

---

The 35th Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting

---

35th

---

February 26 - April 3

---

1977

---

The Corcoran Gallery of Art

Washington, D.C.

---

---

## The 35th Biennial

---

Jane Livingston

The first assumption made in selecting the artists to participate in the 35th Corcoran Biennial is that interesting painting in America is being produced throughout the United States: it is not as in the past centered exclusively in a few art capitals. Moreover, in formulating this show we have deliberately included artists of various ages, thereby avoiding a generational exclusiveness.

It is a widely promulgated view that American art in the 1970s characterizes a retreat from the highly innovative and dialectically spurred developments of the 1950s and '60s. A tendency toward a plurality of styles, and an overall spirit of reassessment of older conventions, has been generally corroborated by the present undertaking. Certainly it results in a varied presentation, though the exhibition does not by any means run the gamut of available traditions or styles prevalent in painting. The best painting of the mid-seventies does not lack vitality or seriousness of commitment. However, we won't often be titillated or startled or baffled by what we see in these artists' approaches, as we so constantly were watching the succession of isms that paraded one after the other in the 1960s. Rather, on the evidence given here, we seem to be in a phase of stylistic extension and/or refinement, rather than invention.

Curiously regionalism per se fails to become a tangible issue in this exhibition. Regionalism and generational distinctions show —but in nebulous ways, difficult to pin down. The clichés surrounding the kind of art associated in the 1960s with Texas, or “the South,” or California, are not dramatically substantiated in this group. Of the painters residing in the South, for example, only John Alexander is obviously referring to his own landscape environment: yet Alexander's work belongs more correctly to a wider American painting tradition. He makes of

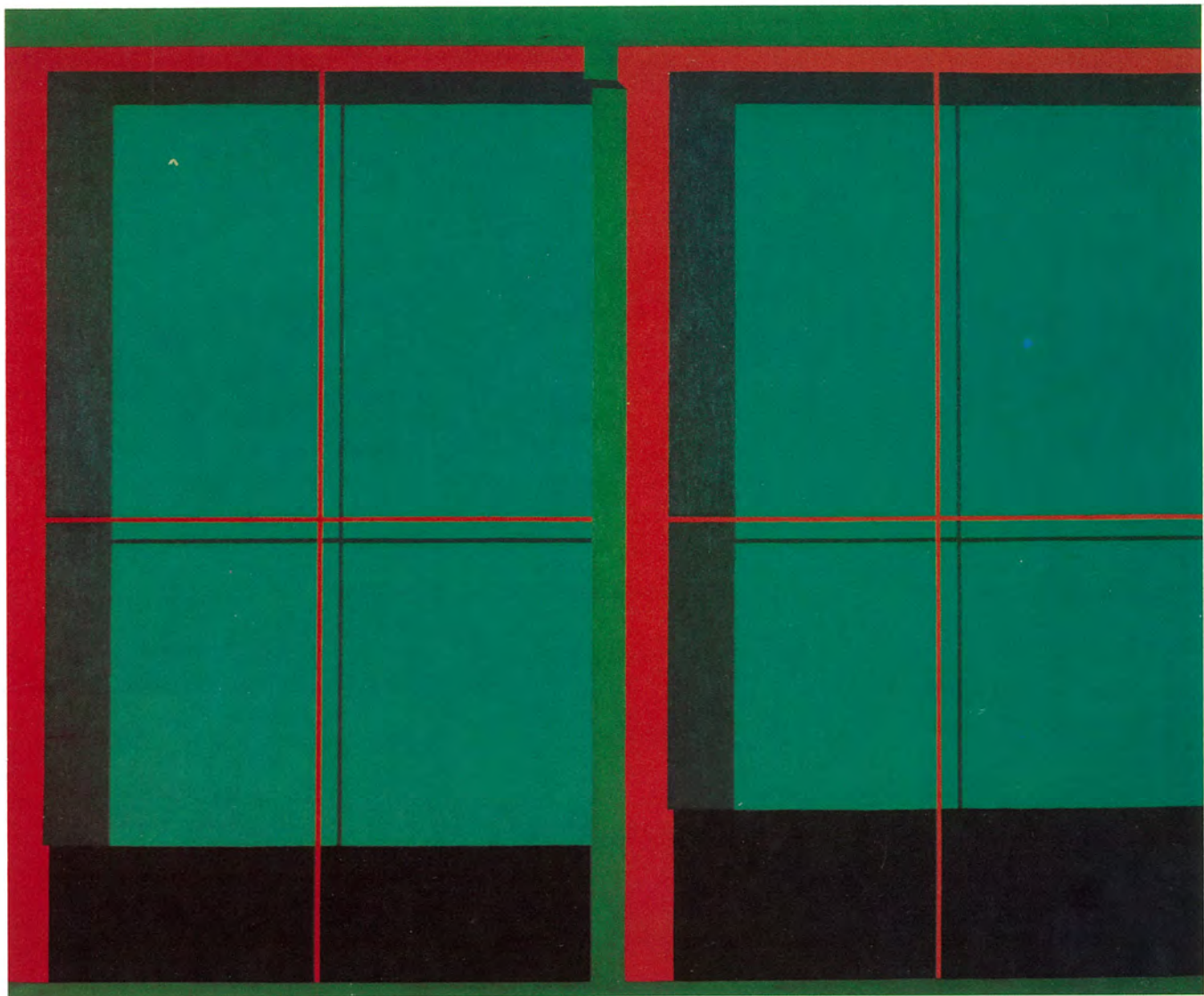
spatial cognition that is separate from those same concerns as they relate to the "formalist" painting that has evolved in terms of other-art-referring self-consciousness about the nature of the painting as physical object.

A flat, schematic, close-toned and incremental way of organizing pictures—an approach whose archetypal practitioner may be Agnes Martin—is represented here in the work of Max Cole, and to some incidental extent that of Paul Dillon. Cole has achieved a phenomenally subtle and authoritative visual statement; she has managed to create a kind of woven pictorial field, surfaces devoid of optical dazzle but sensually and intellectually seductive nonetheless. The paintings are opaque and still lucent: the repetitive reflections make a virtually enveloping presence. Dillon has transformed a prototypical pop art image—repeated comic strip excerpts—into sophisticated painting surfaces which, in their intricate, nearly mesmerizing patterning, are more abstract than they are iconic or representational. They are, important to note, collage surfaces. (Collage is unexpectedly rare in this gathering of paintings.) Dillon's work belongs to a strain in American painting of decoration in the best sense. Michael Clark, on the other hand, makes iconic paintings, appropriating one common image (it often used to be George Washington—in the present case it is the more ambiguous, long repeated window) into his repetitious and evolving painting vocabulary so that we paradoxically return to a perception of the image not as "window" but as a painted surface. He is obsessed as was Seurat with each millimeter of paint.

The modernist strain associated with Helen Frankenthaler, Jules Olitski and Larry Poons, for instance, is represented here in the work of Darryl Hughto, Sandi Slone and Basilios Poulos, and less directly David Headley. Hughto relates to Darby Ban-

landscape a painted canvas that is as much an electrically coruscating membrane as it is a depicted expanse of terrain. Alexander's propensity to narrational picturing, evident especially in the drawings inhabited by fantastical creatures, is more and more replaced in the paintings with a kind of singleness, an airless, vertiginous quality of place. Here, anecdotal mania and a passion for "pure paint" coexist in equal measure. It is not a compromised but a transfigured kind of realism.

Realism and its substyles are simply missing from this selection. This does not, however, reflect an absence of realist painting taking place in America. Indeed at this moment another exhibition, of only newly-conceived realist painting, could be mounted under similar geographic and age premises. Except for the "primitive" O. W. (Pappy) Kitchens, only Alexander, Michael Clark, Paul Dillon and Martin Myers use (marginally) illustrational subject matter. Each of these artists, in his often pattern-like use of imagery, is essentially more concerned with formal relationships than with the meaning of the images themselves. Pappy Kitchens, of course, is an explicitly story-telling artist, whose remarkable design instincts and spatial eccentricities elevate his best paintings to a visual level equal to that of any folk artist in the country. The rationale for including the unknown Pappy Kitchens in this Biennial is not whimsical; it is my contention that both the formal and narrative influences of folk art idioms manifestly pervade much American painting. In this selection, such apparently sophisticated, diverse artists as Lucinda Parker or Jim Waid, and even Michael Clark or Michael Goldberg, demonstrate a certain awareness of the compositional approach to which I am referring. It has to do with flat, interlocking areas of color, and an emphasis on shape as well as a decorative compositional rhythm and a



## MICHAEL CLARK

Born 1946, Denver, Colorado. Lives Washington, D.C. and New York City.

**Individual exhibitions:** Jefferson Place Gallery, Washington, D.C., 1968; ACE Company, Washington, D.C., 1970; Pyramid Gallery, Washington, D.C., 1971; University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1971; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1971; Lunn Gallery/ Graphics International Ltd., Washington, D.C., 1973, 1975, 1977; Everson Museum, Syracuse, New York, 1973; Andrew Crispo Gallery, New York City, 1974, 1977; David Heath Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia, 1977.

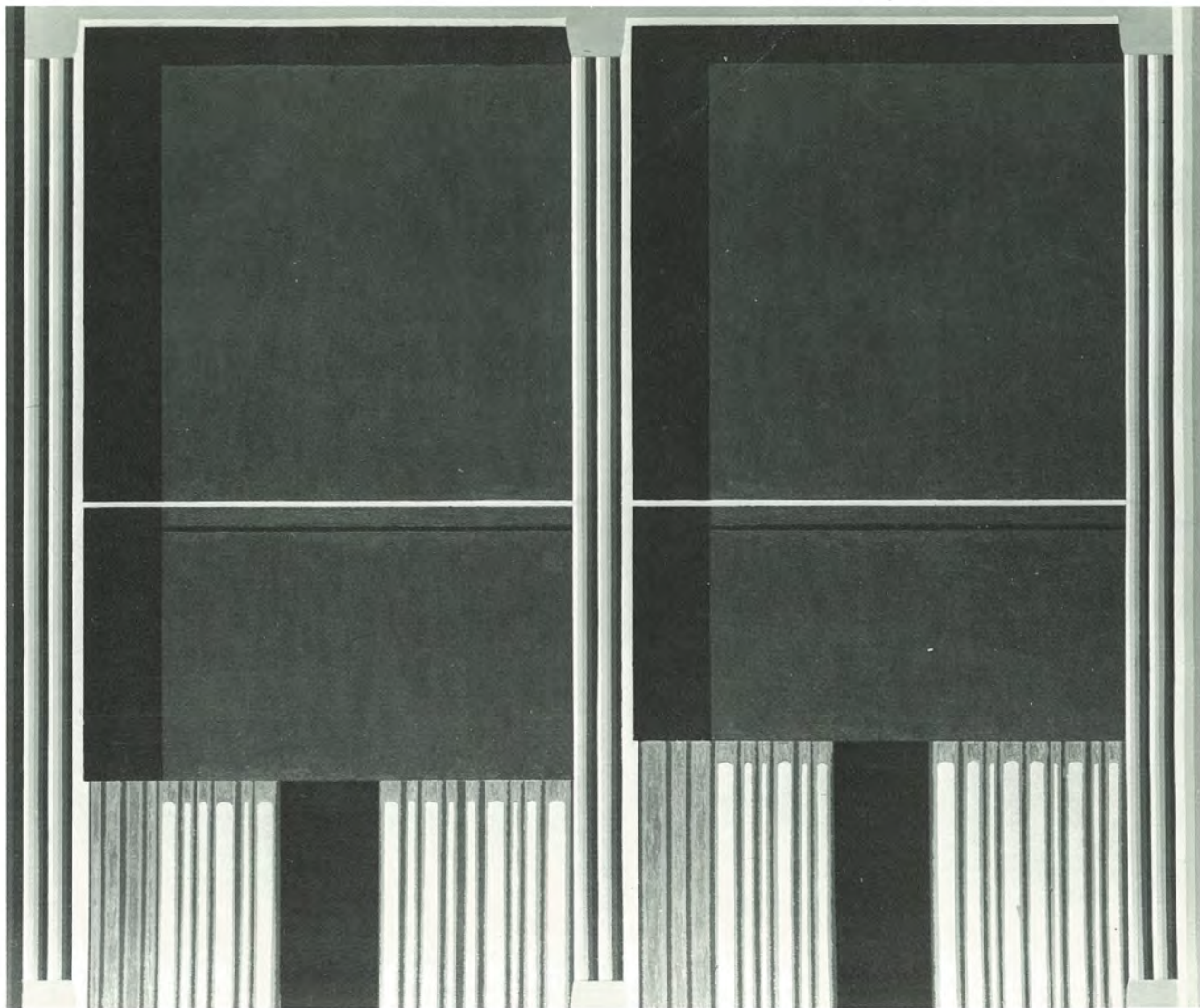
**Group exhibitions include:** *18th Area Exhibition*, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1967; *Five Young Artists*, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1967; *Washington, 1968, New Painting: Structure*, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1968; *The Washington Painters*, Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida, 1969; *Ten Washington Artists, 1950-1970*, Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, Canada, 1970; *Washington Art: Twenty Years*, Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland, 1970; *Seven Young Artists*, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1971; *Realists*, Pyramid Gallery, Washington, D.C., 1972; *Twentieth Century Realists*, Andrew Crispo Gallery, New York City, 1973; *The George Washington Birthday Show*, Clark-Stark Studio, Washington, D.C., 1973; *Washington Portfolio '74*, The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.; *Group Exhibition*, Andrew Crispo Gallery, New York City, 1974.

*San Francisco Chinatown Windows*, 1976, oil on linen, 30 x 36\*

*Lower East Side Window #1*, 1976, acrylic and oil on linen, 24 x 32

*Classical Grey, Green, Black*, 1974-75, acrylic and oil on linen, 26 x 32

Michael Clark's paintings are lent by the Andrew Crispo Gallery, New York City



Michael Clark, *Classical Grey, Green, Black*



---

## Catalogue of the Exhibition

---

All dimensions are in inches; height precedes width.

### John Alexander

*Untitled*, 1976-77, oil on canvas, 83 x 90

*Untitled*, 1976-77, oil on canvas, 83 x 90

*Untitled*, 1976-77, oil on canvas, 68 x 72

### Karl Benjamin

*Number 23*, 1976, oil on canvas, 53-1/2 x 53-1/2

*Number 26*, 1976, oil on canvas, 53-1/2 x 53-1/2

*Number 21*, 1976, oil on canvas, 62 x 31

*Number 7*, 1976, oil on canvas, 62 x 31

### Paul Brown

*Spell*, 1976, acrylic on canvas, 96 x 144

*Glider*, 1976, acrylic on canvas, 96 x 144

*Short Story*, 1976, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 96

### Michael Clark

*San Francisco Chinatown Windows*, 1976, oil on linen, 30 x 36

*Lower East Side Window #1*, 1976, acrylic and oil on linen, 24 x 32

*Classical Grey, Green, Black*, 1974-75, acrylic and oil on linen, 26 x 32

### Max Cole

*Alba*, 1976, ink on linen, 79 x 92. Lent by Mr. & Mrs. Morris S. Pynoos,  
Beverly Hills, California

*Siltanen*, 1975, ink and acrylic on canvas, 79 x 92

*A. H. IV*, 1977, ink and acrylic on canvas, 79 x 92

### Herbert Creecy

*Untitled*, 1976, acrylic on canvas, 67 x 67

*Untitled*, 1976, acrylic on canvas, 67 x 67

*Untitled*, 1976, acrylic on canvas, 67 x 67