



ART TALK

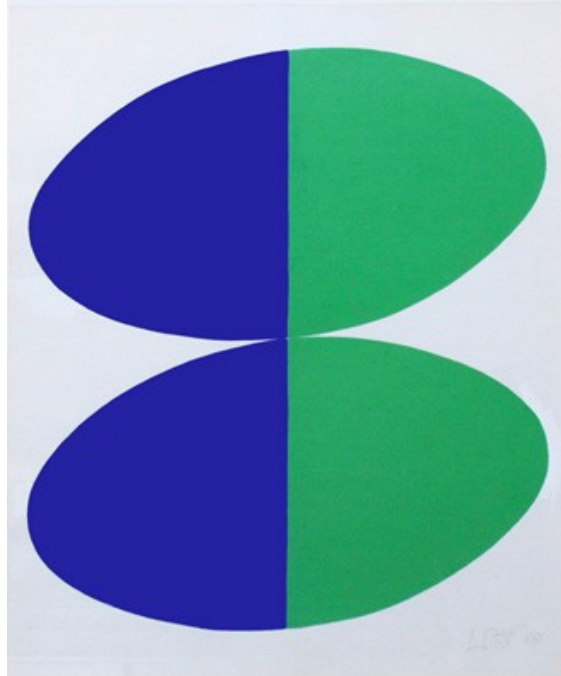
Geometric Abstraction in Many Forms

THU JAN 23, 2014

Host: Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

The great grandfather of geometric abstract painting was Piet Mondrian but his ideas of great simplicity -- few colors, fewer lines -- have been expanded exponentially by his children, grandchildren, even great grandchildren. Three shows right now exemplify the differences and similarities.

Leon Polk Smith, for example, considered the work of Mondrian to be his initial guide to the realm of non-objective painting. Raised in Oklahoma, where both parents were part Cherokee, he labored in ranching and construction, overcame polio and survived the Great Depression, before making his way to New York in 1936.



Leon Polk Smith, "Untitled," 1969
Acrylic and tempera on paper, 24.25 x 18 in (61.6 x 45.7 cm)
Courtesy Louis Stern Fine Arts

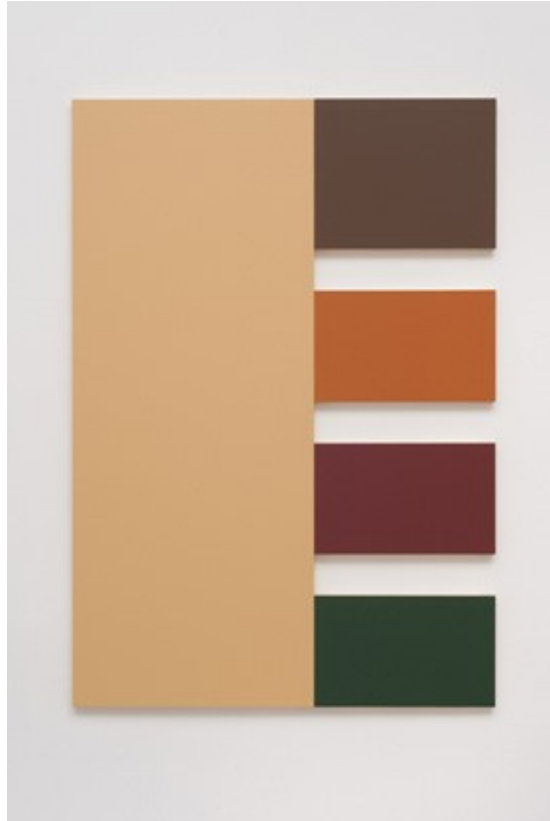
He was studying at Columbia University Teachers College, when he first saw the work of Mondrian. By the 1940's, he was exploring those ideas though often using curved rather than straight lines. There evolved a buoyant, even cheerful quality to his art that is evident *Linear Curves: Works from the 60's*, at **Louis Stern Fine Arts** in West Hollywood through February 22.



Leon Polk Smith, "Constellation Orange - White," 1967 Oil on canvas, 63 x 38 in. (160 x 96.5 cms) Courtesy Louis Stern Fine Arts

Consider the pair of square canvases with rounded corners, one mounted atop the other yet offset, half orange, half white, divided by a slightly curved line that also unites: *Constellation Orange-White*, 1967. Or the collage of four black paper ovals ascending on an orange background. Smith was in his fifties, even early sixties, when making these energetic pieces and until his death in 1996, at the age of 90, he continued to produce lively geometric abstractions, playing with the sizes of the canvas, the relationship of a simple shape to a carefully chosen color. He never wavered from his faith in the rewards of geometric painting. But his decisions were intuitive, unlike the theoretical ideas of Mondrian or his followers in the de Stijl movement. For more information, go to louissternfinearts.com.

Those early modern precepts would have been known by Shephard Vogelgesang, who created the colors used in the 1934 *Chicago Century of Progress* and a year later for General Houses, a company that produced pre-fabricated modern houses owned by Howard T. Fisher, father of influential teacher and artist Morgan Fisher.



*Morgan Fisher "2" (Old Ivory, Sky Blue, Terra Cotta, Crylight Green, Leather Brown, Vert Green, Red), 2013
Acrylic house paint on panels, 92 x 42.5 inches (233.7 x 108 cm)
Courtesy of China Art Objects Galleries
Photo by Robert Wedemeyer*

This is key to the exhibition of geometric abstract paintings by Morgan Fisher, *Exterior and Interior Color Beauty*, on view through March 1 at [China Art Objects](#) in Culver City. Each piece is an enlarged recreation of the paint chip combinations featured in the General Houses brochure "Exterior and Interior Color Beauty: A wide Selection of authentic DECORATIVE TREATMENTS."



*Morgan Fisher, "C5" (White, Heather, Iris), 2013
Acrylic house paint on three panels, 24.9 x 30 x 1.25 inches (63.2 x 76.2 x 3.2 cm)
Courtesy of China Art Objects Galleries
Photo by Robert Wedemeyer*

As paintings, they are meticulously fabricated by Fisher's assistant in New York and the colors are tasteful and appealing. As the brochure says, "The great majority of us appreciate a cleverly decorated home but even the few of us with an inherent color 'feel' find it difficult to select the color combinations for a complete house. There are so many effects color has, over and above its beauty, that expert color knowledge is required to fully utilize color harmony and contrast."

The conflation and contradiction of Modernist and decorative ideals, questions of function and form, rise to the surface in this show, thoughts that accompany the work by many Conceptually-based artists. However, what could be a rather tired conceit gets considerable reconsideration by the fact that it is all highly personal material for Fisher.

This Harvard trained intellectual is well-known for his experimental films and installations and his teaching at Art Center. (He is now a professor at the European Graduate School in Switzerland.) About fifteen years ago, he began painting installations based on the architecture of a particular site and was included in the Hammer's last biennial show Made in L.A. Some were shown at Bortolami Gallery in New York last fall but this is the first time both interior and exterior color choices have been exhibited and a worthy effort it is. For more information go to chinaartobjects.com.



*Patrick Wilson, "Hot Wings", 2013
Acrylic on canvas, 72" H x 67" W (182.88 cm H x 170.18 cm W)
Courtesy of Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects
Photo by Robert Wedemeyer*

And then there is Patrick Wilson whose striking, labor-intensive paintings are on view in Steak Night at **Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects** in Culver City through February 22. He layers bright, related hues in squares and rectangles often applying the paint so that it becomes a panel slight raised from the rest of the surface. Minute edgings of lighter color set up the illusion of luminosity. Perhaps Wilson fears seeming overly serious for he gives these carefully constructed works rather droll titles like Beans and Rice or Hot Wings. Or maybe he thinks looking at painting should be as enjoyable as a good meal. For more information go to vielmetter.com.