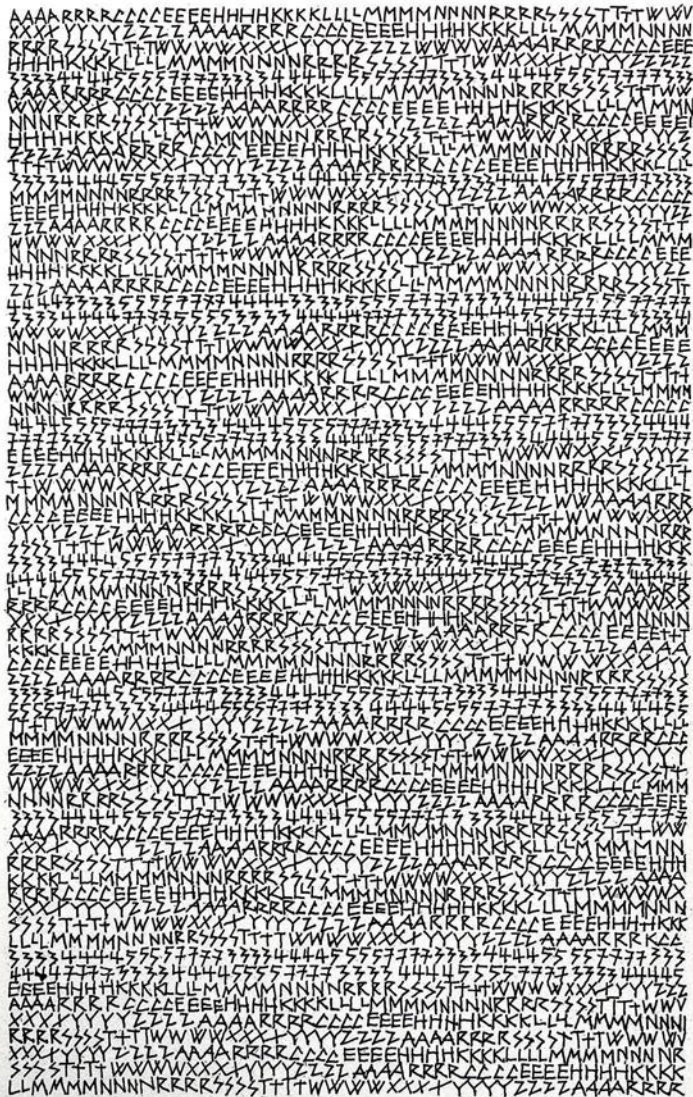
Leo wrote: "Wild flowers speak beautiful words of the intricate, their 'afterward' seeds murmur even more miniscule and increasingly complicated. Such miniatures cannot be small enough calls for anticipation, imagination, possession my favorites—thistle and milkweed!"

In my current work, the black drawings have their own logic. I apply watercolor and respond with pencil lines.

—JANE LOGEMANN



Jane Logemann
Poem 11
2023
watercolor, pencil,
black german etch paper
12 × 10 inches



Beatrice Riese, *Rimac*, 1997, lithograph on Somerset, edition no. 28/100, 9.75 × 12.75 inches; published by AAA in the 60th anniversary portfolio
Courtesy of Julian Jackson

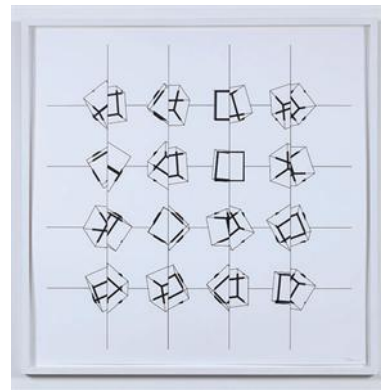
BEATRICE RIESE

(1917–2004)

In the mid 1990s, I was contacted by Beatrice Riese, who had seen my work at an exhibition. She told me that she was interested in my work and would like to meet and invite me to join American Abstract Artists, where she was president at that time. After visiting each other's studios multiple times, I joined the group, and we became good friends. We shared many wonderful and interesting discussions about our different approaches to inventing and drawing signs, creating a sort of visual language. We discussed trading pieces of our art but that did not happen, because unexpectedly in early 2004, Beatrice died.

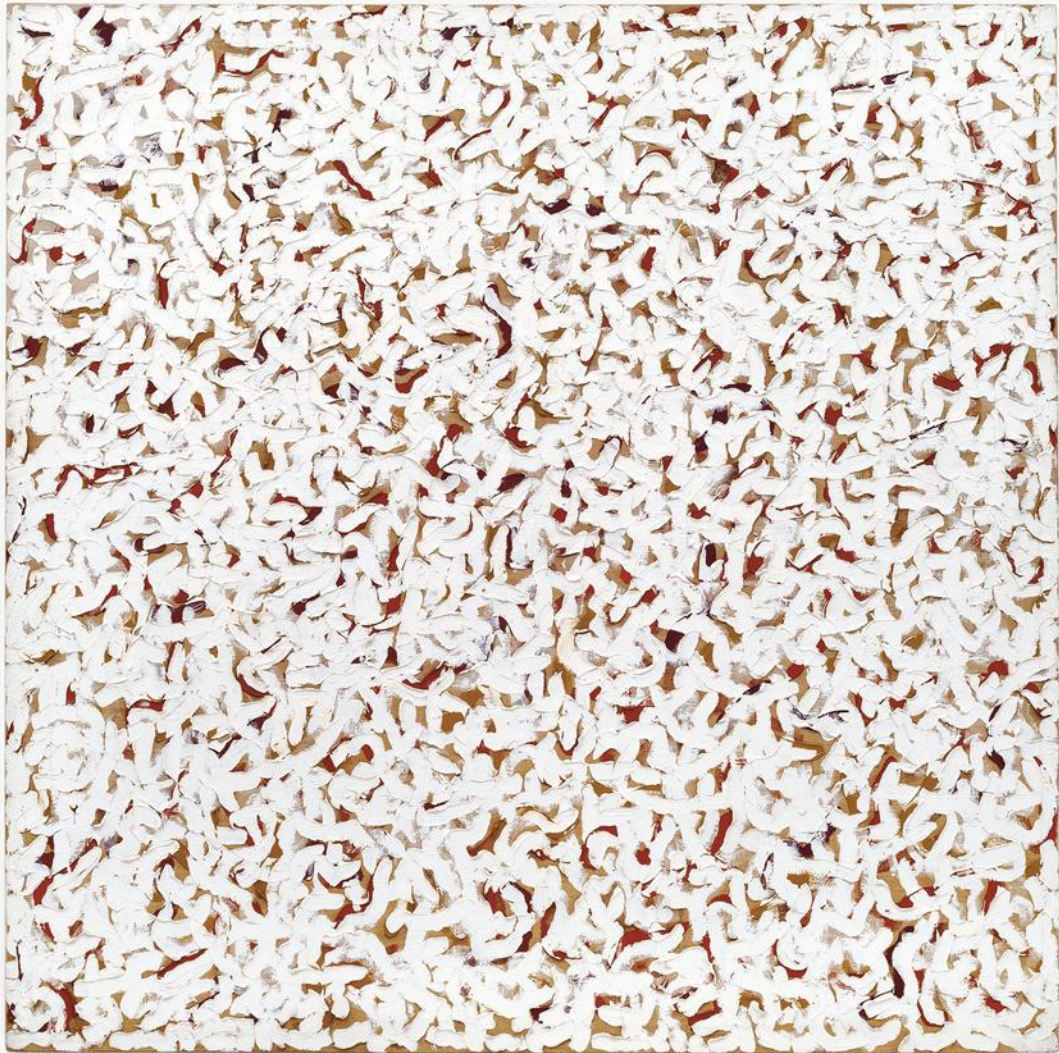
A friend with whom she regularly toured the galleries in Chelsea contacted me to say Beatrice had left a note to him, that for an already planned show at A.I.R. Gallery, in which women invite their favorite male artist, she had chosen me. The exhibition, which became *Mixed Company: Women Choose Men*, opened at A.I.R. on June 22, 2004. I felt so honored and stunned by her wishes that even today I remember her kindness.

—MANFRED MOHR



Manfred Mohr
P-197-PZ
1977-87

plotter drawing on paper
29 × 29 inches



Robert Ryman, *Untitled [Background Music]*, c. 1962, oil on stretched linen canvas, 69.25 × 69.25 inches
© The Greenwich Collection

ROBERT RYMAN

(1930–2019)

When asked to write a short essay about a previous member of AAA, I immediately thought of my friend, Robert Ryman.

Bob Ryman, Bob Yasuda and I used to meet most Mondays at the Village Vanguard to hear the Mel Lewis 17-piece big band. Ryman had originally come to New York to be a jazz saxophone player, and besides painting, the three of us had the love of jazz in common. We would arrive early, spend some time talking before the first set, and then leave to go home so as to be at the studio working the next morning, energized by the music.

My connection with Bob's painting is the love of what oil paint can do physically. Sometimes I think my interest is the paint itself and the mark making through the sculptural qualities of oil paint. We both have spent a lifetime working with a very limited color palette. He had basically one; I have basically four with no feeling of limitations. We are both romantic painters.

—JUDITH MURRAY



Judith Murray
Dark Before Light
1998
oil on stretched linen canvas
96 × 108 inches



Robert Ryman, *Untitled*, c. 1960, oil on canvas, 58.75 × 58.75 inches

© The Greenwich Collection

Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio

ROBERT RYMAN

(1930–2019)

Below is a conversation I had with the painter Robert Ryman several years ago.

“Mr. Ryman, we have some things in common: Both of us have our birthday on Memorial Day, May 30th.”

Mr. Ryman said, “Yes, we used to have a parade on our birthday and it was a national holiday, and schools were closed. Then they changed the rule to the last Monday of the month to celebrate.”

Mr. Ryman and I both agreed that we had gotten cheated out of a parade.

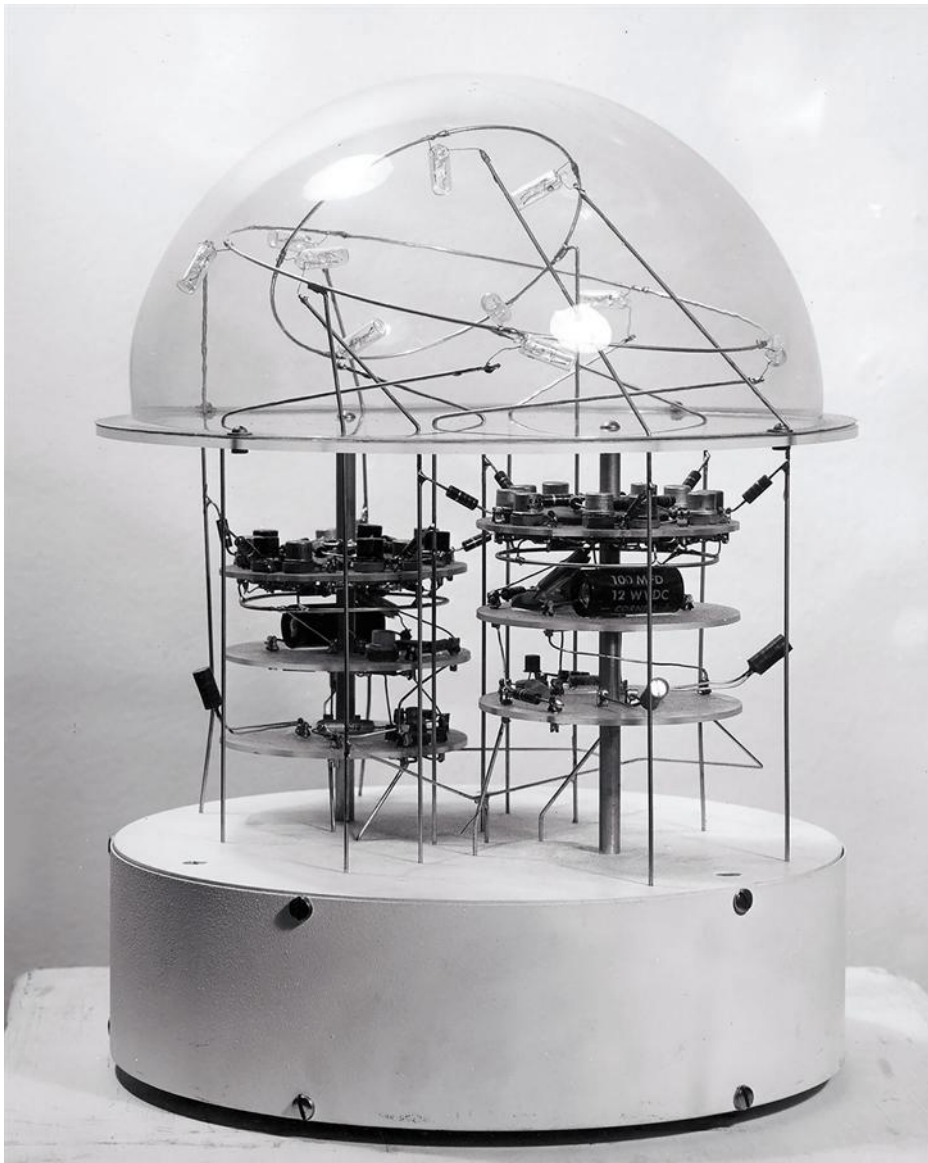
My full name is Edward Francis Shalala, named after my father’s brothers, Edward and Francis, killed during WWII. Though I never met them, I think of them both, and especially on Memorial Day, a national holiday to remember our country’s fallen heroes.

Now I’ll think of Robert Ryman on May 30th, our birthday. Especially when our birthday falls on the new Monday Memorial Day, I’ll think of the parade.

—EDWARD SHALALA



Edward Shalala
Fort Totten, Queens, New York, Untitled
2020
#10 canvas thread
45 x 50 feet; documentary photo
11 x 14 inches



James Seawright, *Opus 3*, 1965, two circles, incandescent lamps

JAMES SEAWRIGHT

(1936–2022)

The first time I met Jim Seawright was in his Soho loft over 25 years ago, when I interviewed for a position as a visiting lecturer at Princeton. I'd been following his work since the late 1960s; then I was a young artist living in the South and searching for novel ways of artistic expression. Jim was a prominent artist in the Experiments in Art and Technology era, and I was fascinated by the images of his work that I saw, mostly in magazines. The work was exciting, but the photographs lacked any sense of process, texture, and scale. Jim's electronic light sculpture, *Dome*, which I saw in reproduction, inspired my first sculpture, *Trove*. In 2018, I produced the traveling exhibition, *Mutual Muses*, which traced the lifelong collaboration between Jim and his wife, Mimi Garrard, a dancer and choreographer. This gave me an opportunity to see the work firsthand and learn much more about Jim's life and art, including his electronic music. His embrace of new technologies in art making inspires me to this day.

—CREIGHTON MICHAEL



Creighton Michael
Trove
1973–74
watch parts, acrylic, light bulbs
Plexiglas, dome
9 × 12 × 12 inches
Courtesy of Mimi Garrard



Esphyr Slobodkina, *The Red L Abstraction*, c. 1940s, gouache on paper board, 6.75 × 8.75 inches
Courtesy of the Slobodkina Foundation

ESPHYR SLOBODKINA

(1908–2002)

In the fall of 1996, the art dealer Gary Snyder took me to meet Esphyr Slobodkina, a Russian-American artist and a founding member of AAA, at her home in Glen Head, Long Island. I had long admired both her paintings and *Caps for Sale*, a still popular children's book she wrote and illustrated that was first published in 1940. Although the artist was in her mid-eighties when we visited, she bustled energetically about the apartment showing us paintings from the mid-1940s through the early 1990s. She also took us into her dressmaking studio in the back, where a hat in progress sat atop a mannequin. Slobodkina's paintings combine clearly defined biomorphic and geometric abstract shapes, some of which derive from patterns she used in her lifelong dressmaking and millinery work. Her color is rich but muted and her touch light and unfussy. Her compositions, which rely implicitly on the modernist grid, hint at the artist's training in architecture and engineering. To this day, I am inspired by the rigor and charm found in her paintings.

—LAURIE FENDRICH



Laurie Fendrich
Bubbles in My Head
2023

acrylic gouache on clayboard
20 × 16 inches



Lynn Umlauf, *October 24, 1978*, pastel, acrylic, paper, canvas, 53 × 41 inches
Courtesy of Zürcher Gallery, New York/Paris

LYNN UMLAUF

(1942–2022)

Like Lynn Umlauf, color is my subject, and the interplay of color and shape is central to the work.

I respond to the way Umlauf used the negative space between shapes (which can either be the wall itself or areas of the shaped canvas left unworked) to formulate the composition. I also share her concern for integrating color and surface. Before applying the pastel pigment and medium, Umlauf would sand, erase, and cut the paper, which adds variation and depth to the surface. Similarly I fire glazes so that the color is fused with the clay body.

Umlauf's choice of color also draws me to her work. The color is considered yet open to interpretation, which makes one want to look for longer periods of time. I experience her canvas and paper pieces from the 1970s as a dialog between painting and sculpture; they extend into the room and are not defined by the contours. Light defines their forms in space. How light interacts with form and color is also my subject.

—SONITA SINGWI



Sonita Singwi
Green Corner
2022
glazed ceramic
9.25 × 9.5 × 6.75 inches



Lynn Umlauf, *Plexis*, 2018, Plexiglas, wire, 54 × 24 inches
Courtesy of Zürcher Gallery, New York/Paris

LYNN UMLAUF

(1942–2022)

In Key West, West Martello Tower ruin, 2011: *Angeline* is the first sculpture by Lynn Umlauf that took hold of me. It is a free-form layered assemblage of colorful, thin Plexiglas shapes, intertwined with copper and steel mesh, topped with a light bulb—all held together with wire and suspended from the ceiling. The light bulb pushes light down through the center, past the yellow, green, and red Plexiglas, hitting the floor with a soft blue glow.

On the Bowery in Manhattan, 2018: East light emanates from the grand arched windows, bathing Lynn's loft with a soft, natural luminosity. Free-form assemblages are suspended from the high ceiling, and the south wall displays drawings and Plexiglas constructions.

Plexis demands attention: a fearless layering of fluorescent pink, yellow, and blue Plexiglas sheet, cut and honed into four personal shapes that overlap and influence each other. It is this essential act of cutting the materials down to reveal what they will become.

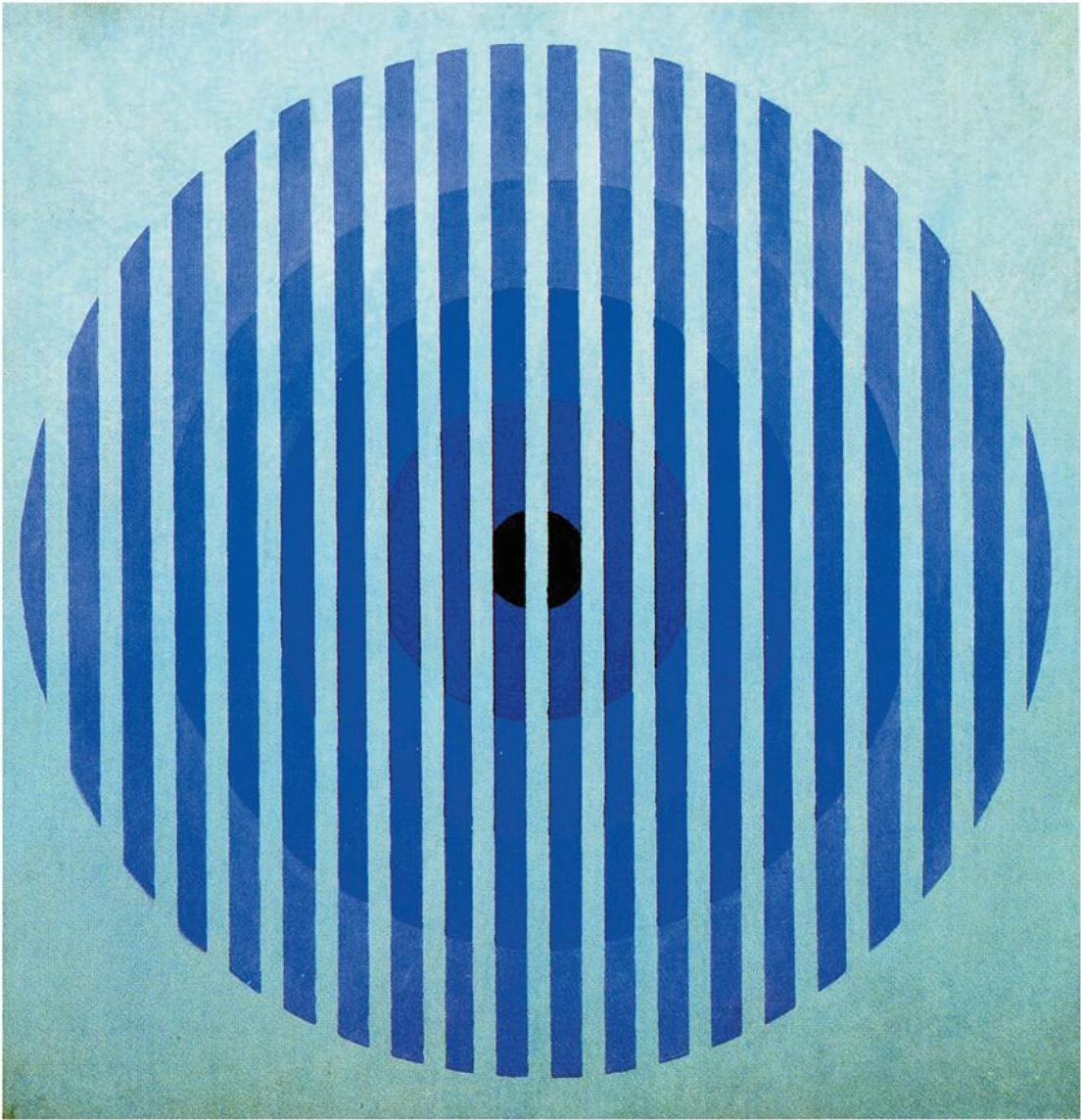
Thank you, Lynn.

—VERA VASEK



Vera Vasek
Why
2023

epoxy resin, mica, stainless steel screw
28 × 19 × 7 inches



Mac Wells, *Lavender Blue #2*, 1965, acrylic with oil glaze on Masonite, 37.5 × 36 inches
Courtesy of Susanna J. Fichera Fine Art, Brunswick, Maine

MAC WELLS

(1925–2009)

Mac Wells's *The Graded Value Series* is a remarkable body of work that goes beyond the concerns of formal, geometric expression. *Lavender Blue #2*, which is a part of this series, is a symmetrical circular motif with each circle painted in progressively lighter gradations of blue. With prolonged observation, we detect that the entirety of the color impression is sensed as a visual emotional quality. Crucially, it is intensified by its negative after-image—a bright orange. This motif suggests the sensation of sight—or perhaps the sun—a flickering yellow orange light hovering above the blue painted surface.

Soft-spoken, a devotee of Zen Buddhism, and interested in all matters of the mind, Wells was persistently attentive to meditation. His work locates us in a luminous space, experienced as a transformation; it momentarily turns the ordinary into serene rapture.

—GABRIELE EVERTZ



Gabriele Evertz
End/Begin
2018
acrylic on canvas
72 × 72 inches

==== DOROTHEA
THE AND LEO

RABKIN

FOUNDATION

====

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As with every publication, the labor that goes into producing a beautifully designed volume like this is largely unseen. It is a pleasure, then, to thank the 32 members of American Abstract Artists who contributed to the project and the eight-member Publications Committee that brought the project from concept to completion. You will see the editorial contributors listed in the Table of Contents and the Publications Committee members in our letter, both at the front of this volume.

Sincere thanks are in order to the individuals and entities that granted permission for historic and archival images to be reproduced: the estates of Siri Berg, John Goodyear, Ward Jackson, Nikolai Kasak, Sol LeWitt, and Vincent Longo; the family of Katinka Mann; Mimi Garrard for James Seawright; the Will Barnet Foundation; The Greenwich Collection representing Robert Ryman; the Emily Mason | Alice Trumbull Mason Foundation; the Betty Parsons and William P. Rayner Foundation; the Pollock-Krasner Foundation; the Slobodkina Foundation; the Mondrian Trust, The Museum of Modern Art, New York City; the Whitney Museum of American Art and SCALA/Art Resource NY; Artists Rights Society (ARS); VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

Additional thanks go to the galleries that provided images and facilitated permissions. In New York City: Berry Campbell Gallery, Fergus McCaffrey, Findlay Galleries, Alexander Gray and Associates, Kasmin Gallery, Spanierman Modern, Richard Taittinger Gallery, and Washburn Gallery; Zürcher Gallery, New York/Paris; Marcia Wood Gallery, Atlanta; Sammer Gallery LLC, Miami; and Susanna J. Fichera Fine Art, Brunswick, Maine. Jim Osman, Joanne Freeman, and Daniel G. Hill—President, Vice President, and Secretary, respectively, of American Abstract Artists—contributed their time and expertise to the meetings and copious correspondence that helped bring this project to fruition. In spreads that pair the work of 26 past AAA members with the words and work of 32 current members, Karen Freedman complemented density of information with an airiness of layout, producing a design that is as much a pleasure to read as to view.

Finally, with deepest gratitude we thank the Dorothea and Leo Rabkin Foundation for the generous grant that made this journal's publication possible.

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