



SPECIFIC FORMS



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curated by Saul Ostrow

Edward Avedisian, Richard Anuszkiewicz, Darby Bannard, Billy Al Bengston, Judy Chicago, Gene Davis, Thomas Downing, Marcia Hafif, Al Held, Ray Parker, Larry Poons, Leon Polk Smith, and George Sugarman.

January 23 – March 7, 2020

LORETTA HOWARD  
GALLERY

521 WEST 26 STREET NEW YORK 10001 212.695.0164 LORETTAHOWARD.COM



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What comes to be thought of as the dominant practices of an era, do not develop in isolation, nor are they the product of a single concerted effort or cause. In the wake of Abstract Expressionism, numerous artists sought to redirect abstract art's disposition. Many of the artists included in this exhibition were significant contributors to the debates of the late 1950s and 1960s. However, in the 1970s, the canons of Color Field (post-Painterly Abstraction), Op Art, Minimalism and Pop came to represent the period, their practices appeared aberrant or deviant.

The works included in Specific Forms have their origin in the opposition to the painterly indulgence of the mid-1950s by Abstract Expressionism's second generation. In reaction to this, there was a general resolve that what was needed to sustain abstract art was a focus on its specificity. Yet, this was not as

simple as it sounds, because although it was agreed that this specificity had to be in accord with the characteristics that defined its form — how best to articulate such elements obviously was open to interpretation.

Most notably what became the two dominant views — though not necessarily definitive — were associated with the young artist and critic, Donald Judd and the senior art critic, Clement Greenberg. Both camps sought to do away with expressivity and subjectivity by severing abstract art's roots in spiritualism and existentialism. In the place of these, they promoted self-referentiality as art's principle content.

Amid the dialogue, various artists flourished who sought to bypass the orthodoxies and literalism that would eventually come to define both Minimalism and Color Field. These artists, while in principle adhered to the two dominant doctrines, investigated art's formal qualities of surface, color, and process by perversely stressing non-relational compositions, patterns and opticality. Avoiding reductivism and essentialism, they employed Formalism's dictums of flatness, anti-illusionism, and materiality to antithetical ends.

Artists such as Edward Avedisian, Thomas Downing, Leon Polk Smith, Judy Chicago, and Richard Anuszkiewicz, for instance engaged the habits of cognition and optics, to make images that appear to rotate, pulsate, float, flip-flop back and forth, or produce after-images. On the other hand, Marcia Hafif, Darby Bannard, Al Held, Ray Parker and Larry Poons without being mimetic verge on referencing objects in the world. Likewise, George Sugarman in his sculpture literalizes their approach by producing incongruous forms. Billy Al Bengtson, who is from the West Coast, is a bit of an outlier, achieving his objectives by literally combining the emblematic and the abstract.

Regardless of their approach, each of these artists produced images and optical effects that are unstable and irregular. In doing so they perversely use their anomalies to offer-up as a type of specificity that is intrinsic to the irregular. Their approach to producing specific forms reveals abstract art's identity to be more nuanced and diverse — consequently, when these works are placed into the canon of the 1970s, they become disruptive.

Saul Ostrow  
New York 2020



BILLY AL BENGSTON  
Andy, 1961  
Acrylic on canvas  
36 x 36 inches

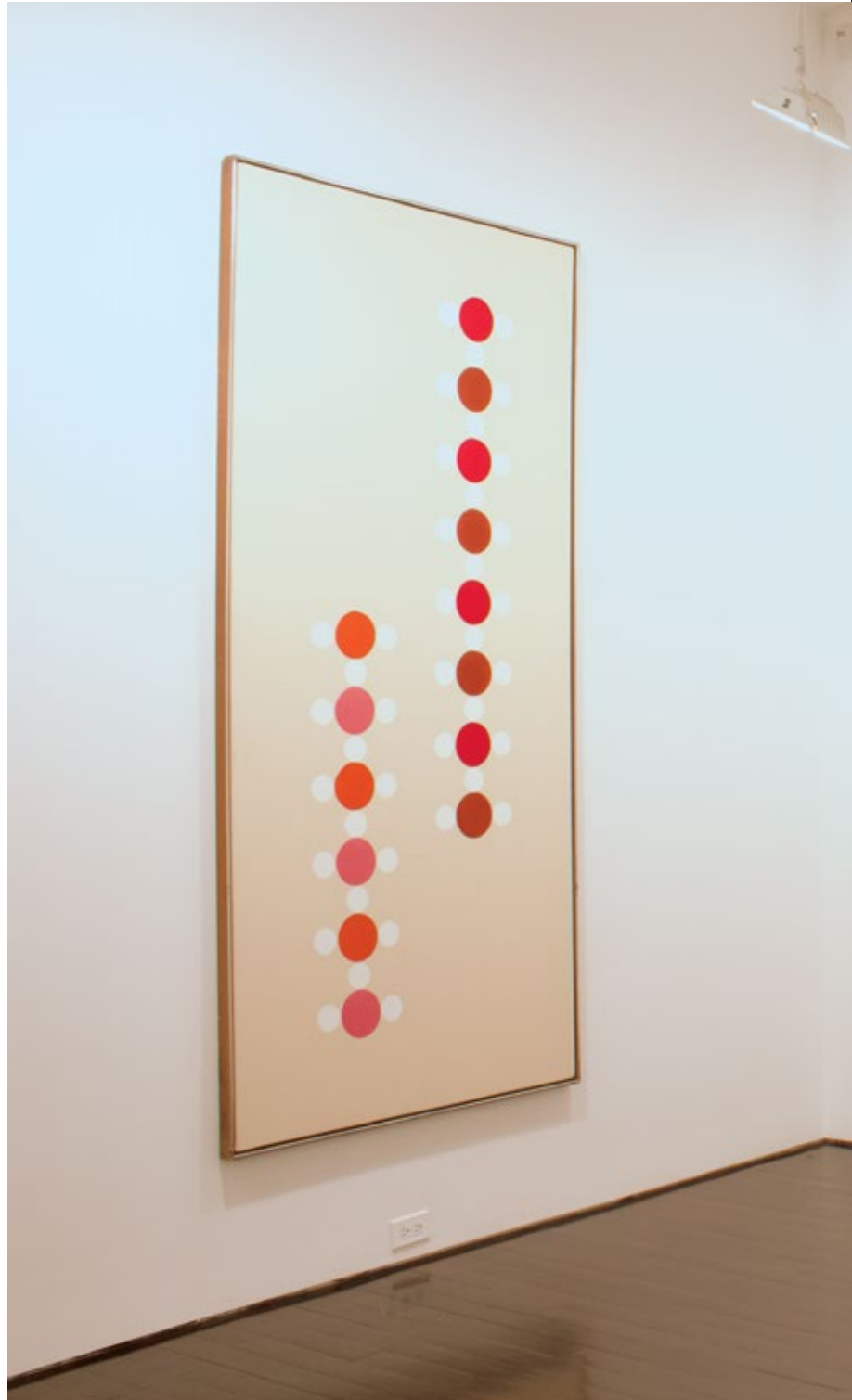
THOMAS DOWNING  
Position 2-13-75, 1975  
Acrylic on canvas  
87 x 40 inches



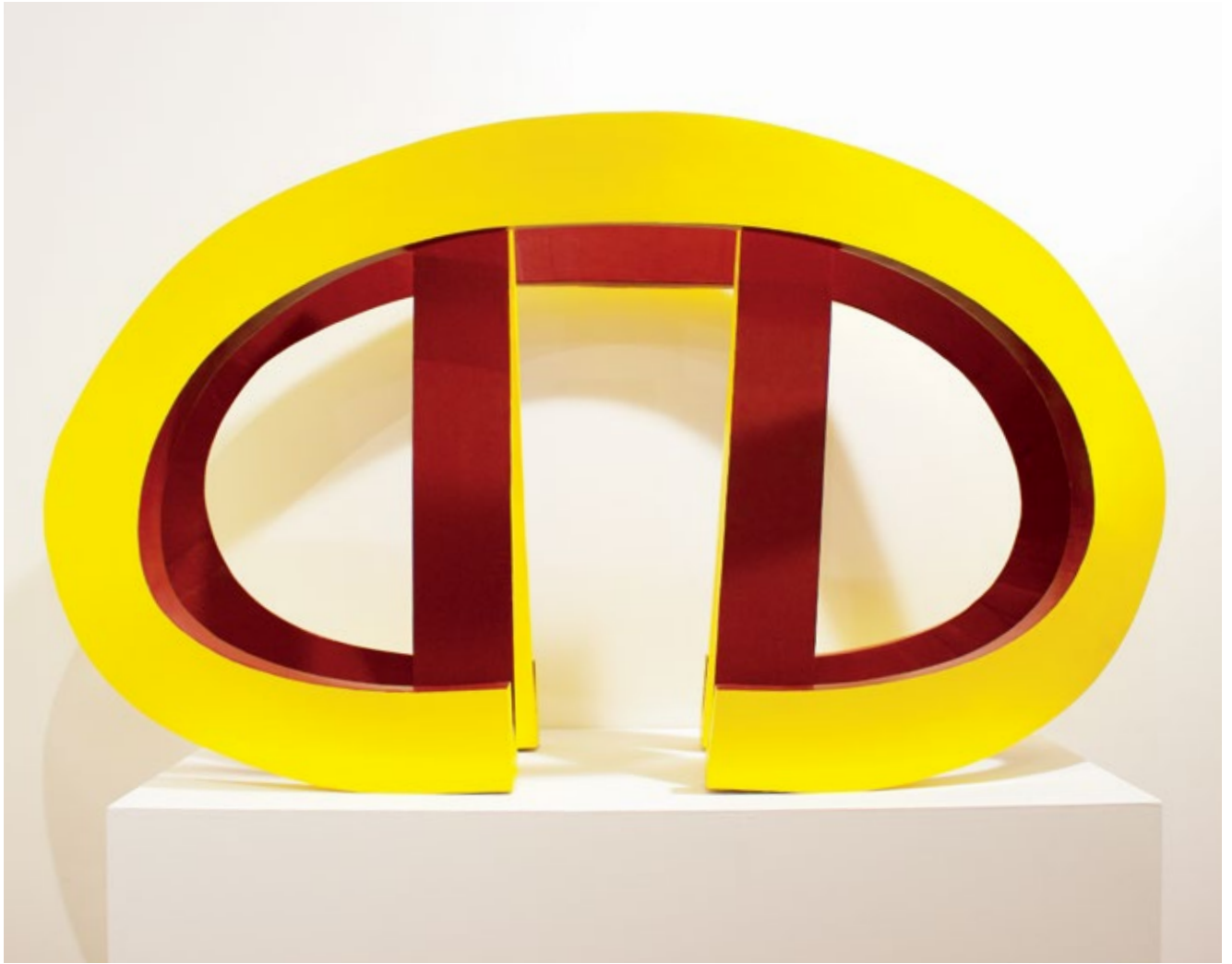


AL HELD  
60 S-2 AP, 1964-1965  
Ink and acrylic on paper mounted on board  
15 x 39 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches

far right  
LARRY POONS  
Rock and Roll, 1958  
Oil on canvas  
48 x 48 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches







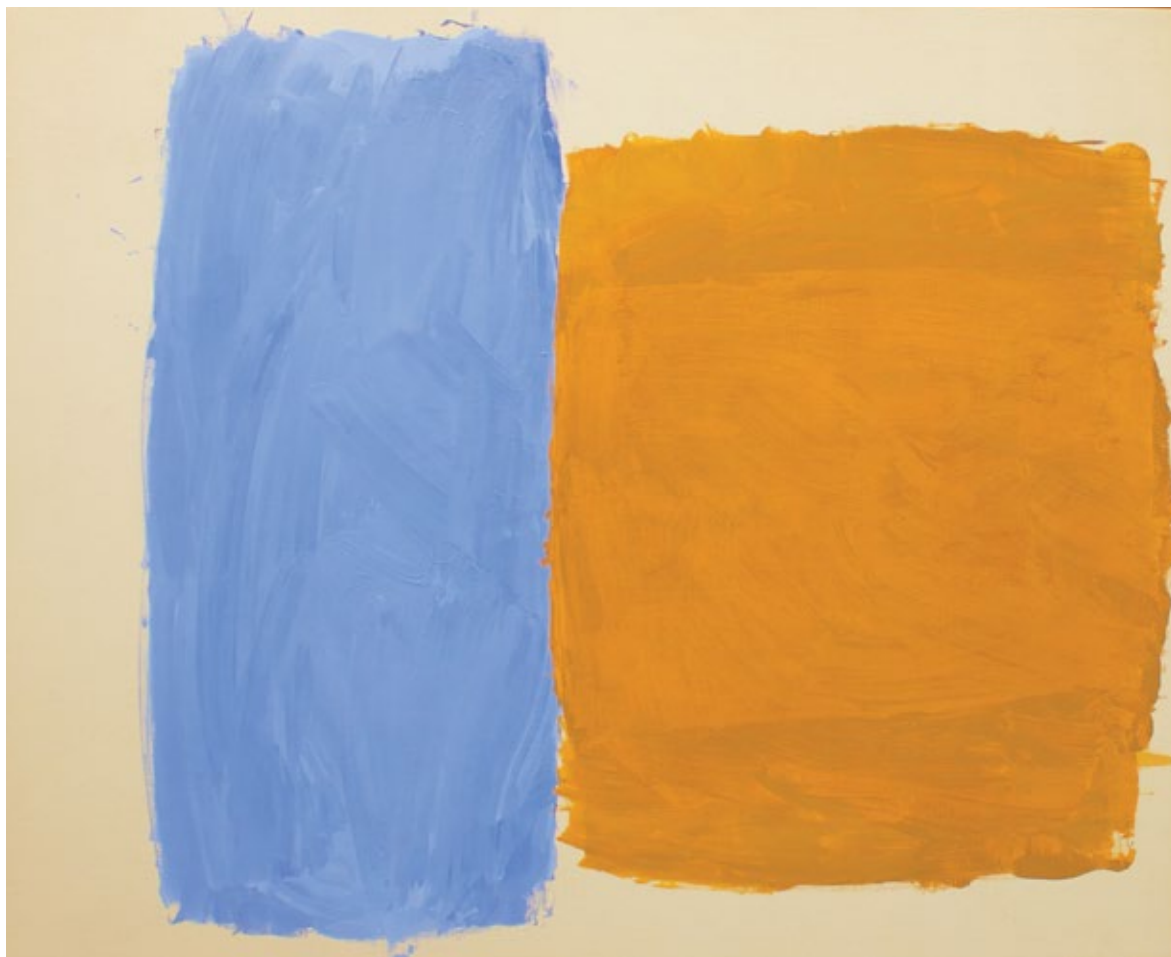
GEORGE SUGARMAN  
Peter's First, 1969  
Painted wood  
26 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 51 x 19 inches



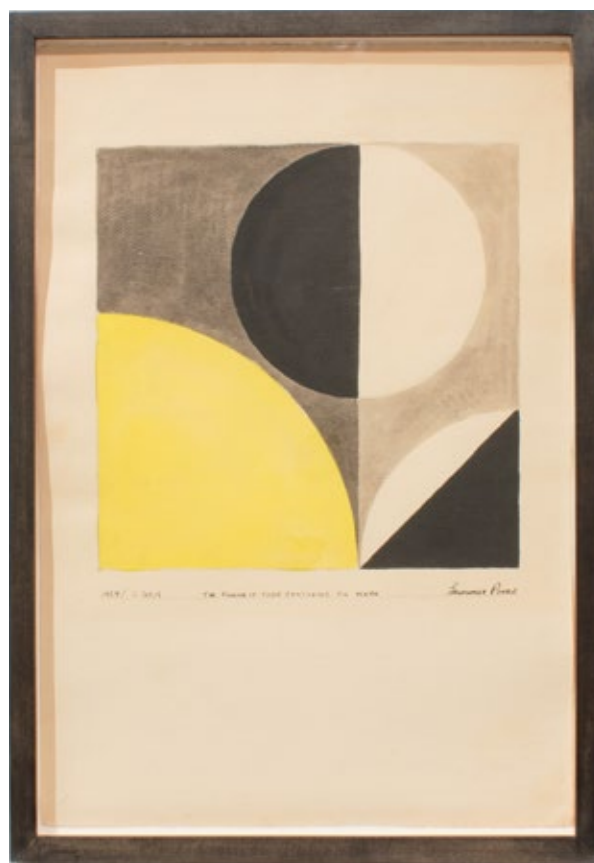
THOMAS DOWNING  
Untitled #29, 1963  
Magna on canvas, stretched  
56 1/2 x 55 1/2 inches



AL HELD  
AA-65, 1965  
Acrylic and ink on butchers paper  
13 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 36 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches



RAY PARKER  
Untitled (#635), 1963  
Oil on canvas  
25 x 31 inches

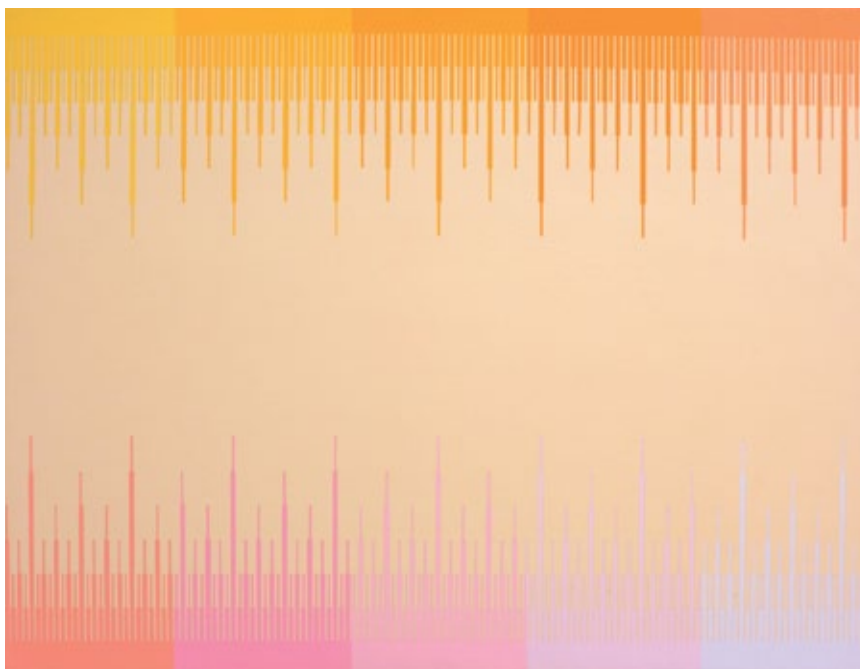


LARRY POONS  
The Flower It Took Centuries to Make, 1957  
Gauche and ink on paper  
22 x 15 inches

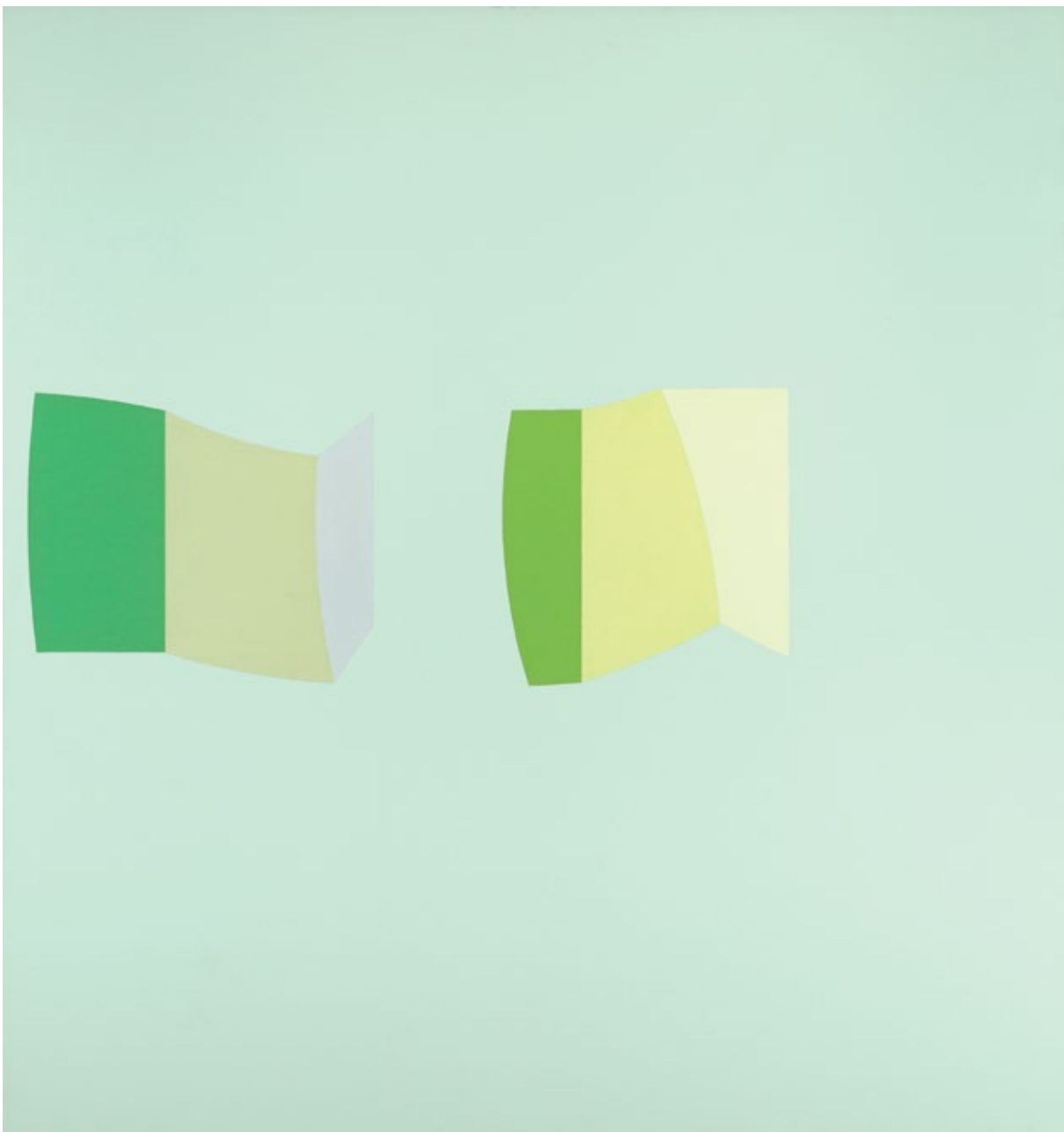
LEON POLK SMITH  
Collage #34, 1970  
Canvas collage, and pencil on paper  
50 x 25 1/2 inches







RICHARD ANUSZKIEWICZ  
Soft Spectral, 1975  
Acrylic on panel  
20 x 26 inches

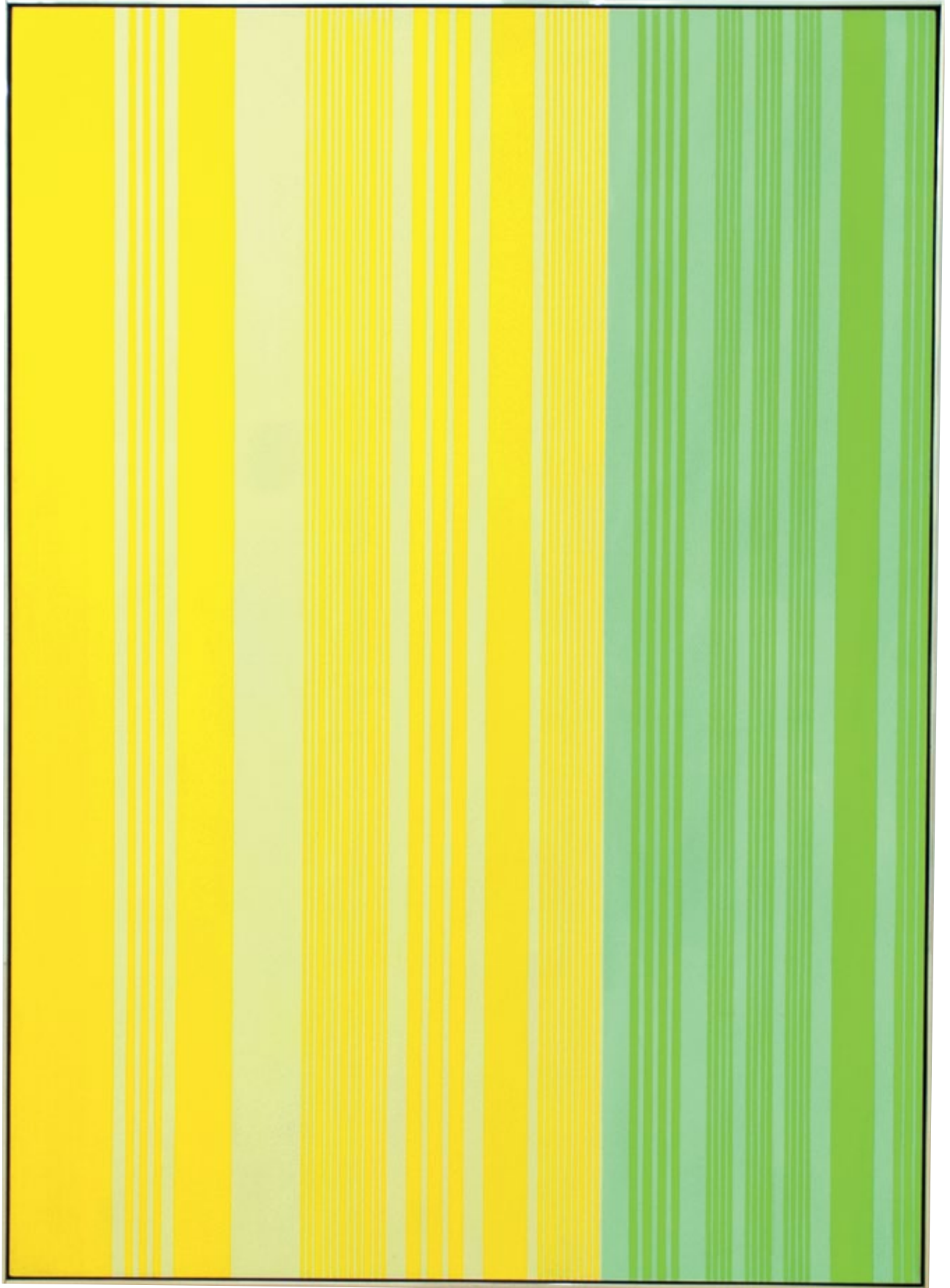


DARBY BANNARD  
Seasons #1, 1965  
Oil on canvas  
72 x 72 inches



MARCIA HAFIF  
157., October 1967  
Acrylic on canvas  
23 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 23 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches

GENE DAVIS  
Lime - Lemon, 1970  
Acrylic & graphite on canvas  
90 x 65 inches





JUDY CHICAGO  
Optical Shapes #6, 1969  
Acrylic on mat board  
11 x 11 inches

Optical Shapes #10, 1969  
Acrylic on mat board  
11 x 11 inches



EDWARD AVEDISIAN  
Untitled, 1965  
Acrylic on board  
30 x 30 inches

This catalogue published on the occasion of the exhibition

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**Edward Avedisian** (1936 – 2007) was among the leading figures to emerge in the New York art world in the 1960s. Along with his contemporaries Kenneth Noland, Walter Darby Bannard, Thomas Downing, and Larry Poons, he breaks with the tacitly of Abstract Expressionism to explore the primacy of the optical experience. The resulting works mix the hot colors of Pop Art, with the cool qualities of Color Field painting.

**Richard Anuszkiewicz** (1930) is known primarily as an Op artist. His paintings are often associated with the rigorous color theory of his mentor Josef Albers. Anuszkiewicz works are an exploration of the optical properties of color, while employing abstract painting's formal and structural qualities to suggest volume and depth.

**Darby Bannard** (1934 – 2016) was a proto-minimalist. His paintings from 1959 to 1965 contain few forms; ranging from a single frame like band painted delineating a monochrome field of color. By the mid-1960s, he developed more complex compositions that consisted of eccentric geometric figure on grounds of pale radiant hues.

**Billy Al Bengston** (1934) is best known for his radical use of late 1950s Californian "Kustom Kar" and motorcycle aesthetics. He often employed the industrial tools of custom carmakers, particularly spray paint and lacquer. These works feature mandala-like shapes with emblematic imagery derived such as sergeant chevrons, and irises.

**Judy Chicago** (1938) is best known as a key figure in the Feminist Art movement of the 1970s, and is considered one of the most prominent voices in the ongoing dialogue about women and art. In the 1960s she was a proponent of a minimalism that emphasized opticality, industrial techniques, and color; clean-edged geometric shapes, and meticulously applied color and finishes. She also used materials such as Plexiglas, plastics, polyester resins, fiberglass and acrylic lacquers.

**Gene Davis** (1920 – 1985) is best known for his use of multicolored vertical stripes throughout his body of work. As a prominent figure of the Washington Color School, which includes such diverse artists as Morris Louis and Thomas Downing, he is also often identified with both Color Field and Post-Painterly Abstraction.

**Thomas Downing** (1928 – 1985) explores the possibilities of color interaction and color-space, freeing them from optical illusion and associations. Downing used patterns of circles of varying hues and sizes that appear to float within undefined space, creating the illusion that each particular set of colors sits on a different plane. In this manner he confronted the viewer with an essentially flat composition that appears to be spatial.

**Marcia Hafif** (1929 – 2018) sought to highlight the essential qualities of both paint as material and color. Her approach was more exploratory and deconstructive than reductive. Hafif contends that she is not breeding sameness but similarity, as she attempts to answer questions about repetition.

**Al Held** (1928–2005) who was originally associated with the second generation Abstract Expressionists, emerged in the 1960s a significant proponent of hard-edged abstraction. Working in series, he created works of increasing complexity during his 50-year career. What underlies his ever shifting, painterly language and practice was his interest in abstraction's ability to reach beyond the viewer's primary senses.

**Ray Parker** (1922 – 1990) was known for his Lyrical approach to abstract painting. His formal vocabulary melds his appreciation for jazz, Henri Matisse, and Color Field; forgoing painterliness, and employing relational compositions with clean color. Parker's Morandi-esque sensibility reflects various emotional states.

Larry Poons (1937) explored geometric imagery that consist of elements whose positioning are non-systemic or logical. Within each painting he was able to combine subjective decision-making and rationality of geometric forms. Poons' approach at this time, was also concerned with paintings objecthood and frontality. These concerns he shared with his longtime friend Frank Stella. By the late 1970s, Poons became committed to developing an ever-more intuitive and process oriented approach to abstract painting.

**Leon Polk Smith** (1906 – 1996) is considered one of the principle practitioners associated with hardedge geometric abstract art. He rose to prominence in the late 1950s and early 1960s with his distinctive approach to shaped canvas and opticality.

**George Sugarman** (1912-1999) was a prolific, controversial, and forward-thinking American artist. His sculptures, drawings, and paintings are stylistically diverse in form. In the late 1950s to early 1960s he produced vividly painted, pedestal-free wood forms and painted metal sculptures. Avoiding the systemic or regular geometry, his forms and approach to making sculpture were in constant state of metamorphosis.

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