



Ten Washington Artists: 1950–1970

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Morris Louis

Kenneth Noland

Gene Davis

Thomas Downing

Howard Mehring

Sam Gilliam

Blaine Larson

Michael Clark

J. L. Knight

Rockne Krebs

The Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, Canada

February 5 — March 8, 1970.

Foreword

TEN WASHINGTON ARTISTS: 1950 - 1970 is the first major American exhibition organized by the Edmonton Art Gallery and represents an expanded program of important exhibitions designed to contribute to the understanding of the artistic production of our time.

The efforts of Andrew Hudson who organized the exhibition and prepared the catalogue are fully manifested in this most complete examination of the Washington scene to date. To him we express our sincere thanks. The significant works included in the show attest to the high regard in which Mr. Hudson is held by dealers and collectors across the continent.

Our thanks also go to the generous individuals and institutions who lent the important works and provided the valuable information which made this exhibition possible.

William Kirby,
Director.

Acknowledgements

My first thanks must go to Mr. Clement Greenberg for introducing me to the art of Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland in the exhibition, "Three New American Painters," he selected for the Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina, in 1963, and to that of Gene Davis, Thomas Downing and Howard Mehring in the exhibition, "Post Painterly Abstraction," he selected for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1964; to Mrs. Katherine Graham and the Washington Post Company for bringing me to Washington in 1965; to Miss Jean Boggs and the National Gallery of Canada for sending me on a lecture tour which took me to Edmonton in 1968; and to Mr. William Kirby and the Edmonton Gallery for asking me to select the present exhibition.

Next, my warmest thanks go to the lenders whose great kindness and generosity in lending such important works to the exhibition have made this latest survey of art in Washington over the past twenty years possible. I am personally honored by their participation and interest in the exhibition, and only wish that Edmonton was nearer to the Atlantic, so that more of them could get to see it. (It is the first time that the work of the five younger artists, Sam Gilliam, Blaine Larson, Michael Clark, J. L. Knight and Rockne Krebs, has been shown with that of the five older, Louis, Noland, Davis, Downing and Mehring.)

To Mrs. Cornelia Noland, Dr. Theodore M. Fields, Mrs. Anne Larson and Miss J. L. Knight, thanks are due for helpful advice.

I am indebted also to Miss Patricia H. Alward of the Publications Department of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Mr. Gerald Nordland, Director of the San Francisco Museum of Art, and Mrs. Nina Osnos, Assistant Curator of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, for assistance in obtaining negatives for the color reproductions; and to the following for assistance in obtaining black and white photographs: Mr. Gene Davis; Mr. Thomas Downing; Mr. Howard Mehring; Mr. Sam Gilliam; Mr. Blaine Larson; Mr. Michael Clark; Miss J. L. Knight; Mr. Rockne Krebs; Mrs. Horton R. Telford; Mrs. John F. Latimer; Mrs. Nesta Dorrance, Director of the Jefferson Place Gallery; Mr. Louis Van Meers; Mr. Ed Zerme; Mr. James Pilgrim, Mr. Renato Danese, Curators, Miss Ellen D. Catlidge, Curatorial Assistant, Miss Martha Morris, Registrar, and Mrs. Inga W. Heck, Public Relations Officer, of the Corcoran Gallery of Art; Mr. Willem de Looper, assistant at the Phillips Collection; Mr. Ben Ruhe, Art Information Officer of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Miss Martha Baer, Registrar of the André Emmerich Gallery; Mr. Leon Levine, Public Relations Officer of the Whitney Museum of American Art; the Public Relations Department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and the Public Information Department of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. My thanks to all.

Finally, I am grateful to Mrs. Helen Jacobson for permission to publish here some of her notes on Morris Louis and to Mr. Walter Hopps, Acting Director of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, who has attended the progress of this exhibition and catalogue with sympathetic concern. My thanks to both of them and to the many others who encouraged me in this endeavor.

A. H.

Introduction

In 1953 an unknown Washington artist, aged 28, persuaded another artist friend, aged 40, also relatively unknown, to go up to New York with him and see what was happening in the art scene there. If there was a particular day on which the present tradition of art in Washington was born, it was the second day of that visit — described as follows in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts “Morris Louis” exhibition catalogue of 1967:

April 3 - 5, 1953

Noland and Louis spent an important weekend in New York. Noland introduced Louis to Clement Greenberg. (Noland had met Greenberg at Black Mountain College in the summer of 1950.) Friday morning they met at the Cedar Street Tavern and went together to Harry Jackson’s studio. Noland and Louis then spent the rest of the day and part of the next visiting galleries. Noland recalls seeing paintings by Kline and Pollock among others. On Saturday evening, in the company of Charles Egan, Franz Kline, Margaret Marshall, Mr. and Mrs. Leon Berkowitz, and Clement Greenberg, they visited Helen Frankenthaler’s studio and stayed about five hours. There they saw Frankenthaler’s *Mountains and Sea* (dated October 26, 1952) a poured stain painting which impressed both men enormously. Back in Washington, Louis and Noland spent two to three weeks working together, sometimes on the same canvas, in an attempt to break down their previous assumptions about painting. According to Noland, they tried to eliminate recognizable structure, and to evolve new ways of applying paint. Louis in particular felt that Frankenthaler’s painting raised questions of technique he wanted to explore.

We have only to compare his works done before and after that visit to see that the encounter with Greenberg and Frankenthaler was crucial to Louis. (He said later of seeing Frankenthaler’s *Mountains and Sea*: “She was a bridge between Pollock and what was possible.”) In the poured paintings of 1954 Louis started to radically question the whole nature of painting — and in doing so discovered his own mature artistic personality.

The dialogue between Louis and Noland was kept up, off and on, until the end of Louis’s life, as was that between Louis and Greenberg. During the mid-1950s when Noland was still in the process of going through a great deal of experimentation before he found his own direction in the early target paintings of 1956 and 1957, the ideas and attitudes that had first come to Washington through the interaction of Louis, Greenberg and himself, began to spread, thanks to his teaching and talking. Gene Davis, Thomas Downing, Howard Mehring and Anne Truitt all enjoyed Noland’s friendship and conversation during those formative years. (The visits to Washington of Greenberg and David Smith can only have strengthened the taking root of these ideas.) How different this shared approach to art was from that held in New York by the worshippers of de Kooning or the followers of Hans Hofmann’s teaching can be glimpsed in Downing’s remark: “Noland’s appreciation of the mainstream of the new American painting, his understanding and insights into the work of Jackson Pollock, Still, Rothko and Newman provided a new orientation.”

This kind of thinking is still in the air today, eight years after Louis's death, nine years after Noland's departure. However diverse their work seems to look, the younger artists working here share the inheritance of those earlier conversations. Sam Gilliam, Rockne Krebs and Michael Clark benefitted from talking with Downing in their formative years of the 1960s. J. L. Knight, who arrived at her "breakthrough" in 1968, was a student with Noland back in 1949 - 1950. Blaine Larson, an "odd man out" in Washington art in terms both of visual imagery and of delayed recognition, shares in the general admiration for Louis. Each of these artists is, in his or her own way, "attempting to break down previous assumptions about painting or sculpture."

There is one large difference between 1953 when Louis and Noland set out to change the course of painting and the situation in Washington today: the art scene has enormously changed. An increasing emphasis on contemporary art in Washington's expanding museum world makes it no longer quite so necessary for the artists to go up to New York to find out what is happening. Louis and Noland are now hung with honor, and pride in their achievement goes hand-in-hand with a widespread interest in and museum support of the artists working in Washington today. It is perhaps the case that the problem now is one of coping with the art boom and maintaining a creative isolation. However, Washington is of a size where that is possible. As one of the artists said recently to me: "If you have a good supply of hay, you can be a painter or a sculptor in Washington, D.C."

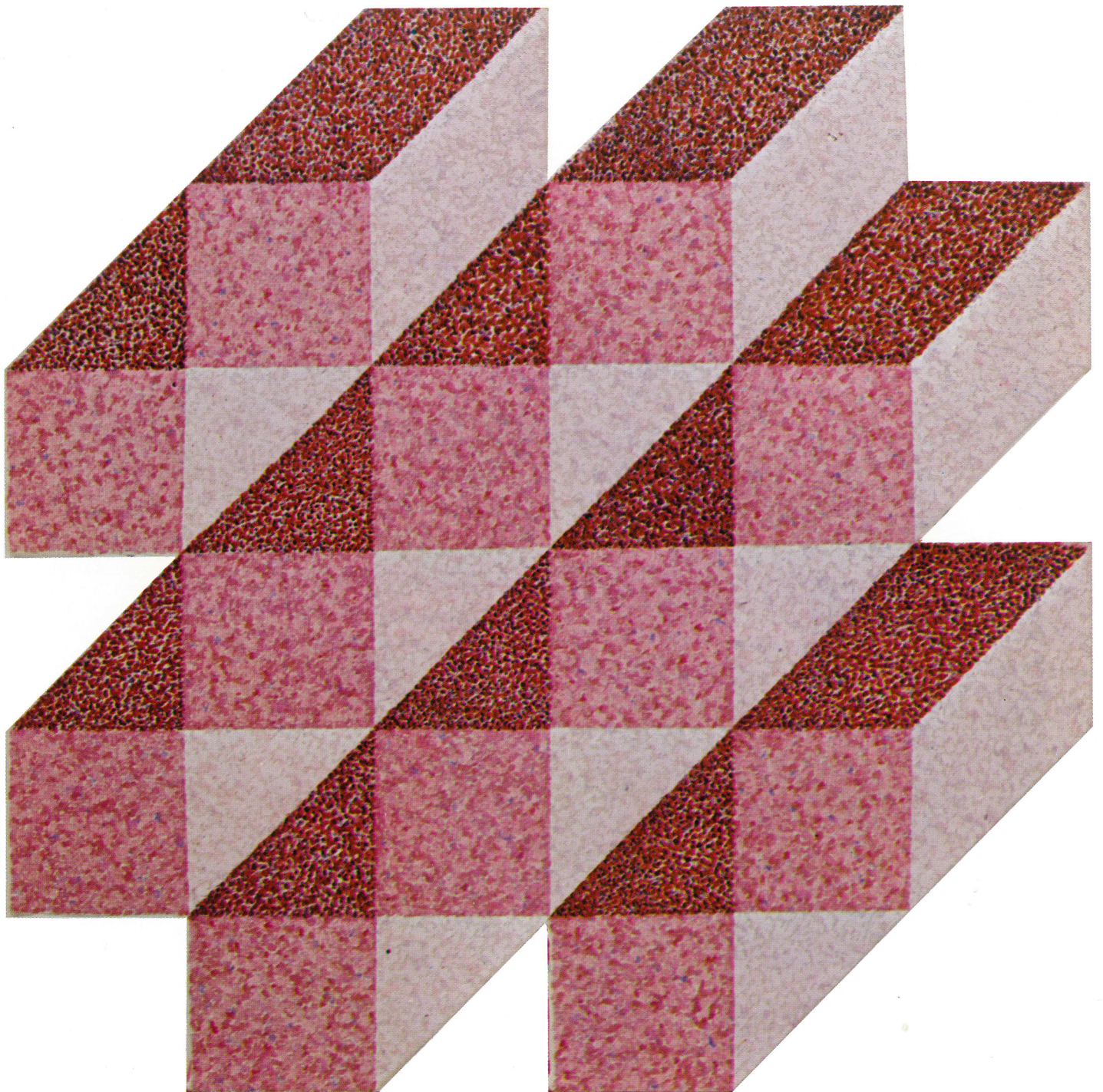
Andrew Hudson,
December, 1969.

Michael Clark

Michael Clark was born in Denver, Colorado, 1946. He studied at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, 1965 - 1966 and at the Corcoran School of Art, Washington, D.C., 1966 - 1969, where he is now an instructor of children's classes.

Group shows include: "Eight Young Washington Painters" at the Jewish Community Center, Washington, D.C., and the "18th Area Exhibition" at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1967; "The Art of Organic Forms," Smithsonian Institution and "Washington 1968 New Painting: Structure," Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1968; and "The Washington Painters" at the Ringling Museum, Sarasota, Florida, 1969.

Michael Clark's first one-man exhibition was held at the Jefferson Place Gallery, Washington, D.C., in 1968.



MICHAEL CLARK. Evelyn's Painting. 1969.
acrylic on canvas. 21 x 21 in.
collection Miss Evelyn Thureau, Washington, D.C.