Claudine Humblet

The New American Abstraction
1950–1970
The New American Abstraction 1956-1970

This project was born and developed over time, the time the author devoted to it, interweaved with that of the artworks, and the time of the artists encountered. Choices, circumstances, and pleasurable meetings all contributed to the course the book followed.

The artists in this project proclaim a "New Abstraction," "hard-edge," a "new painterliness," "structureism," and a poetic adventure around the concept of the "fourth dimension" (PARK PLACE).

The title of this book is borrowed from "Toward a New Abstraction," the catalogue of an exhibition organized by Ben Heller at the Jewish Museum in New York, in May-September 1963, which included such artists as Frank Stella, Paul Feeley, Kenneth Noland, and Raymond Parker.

The aim of the project was to connect in spirit artists chosen from the New Abstraction movement, as opposed to other movements that determined the "spirit of the times," such as emergent Minimalism and Pop Art.

Each individual must remain detached within his own context, which is what each of the chapters has attempted to do.

New Abstraction should be understood not as a movement—various signs indicate very well the importance of Abstract Expressionism for some artists—but a kind of convergence over a period of time of structure approaches that attract each other rather than form a precise group. A single "spirit of the times" did not exist.

What out of convenience we refer to here as "New Abstraction," besides its sometimes complex origins, intersects over time with other movements and trends, such as Neo-Dadaism, the beginnings of Minimal Art, and Process Art.

Structure triumphs in this art which its open structures, though they are sometimes concealed, it is an outspread, joyous art. If sexuality seems absent at first, it is the keen joy of pure color that attracts the viewer to what the work stands in the space, with rare clarity. Color is structure. In each artist color is linked to the structure itself. The structure is the color and the color bursts out of the structure. Spontaneously sweeps it away, it is this that creates the domain of joy and sensuality, in contrast to the "constructed" and "concrete" European art. Each artist invents his own art of color in bold or subtle ways, this is the guiding thread of this book.
Claudine Humblet


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From Post-Mondrianism to New Abstraction

Leon Polk Smith
Leon Polk Smith (born in Chikasha, Oklahoma, in 1906, died 1996) discovered Mondrian's work in the summer of 1936 on his first visit to the Albert Gallatin Collection in the Museum of Living Art, then at the University of New York. The encounter was a liberating shock that made him aware of what he wished to achieve, but it was only gradually that he moved toward the mastery of purely abstract means of expression.

In 1936 Smith's compositions were still realist (inspired by the countryside and the farm he was familiar with in the state of Oklahoma) though they "unconsciously" included surreal elements (Chore Time, oil on canvas, 1936; Boy on a Mule, oil on canvas, 1936).

The forms are flat, brightly colored, and boldly outlined. Still Life Portrait (oil on canvas, 1939) is bathed in a more markedly Surrealist atmosphere. Around 1940, Smith very intuitively developed a simplified, personal Cubism that originated in fragments of still life (Repeated Forms, oil on canvas, 1940) or portraits taken from urban life (White Woman; Georgia Black Woman, oil on canvas, 1940). Repeated Forms is one of the most abstract works due to the simplification and repetition of one element in a "stained-glass window" composition with the space divided into compartmentalized planes of color. His attraction to a flat surface and a flat treatment of color was already evident, and he took the final leap toward pure abstraction in 1942.

Guided by his admiration for the absolute, pure plasticity of Piet Mondrian's oeuvre, it seems that Smith wished to take up the challenge that anything is possible in abstract art. For Smith, Mondrian's work, far from being the ultimate outcome of the abstract adventure (or an "obstacle" to any attempt to transcend it) contained in embryo the idea of a new departure. It essentially triggered his own creative energy.

His first geometric abstract works at the beginning of the 1940s still drew their inspiration from familiar themes (Little Dogies at Night, oil on paper, 1942; Oklahoma Territory, oil on canvas, 1943; Git Along Little Dogies, oil on canvas, 1943). In November–December 1942, Leon Polk Smith exhibited at the Finacoteca Gallery (in January–February that same year, Mondrian had exhibited for the first time in New York at the Valentine-Dundensing Gallery).

In the manner of Theo van Doesburg, whose work De Koe (Smith was familiar with it) was shown in the exhibition Cubism and Abstract Art organized by Alfred Barr at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1936), his abstract development unfolded during a process of "esthetic transformation" of an original theme. The echo of the motif, the object of the metamorphosis, persists in the grouping of the elements from which, unbeknown to the artist, there arises an abstract rhythm, a geometricized composition. The picture space is still divided up into compartments in the first abstract
compositions, whose elements are bars and square or rectangular blocks in earth shades, oranges, red, black, and white.

At first, the relationship between the form and the space ("the essential of space" that was expressed in the "new plastic" through "the relation of one color plane to another") magnified by Mondrian's art, had to be sought within the limits of a flat rectangular space in Smith's work. Nonetheless, the freedom of his first abstract compositions compared to the orthogonal grid in Mondrian's works, as well as the increasing mastery of the relationships between the formal elements and the space, very soon began to show signs of an individual artistic calling.

The different phases of the compositions from 1945 to 1952 expressed a desire to organize the abstract vision in a coherent space, rendered dynamic by the exchange between the formal elements.

_Duet Blue – Red_ (oil on canvas, 1945) can be considered a forerunner of the _Columns_ series. The title suggests the idea of a response or "exchange" with regard to an earlier correspondence. The surface attests to a search for unity or a formal whole that encompasses differences. The space "opens up" in this work, unlike the "compartmentalization" of the earlier works. The grouping of the elements (dark blue, red, black, and white rectangles and bars on a bluish gray ground) on either side of implicit vertical axes suggests structural responses. The smooth, flat surface lends itself to a subtle interplay of exchanges through the color and rhythmic arrangement of the elements.

The correlation of forms and space tends to become established in some works of 1945–47 where the "passages" between the structural groups in _Grey Columns_ (oil on canvas, 1945) or the "columns" themselves in _Center Columns, Blue – White_ (oil on canvas, 1946) become disengaged from the vertical axes. The works in this series and those related to them, such as _Blue, Black, White_ an oil from 1946 and a gouache from the same year, create optically more complex formal relationships through the alternation of dominant colored blocks and the relations that develop between one group and another, as well as the importance of the regular intervals of background color.

In 1945, works like _New York City_ (oil on canvas) and _G. W. B. (George Washington Bridge)_ are compositions where the whole surface is the arena of a regular fragmentation. The surface of _New York City_ (perhaps already an indirect homage to Mondrian) vibrates under the equal pressure of the nuanced grays and light blues of the different planes, the more shifting rectangles, and brightly colored bars. The total impression is that of a "woven" surface where the differences of the surface and the syncopated rhythms become reabsorbed in the colored harmony. In _G. W. B. (George Washington Bridge)_ curves and circular shapes are introduced for the first time and overlap horizontal bars.

Smith's profound tendencies emerged in the course of a patient process of growth and self-determination. The totally spiritual encounter with Mondrian reinforced rather than triggered the artist's own development toward a purified formal language governed by the idea of a superior plastic balance. This was the constant touchstone and keystone of Leon Polk Smith's entire oeuvre.

Smith's first "homage" to _Victory Boogie-Woogie_ (1942–44), Piet Mondrian's final unfinished work— which featured in an exhibition devoted to him at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in March–May 1945—saw the light of day in 1946 (Homage to "Victory Boogie-Woogie" #1, oil on canvas, 1946).

The most famous compositions of Mondrian's New York period (the "New York City" series, begun in 1940–41; _Broadway Boogie-Woogie_, 1942–43; _Victory Boogie-Woogie_, 1943–44) were for some of his followers the catalyst that sparked a decisive turning point in their evolution. A dynamic rhythm is expressed through the overlapping bars _New York City_, and their fragmentation into small squares _Broadway Boogie-Woogie_, which generates a "staccato" rhythm, is most perfectly expressed in _Victory Boogie-Woogie_, a square work standing on one corner, where the multiplying and shifting colored accents suggest that a single pulsation animates the whole surface. The square on one corner format of _Victory Boogie-Woogie_ serves the purpose of activating the internal space of the painting.

Smith's _Homage to "Victory Boogie-Woogie" _#1, 1946, is a rectangular composition, wider than it is.
Still Life with
Mauve, 1926
Oil on canvas
47 x 33 in
(119.4 x 83.8 cm)
Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield
(MA)
Gift of Ann
Pothier-Keller
tall. A mosaic of squares is coordinated according to a subtle art of relationships between planes of color. The three main, larger, red, black, and yellow squares are fully saturated. The "secondary" squares stand out thanks to their more delicate range of grays and pale blues. The smallest squares contribute more vivid accents of dark blue, light red, and yellow. These three kinds of "harmony" establish relationships of color and form between each other, and also establish relationships with the space through the many linear axes. The still visible pencil lines in places reveal the existence of an initial grid that the artist intuitively modified by working on the color and balancing the elements, in the course of the process itself or the progression in the space.

The second "homage," Homage to "Victory Boogie-Woogie" #2, 1946–47′ (oil on wood panel), is one of the first works in the shape of a "tondo." It is a composition of squares inscribed in a partially effaced grid. The larger red squares outnumber the smaller blue, black, and yellow fragments. The link between the squares, some of which only meet at one corner, generates an irregular rhythm. Smith takes the idea of a rhythm that divides up the surface in a structure that is still orthogonal from Mondrian. The flat space gives no "indication" of depth.

Black-Blue-Gray-White Squares (oil on canvas, 1947) may appear an equally direct, if not more evident homage to Victory Boogie-Woogie. The format of a square standing on one corner accentuates the implicit diagonal axes that constitute the invisible interior grid. An intuitive balance governs the linking of the motifs. The pale register of slate blue-grays, light gray and black, brightened up by the larger white squares, already reveals the distance separating Smith from Mondrian.

The flat space of Smith's "homages" is equally distinguished from the shifting and oscillating space of Fritz Glarner (born in 1899) and from the deep space of Burgoyne Diller (born in 1906), in their compositions of the same period. A work by Diller, such as Third Theme, 1946–48, is based both on the activation of the whole surface and on its fragmentation; this double effect results in the alignment and overlapping of strictly linear elements.
Homage to "Victory Boogie-Woogie" #1, 1946
Oil on canvas
42 x 57 in
(106.7 x 94 cm)
Dallas Museum of Art, The Art Museum League Fund
Photographic credit: Brad Flowers

New York City, 1946
Oil on canvas
47 x 33 in
(119.4 x 83.8 cm)
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Gift of the Edward R. Dowd Jr. Purchase Fund and the National Endowment for the Arts
Gray, Yellow, Black
Exchange, 1946
Oil on canvas
23 x 14 in
58.4 x 35.6 cm
Estate of the artist
**Black-White**

**Definition**

**Title:** Black White, 1946

**Medium:** Oil on canvas

**Dimensions:** 45 x 32 in (114.3 x 81.3 cm)

**Location:** Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York

**Gift:** Gift of the artist

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**W. P. L., 1949**

**Medium:** Oil on canvas

**Dimensions:** 40 x 32 in (101.6 x 81.3 cm)

**Location:** Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

**Gift:** Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Arthur Lumma, 1971

**Photograph:** Photograph by David Heald

© The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York
The first of the “Exchanges” series (Gray Yellow Black Exchange, 1946, and the works that followed from 1946 to 1949) and the “Diagonal Passages” date from the same period as the “homages.” Leon Polk Smith had an exhibition at the Egan Gallery in March 1946.

The concept of “exchange” takes shape more clearly in such works as Gray Yellow Black Exchange (oil on canvas, 1946), based on silvery gray, orange, and matt and glossy black. In this composition the colors of the formal elements and those of the plane are “exchanged” in the search for a unified space. The elements are “hooks,” bars or rectangular fragments. In Black-White Definition New York (oil on canvas, 1946), the elements are inverted as they “respond” to each other and share the portions of space. The parallel diagonal axes appear to join the corners of the shapes. The colors are reduced to two tones (Black-White Definition New York: Red-Black, oil on canvas, 1946–47) or to three in the compositions that are particularly pared down such as Blue-Red-White (oil on canvas, 1946) and Red-Black-White (oil on canvas, 1948). The structural “exchanges” between similar formal elements create a unified or homogeneous surface. Certain works with “all-over” (Lawrence Alloway) motifs were included in the exhibition Post-Mondrian Painters in America organized by the Sidney Janis Gallery in May–June 1949 (in which Joseph Albers, Ilya Bolotowsky, Burgoyne Diller, Fritz Glarner, and Harry Holtzman participated).

W. P. 1. (oil on canvas, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York), 1949, is the most colorful work in this structural series, which it definitively brings to a close. The bars and fragments are divided into numerous little squares, in primary colors, gray and black, on a white ground (this work’s interior dynamics and surface division suggests that it is an indirect homage to Broadway Boogie-Woogie).

The “Diagonal Passages” (from 1946–47 to 1950) adopt different formats, the tall rectangle, the square standing on one corner, and the circular form (or the “tondo”).

The more static compositions in a rectangular format consist in an arrangement of asymmetrical rectangular elements in the three primary colors, pearly gray, and different shades of white, meeting at
Diagonal Passage
120.1, 1967-68
Oil on wood panel
diam. 23 3/4 in
(60.3 cm)
The Cleveland Museum of Art,
Cleveland (OH)
Purchased with
a grant from the
National Endowment for Arts
and matched by
gifts from members
of the Cleveland Society for
Contemporary Art

Diagonal Passage
126. Large, 1967-61
Oil on canvas
diam. 80 in
(203.2 cm)
Brooklyn Museum
of Art, New York
Gift of the artist
Opposite Angles – Black and Gray, 1949–50
Oil on canvas
24 x 12 in
(61 x 30.5 cm)
Estate of the artist
Black - White
Apartment, 1982
Oil on canvas
51 x 26 in
(129.5 x 66.5 cm)
Private collection,
Cambridge (MA)
Black – White Duet with Yellow, 1952
Oil on canvas
diam. 60 in (147.3 cm)
Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York
Gift of the artist

Black – White Duet with Red, 1953
Oil on canvas
diam. 78 1/2 in (199.3 cm)
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,
Washington, D.C.
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,
Smithsonian Institution, promised purchase with funds donated
by Edward R. Downo, Jr., 1982
Photographic credit:
Lee Stalsworth
First One, 1954
Oil on canvas
diam. 39 1/2 in
(100.3 cm)
Dr. Irving and
Natalie Forman
Collection, Santa Fe
(NM)
right angles, and surrounded by black lines of different thicknesses (Diagonal Passage no. 2, oil on canvas, 1946–47; Diagonal Passage no. 9, oil on canvas, 1949).

Diagonal Passage White, Yellow, Black, Gray (no. 1) (oil on canvas, 1949) and Diagonal Passage no. 3 (oil on canvas, 1949), the latter in the square on one corner format, develop discreet harmonies where gray and yellow dominate. The elements open on one side (turned toward the edges of the frame) indicate a drive toward the external space. The corners only meet to suggest the idea of a passage in the interstices between the planes. This is clearer in the internal axes of a composition reduced to four elements (Diagonal Passage with Horizontal, oil on canvas, 1950).

In other "Passages," a diagonal direction determines the position or sequence of the elements (Diagonal Passage Red-Blue-Green, oil on canvas, 1948, and Diagonal Passage no. 7, oil on canvas, 1949).

The attempt to reconcile the orthogonal order of Neoplasticism with a diagonal movement achieves a more complete solution in the circular format of Diagonal Passage 120.1 (oil on wood panel, 1947–48).

Composition #1502 (oil on wood, 1947), which is earlier, already breaks with the statics inherent in the orthogonal design (which still dominates a work like Homage to "Victory Boogie-Woogie" no. 2). It is the first attempt to fuse the colored planes and the circumference in a diagonal arrangement.

Diagonal Passage 120.1 takes the theme of the "passage" a stage further by involving the whole picture space. Like its larger copy, Diagonal Passage 120 Large (oil on canvas, 1947–51), it is one of the most significant 1940s works as regards the force of its plastic cohesion. The conceptual mastery of the work contributes toward ensuring the plastic beauty of its relationships. The initial grid is yet again merely the means of gauging the mathematical relationships of the surfaces. Here the plane-space "in extension," in its orthogonal framework, gives way to a surface that creates the suggestion of a circular movement within the composition itself. The diagonal axis that links the corners of the central square and the two angles inscribed in the circle acts like its pivot. Diagonal Passage 120.1 is striking in the extremely precise work on the proportions and meeting points of the planes, the flat nature, and the density of the colors. Through another ideal of synthesis, Smith gave renewed vigor to the art of the "relationships" of Neoplasticism.

The mystic and philosophical meaning that Glarner gave to the symbol of the circle (his first tondo dates back to 1944)—"the strongest form symbol of oneness"—is absent from Smith's first circular works.

At first the circular form allowed him to reconcile Mondrian's "determined" space ("complete space-determination") with movement. While initially it was a question of finding a solution to a problem of a purely formal nature, by contrast Smith's oeuvre acquired a cosmic dimension when the artist began to develop the features of his own individual style in the second half of the 1950s.

In a still static work of 1947, Circle in the Square (oil on wood), the intrusion of the circumference into the square format is another evident sign of the artist's attraction to circularity.

The diagonals of the "Passages" become transformed into other structural themes. First there are the Inch Squares of 1948–49 (Inch Square no. 3; Inch Square no. 3, oil on canvas)," in a vertical format, which increase the diagonal axes in mosaics of little squares in the basic colors black and white. Then comes the series of "Diagonals," which are simplified compositions of four rectangular planes in a continuous line (Four Blue Diagonals; Black Yellow White, oil on canvas, 1950). And finally the "Opposite Angles" of 1949–50 (Opposite Angles, 1949–50; Opposite Angles – Black and Gray, 1950, oil on canvas) with opposite wide bars where the intuition of "interchangeability" can already be discerned.

The "Opposite Angles" offer a plastic synthesis of the problems that the former "Exchanges" and "Passages" posed, though extremely pared down and showing a concern for expressive simplification.

Homages to white and black, two colors with which the artist never ceased to have a particularly intense relationship throughout his career, White – White no. 1 (oil and graphite on canvas, 1948) and Black – Black (oil on canvas, 1950) are among the early works in American art focusing on mono-
Yellow Edge, 1954
Oil on canvas
dim. 31\% in
(80 cm)
Mr. Robert
M. Jamieson
Collection,
New York
chrome and the modulations of a single tone. The interior structure of White – White no. 1 in an elongated vertical format lends itself only to a purely formal comparison with Opalescent Vertical by Ilya Bolotowsky, 1955—a work conceived in a more architectonic spirit and in a very different color register. Smith’s work attests to the artist’s desire to draw personal trajectories in space and color, to imprint a secret path in the material. The poetry of this white work is created by the rare density of the same white whose successive layers can be guessed at, and the linear path that challenges, despite appearances, an order that is strictly geometric or pre-established.

Black – Black is a composition of squares and rectangles of different sizes and black modules with sometimes uneven and shaggy lines, based on a contrast between matt and glossy blacks and dark grays.

From 1952 on, Smith’s oeuvre followed its original path toward new dimensions, leading to constant renewal. The quest for a new picture space took place in various stages. Black – White Reprint (oil on canvas, 1952) translates into a rectangular format the governing idea of “interchangeability of form and space” in the potential structural exchange of white and black.

The 1950s:
The theme of the round shape (the structure of the support acquires its full importance here before dictating the intuition of the internal forms) never ceased to overwhelm Leon Polk Smith’s spiritual and plastic world, from the moment when the idea of the “complementarity” of form and space first came to him (“I observed a concomitant situation wherein the idea of space and form were complementary to each other as well as interchangeable”). From 1953 onwards, the “spherical” format became Smith’s favorite for the expression of his fundamental insights. The idea of the “interchangeability” of form and space could be better expressed on a circular surface whose very roundness invited an in-depth exploration of the concept of perpetual motion (perhaps the artist dreamed of the symbol of the wheel and of its ceaseless movement or simply of...
Black Anthem, 1966
Oil on canvas
72 x 120 in
(182.9 x 304.8 cm)
Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York
Gift of the artist
**Autumn Fossy, 1961**
Oil on canvas
52 x 38 in
(132.1 x 96.5 cm)
Estate of the artist

**Storch of Black II, 1961**
Oil on canvas
28 x 19 in
(71 x 48.2 cm)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Estate of Eleanor Ward
© 2001 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Cobalt Violet - Deep Yellow, 1990
8 ft. x 4 ft., in
(173.7 x 117.5 cm)
Estate of the artist
the celestial orbs that show us only one face at a time).

The problem of "exchange" seems to have been transposed onto the circular form of Black – White Duet with Yellow” (oil on canvas, 1953) and Black – White Duet with Red” (oil on canvas, 1953) where the (optical) inversion of black and white illustrates yet again the interpenetration of form and space. The orthogonal order of the black and white planes becomes more flexible to adapt to the flat form of the circular shaped canvas.

First One” (oil on canvas, 1953), in dense gray and black, is perhaps the first work in which the artist attempts to translate the line and flow of a curve (the gray form), swelling slightly along its asymmetrical course (numerous drawings prepared the artist for original work on the "particular space concept" that the curved space gave him) and influencing the perception of an already moving space ("the curved space which moves in every direction"). The contours of this curve delimit the portions of (black) space around it. The white form in Yellow Edge” (oil on canvas), painted that same year, that is both bulbous and flat, and penetrates the orange plane, is similar.

Inner – Outer Circle” (oil on canvas, 1954), renders more explicitly the meeting between two superimposed, circular planes (in gray and black).

The theme of sphericity and the geometric division of a "curved space" predominates in some tondo works such as Black – White – Black” (oil on canvas, 1954), the black and white Approaching Sphere” (enamel paint on a painted aluminum panel, 1955), the red and black Stonewall” (oil on canvas, 1956), and Black Crescent” (oil on canvas, 1955).

The space itself must, to use the artist’s words "absorb" the form, " releasing it of its every need to behave any longer as form." In this kind of work, two unequal portions of a circular shape share the spherical space, separated by a fissure that creates the suggestion of a fluctuating space between the curves (the theme of Approaching Sphere provides the symbolic connotation of these works). The intuition of the curvature of space is expressed here.

The later tondo works of the same decade reveal how important the discovery of the plastic possibil-

ities inherent in the circle or stemming from it were for Smith, in order to express the spirit of a total space through the internal plasticity of the planes.

The circular works such as Black Rock” (oil on canvas, 1955) in black and gray, Red Black Rock” (collage and oil on canvas, 1955), Okehe” (oil on canvas), painted the same year in black and white, Black – Copper” (oil on copper paint on canvas, 1956–57)—this painting was shown in the exhibition Construction and Geometry in Painting – From Malevich to "Tomorrow" at the Galerie Chalette, in March–May 1960, one of the first exhibitions to launch the debate on the "New Geometry"—translate the idea of this space into interlocking planes, evoking not so much the concept of "exchange" but rather an uninterrupted flow. In Black Rock, two symmetrical planes meet on either side of a deep curve. The expressive curvature of the single line is like a juncture of two worlds, whose chance encounter creates constant movement on the surface. The black concentrated form of the central plane of Okehe” (oil on canvas, 1955) determines and contains the curves of the two white forms that are linked to it, suggesting a whole. The planes are heightened by the harmony of black and white.

The formal content of Anitou no. 1” (oil on canvas) and Anitou no. 3” (oil on canvas), from 1958—where the position of the black and the white is reversed—affirm a concern for cohesion met by the sober majesty of the black and white. The large white form of Anitou no. 3 was included in Modern Classicism held at the David Herbert Gallery, New York, in February 1960, alongside works by Josef Albers, Ellsworth Kelly, Myron Stout, George Teraski, Sidney Wolfinson, Alexander Calder, and Louise Nevelson. Affirmatively asymmetrical, this form pushes the black areas toward the periphery and the lateral elements create the illusion of a deep space that extends to the other, invisible side of the surface.

The relationship between all the planes in Furtheros Pirus” (oil on canvas), another work in a circular format dating from 1958, rests on an intuitive plastic balance. The dark black and brown forms with their sharp profile and clean-cut edges are further accentuated by the mass density of the white zone surrounding them, and this only
Correspondence
Yellow Paint, 1961
87 x 52\(\frac{1}{2}\) in
(211.3 x 135.3 cm)
Galerie Hoffmann, Friedberg (Germany)

Correspondence
Red - White no. 1, 1963
Oil on canvas
88 x 66\(\frac{1}{2}\) in
(223 x 174 cm)
Galerie Hoffmann, Friedberg (Germany)
acquires its full resonance through the interaction of the forms.

The spirit of concision becomes naturally combined with fullness in the serene articulation of the three planes in *Iami*" (1958), sustained by the subtle association of light gray, black and white.

The work on the concept of space, and on the line as the meeting point of the planes, continues in some works dating from the end of the 1950s, the first “cut out” canvases, in unusual formats (triangles" from 1954–55 or squares" from 1956–57 with rounded corners, the oval of *Geronimo," oil on canvas, 1957, and the long rectangles with four curved sides of *Moon" and *Sun," oil on canvas, 1958–59). The shaping of the external support, the “cut out canvas,” perhaps permitted Smith to approach his intuition of a curved and continuous space in a more concrete manner. The shape of the frame is part of the imagery of the forms. In *Sun" and *Moon (1958–59) the curved planes structurally match the winding line that divides them, like the two sides of the universe, one lit up and the other still in darkness (the black and gray of *Moon; the yellow and white of *Sun). The internal line is echoed by the form of the contours.

The possibilities of the spherical space are subsequently adapted to the rectangular plane through mastery of the flatness, so typical of Smith, in which his majestic and precise, flexible or irregular curves are inscribed.

At the end of the 1950s, Smith’s work acquired greater freedom and diversity, albeit preserving a concern for control, accompanied by a particularly expressive interplay of similar shades such as the different blacks in *Niamei" (oil on canvas, 1957), the contrast of black and white in *Ada" (oil on canvas, 1958) and in *Expans" (oil on canvas, 1959), and the association of gray, black and white in *May Twenty" (oil on canvas, 1959) and *Black Anthem" (oil on canvas, 1960).

The almost daring lightness of the irregular form in *May Twenty" seems to want to make the rigorous frame explode. The curves in *Expans" (1959), which do not close in on themselves, express the power radiating from a form that expands and dilates, whilst remaining “self-contained.”
Correspondence
Green – Orange,
1966
38 x 38 in
(96.5 x 96.5 cm)
Estate of the artist
Correspondence
Blue - White, 1967
Acrylic on canvas
90 x 50 in
(229.0 x 127 cm)
Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York
Gift of the artist
In *Black Anthem* (1960), which displays great formal and tonal mastery, two light and slightly dissimilar forms spring from the sides as though out of nowhere, drawn within the curves of the vast black plane. The extremities of these forms seem to extend beyond the edges of the frame, and their “hard” angles (turned toward the latter) would already be an example of Hard-Edge abstraction if the unified field did not resemble these forms in the sumptuous orchestration of silvery pale gray, black and white. Within the context of New Abstraction this work is distinguished by its forms, its sobriety and its impressive size.

With their tall, rectangular format, *Over Easy* and *Autumn Easy* (oil on canvas, 1958) and *Autumn Easy* (oil on canvas, 1961), in light mauve and black, anticipate the major series of “Correspondences” by linking two forms-planes that “correspond” at the limit of their common edge.

*Black Bend* (oil on canvas, 1960), exhibited in *Geometric Abstraction in America*, Whitney Museum of Art, March–May 1962), *Two Way Stretch* (oil on canvas, 1961), and *Stretch of Black III* (oil on canvas, 1961) are similar in their nuanced tonal register of black, light or dark mauve, and red (or red ochre). These works still attest to the essential role of a central plane that restrains the strong, asymmetrical curves.

A 1961 work by Smith, *The River* (oil on canvas) was associated to the context of *American Abstract Expressionists and Imagists* (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, October–December 1961) because of the sensibility evident in the line of its moving plane. It was doubtless an example, according to a certain logic, of the “Imagist wing of free abstraction” that questioned what H.H. Arnason referred to as “the arbitrary demarcation between free and geometric abstraction.”

It is known that this major exhibition was held some time after the debate began on the “new geometry,” “modern classicism” (*Modern Classicism*, The David Herbert Gallery, New York, February 1960), and “Hard-Edge” (*Six American Painters*, Arthur Tooth Gallery, London, January–February 1961).

Correspondence

Black - White, 1968
Oil on canvas
98 x 120 in
(248.4 x 304.8 cm)
Estate of the artist
Three Yellow Ovals
1967
Acrylic on canvas
18 x 32 in
(45.7 x 126.3 cm)
Estate of the artist
The Correspondences

The concept of the line evolved in the series of "Correspondences" (1960–68), one of the most significant periods of Smith's mature oeuvre. The full development and structural variety of this group of works make it one of the most original contributions to New Abstraction. These works, thus titled to indicate the fundamental concept underpinning the entire group, permitted Leon Polk Smith to renew his approach to the relationship between line, form and color in a unified space (the Stable Gallery exhibited a first group of "Correspondences" in March–April 1963). The correspondence of two distinct planes of color, which meet on either side of the line that links them, was born after a gestation that remains a mystery. From a quest for the line there emerged the creation of two opposite "worlds" that adjust to each other guided by the intuition of harmony and the balance of colored masses.

The "Correspondences" rest on the principle of the "adaptation" of two planes through the power of the line, and the search for a subtle plastic equivalence through the action of the color. The internal scale of the forms increases to meet a new need for expansion and unity. A dialogue between forms is established in each work, rather than the simple resolution of a polarity. Another group was exhibited at the Galerie Chalette in October 1965, accompanied by "torn drawings," which are a kind of collage where the line, created from two torn pieces of paper, has been shifted to the interior of the plane (Torn Drawing, cardboard-paste, 1960).

The "exchange" between two forms animated by tension is created by starting from the line. The 1960–61 "Correspondences" are characterized by the fullness of the curve that joins two forms (Cobalt Violet – Deep Yellow, 1960; Correspondence Yellow Point, 1961, shown in the 65th Annual Exhibition of American Art at the Art Institute of Chicago, 1962). The equal intensity of the tones unifies the surface like an energy field. Cobalt Violet – Deep Yellow featured in the exhibition Six American Abstract Painters (introduction to the catalogue by Lawrence Alloway) at the Tooth Gallery, London, in January–February 1961, which presented works by...
Ellsworth Kelly, Alexander Liberman, Agnes Martin, Ad Reinhardt, Sidney Wolflon and Leon Polk Smith. This was one of the most important exhibitions as regards the search for concepts and unifying aesthetic criteria (the relationship between classicism and free inventive geometry, the effects of new texture and of finish as the "antithesis" of Action Painting, surface unity, "hard-edge," and the "control factor"). Referring to Cohel's Violet - Deep Yellow, Allowy remarked on the "oscillation which involves the whole picture" and the "mysterious sense of movement."

The line in Correspondence Red, Green, Large no. 811 (1961, in blue-green and red) becomes rounded and subsequently breaks, seeking its direction that may perhaps be found on the other side of the surface. A seemingly whimsical line encloses the planets in its twists and turns in Correspondence Black - Silver, 1962. The indefinable nature of the line in Correspondence White - Yellow, 1962, corresponds to the diffuse luminosity of the combination of orangered-yellow and white.

Some "Correspondences" of 1961-62 were included in the exhibition The New Formalism - Contemporary American Painting (The University of Michigan Museum of Art, January-February 1964).12

In 1963, the "correspondences" rendered more evident the quest for a unified plane, where the "weight" and intensity of the colors, like the narrow blue form of Correspondence Blue - Yellow that meets the luminous yellow plane coming from one side, respond to contrasting forms with unequal surfaces (Correspondence Red - White no. 1; Correspondence Blue - Yellow, oil on canvas).

The two planes in Correspondence Black - Yellow, 1963, are joined and interlocked by the zigzag line, while the limpid winding line in Correspondence Red Black "S" On Oval (oil on canvas, 1963) is in structural harmony with the oval support.

In Correspondence Green - Orange (oil on canvas, 1963), Correspondence White - Orange (oil on canvas, 1964), and Correspondence Yellow - Red (oil on canvas, 1965), an unusual shape stands out from the "colorform" that envelops it (the center of gravity is situated above or below the middle of the canvas). The centered shape in Correspondence White - Orange (exhibited in The Responsive Eye, Museum of Modern Art, New York, February-April 1965) lends itself to a powerful visual contrast with the ground.

In Correspondence Violet - Scarlet (oil on canvas, 1965) the scarlet curve stops a few inches from the lower edge. The tondo Correspondence Black - White Reversed (oil on canvas, 1965) echoes yet again the balance of a world perceived as a whole, through the interaction of the interlocking forms.

Within the context of the exhibition Systemic Painting (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, October-November 1966) the pure curve of the blue arc in Correspondence Orange - Blue (oil on canvas, 1965), cutting through the orange ground from one side, is a new contribution to the universe of non-systematic geometry, stemming from an inner force.

In 1966, a work like Correspondence Blue - White (oil on canvas) again expresses through the fullness of a curve the color harmony of two forms, while the need for precision of line translating a contained force and a kind of straightness in the suppleness characterizes Correspondence Green - Orange (oil on canvas, 1966) with the equal "value" of its two planes.

Not only the size of the canvas, but also the inner scale expands in the more geometrized 1967-68 "Correspondences." In Correspondence Black - White (a tall rectangle) and Correspondence Yellow - White (a large square from 1967), the nature of the line serves to give mysterious expression to a white form, with mixed contours (combining two straight lines, a curve, and a diagonal), like a window opening onto infinity in its black and yellow ground. The thrust of the diagonal and the response of the upper curve seem to bear upward that ideal of harmony whose hidden meaning doubles lies in the artist's alliance with universal forces.

The evolution of the line can be gauged by the development that took place from Stonewall (see note 81), 1956, to Correspondence Green - Red (oil on canvas, 1968), or from Black Anthem (see note 102), 1960, to Correspondence Black - White, 1968. The cohesion of the circular surface of Correspondence Green - Red is based as much on
Constellation for
Dut Red – White,
1967
Acrylic on canvas
130 x 30 cm
(51.2 x 78.7 cm)
Estate of the artist
Constellation M,
1989
Oil on canvas
3 panels
120 x 88 1/2 in
(304.8 x 224.8 cm)
each
Rose Art Museum,
Brandeis University,
Waltham (MA)
Gift of Dr. and
Mrs. Arthur Lejute,
New York
Constellation

1969

Twelve Circles
Acrylic on canvas
102 x 146
(261.1 x 368.8 cm)
Estate of the artist

Constellation MIII

Wax, 1970
Acrylic on canvas,
2 panels,
circle diam. 78 in
(198.1 cm) each;
67 x 40 in
(170.2 x 101.6 cm)
Brooklyn Museum
of Art, New York
Gift of the artist
Constellation A6
Blue - Red, 1972
Acrylic on canvas
2 panels: 54 x 47 in
(137.8 x 119.4 cm)
Museum für Kunst
Köln, Germany
the complementary colors as on the compact unity of its full forms. In its vast proportions, the angle in *Correspondence Black – White* becomes a rectilinear join (without a right angle)\(^\dagger\) that unites the equally saturated black and white planes.

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**The Constellations**

Smith’s greatest work on the power of forms and on their dynamic relationship with space is concentrated in the 1967–75 "Constellations," thus titled because of their reference to the "celestial configurations."\(^\dagger\dagger\) The parameters in this evolution are the line as "forces of energy,"\(^\dagger\dagger\) space, and movement. The first exhibition of these works was held at the Galerie Chalette in October–November 1969.\(^\dagger\dagger\)

His works were executed in acrylic from then on.

The "Constellations" represent new work on form and space, which takes concrete shape in an ensemble of two or more panels that constitute a single plastic unit. The geometric language from which they borrow is transformed or reinterpreted according to the artist’s inspiration and consists of circles and large ovals divided by planes of color, pointed ovals, squares and rectangles with slightly rounded corners.

Each "Constellation" draws a particular trajectory in the wall space. The straight or curved line that traverses the forms and extends from one tangential point to another takes on the role of linking the planes. The line is animated by force; it is also the carrier of direction or movement. The orientation of the panels (or the forms) and the points of linear continuity, submitted to the most extreme control, condition the relationship between the form and the space it calls out (henceforth form is called *space-form* [spaceform]; the "Constellations" move from "top to bottom, from bottom to top," in every direction, the forms constitute "shifting patterns of complexity").\(^\dagger\dagger\)

The "Correspondences" at times refer to the idea of the fluctuation of an infinite space reduced to the plane, whose flat surface is stripped of any illusion of depth. In the "Constellations," the "shaped" forms that preserve their autonomy actively project into the external space. Each work seems to impose new formal relationships that underpin, however, the intuition of the balance of expertly mastered plastic laws.
Three Yellow Oval† (acrylic on canvas, 1967) was described by the artist as an intermediate stage between the "Correspondences" and the "Constellations". A diagonal symmetrically divides into equal portions three tangential oval panels of the same size. The direction of the line suggests a displacement of the forms in the space. Smith stressed the "multiple" role of the line that "regulates the speed of movement," "a reverberator for the forces of energy which build up about it..."††

In Constellation For Our Red – White (acrylic on canvas, 1967), whose variable position on the wall can change one's perception of it, an oblique line creates a regular division, in the homogeneous sections of two colors, in five square panels with rounded corners, evenly positioned in relation to it. A sphere and an oval meet in Constellation Green – Blue††† (acrylic on canvas, 1968), where a vertical line unites two forms whose asymmetrical planes correspond only in density of color. Tensions become annihilated in the "complementarity" of the two colors, dark yellow and cobalt blue, in Constellation I Deep Yellow and Blue Dark††† (acrylic on canvas, 1968–69). The line in Constellation S Dark – Yellow††† (acrylic on canvas, 1968), broken in several parts, determines the equal paths between the centers of four spheres.

The role of color remains unifying, as in Constellation M†† (oil on canvas, 1969), where three equal ovals asymmetrically divided by colored planes and each pointing in a different direction, combine three warm shades ranging from mauve to blue, orange and yellow.

Color is closely associated with the shape of the panels and the intervention of the wall space in some works of 1969, in which the fragments of painted elements recompose internal geometric forms, for instance, the hexagon cut out of the circumference consisting of six tangential circles in Constellation A†† (acrylic on canvas, 1969), and the three round shapes of Constellation Red – Blue – Red† (acrylic on canvas, 1969), which are hollow in the center and link the square planes that they cover in a regular sequence. In this painting the plastic interaction of the painted form and the concrete panels achieves a unique symmetrical balance.
Cross Roads Grey.
1978
Acrylic on canvas
82 x 82 in
(208.3 x 208.3 cm)
Mr. Robert
M. Jumison
Collection,
New York

1978
Acrylic on canvas
dim. 80 in
(203.2 cm)
Estate of the artist
Red Wing, 1979
Acrylic on canvas
49 3/8 x 181 in
(125.3 x 460.7 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art,
New York
Helen Acheson,
William A.M.
Burdett
and
Bancroft
Rooftop Feeds
Photograph © 2001
The Museum of
Modern Art

Long Journey, 1981
Acrylic on canvas
50 x 119 in
(127.0 x 48.9 cm)
Estate of the artist
The number of units increases in the most lyrically exuberant "Constellations" (Constellation Twelve Circles, acrylic on canvas, 1969), which "send back" segments of colored circles from one form to another in a multidirectional space. The activation of the whole surface—the internal space of the work with the interstices of wall space and the invitation to multiply the forms in all directions—is the objective attained ("The mystery is this situation, coupled with an endlessly silent contemplative serenity"). Smith's "Constellations" thus express the explosive and joyous force of the forms brought together in a structured universe, and yet again exchanging ranges of color.

This innovation in the spirit of the forms yet again broke new ground. Constellation Milky Way (acrylic on canvas, 1970) combines an oval and a sphere (in blue, white and black) in a movement where the two forms seem to draw apart and come together, seemingly inspiring the suggestive power of the line in the contrast between the continuous curve and the two straight lines separated by the section of wall.

Constellation #5 Blue – Red (acrylic on canvas, 1972) is an originally shaped work created by the combination of a sphere and a pointed oval.

The panels of Constellation Yellow – Blue Violet (acrylic on canvas, 1970) and Constellation Green Square Accent (acrylic on canvas, 1971), consisting of five and six sections respectively, are part of a geometric curve that could become a complete circumference. The internal relationships of a work like Constellation Green Square Accent are rendered more complex by the introduction of a geometric progression in the size of the panels, which is matched by the gradation of colors. The line intervenes again in the context of a simple progression (the series began in 1967) in the oblique sequence of panels of the same diameter (Constellation Six Circles Black and White, acrylic on canvas, 1974), which it separates. The line stops when the surface of the opposite color corresponds to a portion of the lower color. In the simplicity of the concept, the relationship between the inclination of the forms and the movement of the internal line is one of great conceptual rigor. In Constellation Tall Black – Red (acrylic on canvas, 1975), three panels succeed each other at an imperceptibly increasing dif-
Form Space #2
1989
Acrylic on canvas
2 panels: 96 x 144 in
(243.6 x 365.8 cm)
Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York
Gift of the artist

Sunset Cerbe. 1983
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 112 in
(152.4 x 284.5 cm)
Private collection
New Mexico for August, 1963
Acrylic on canvas
120 x 60 in
(304.8 x 152.4 cm)
Estate of the artist

At Summer, 1963
Acrylic on canvas
45 x 72 in
(114.3 x 182.9 cm)
Estate of the artist
**Green – Two Black Edges**, 1984
Acrylic on canvas and wood
74 x 170 in
(188 x 432 cm)
Neues Museum, Staatliches Museum für Kunst und Design, Nuremberg (Germany)

**Violet with Red Curve**, 1965
Acrylic on canvas with wood frame
73 x 84 in
(185.6 x 213.4 cm)
Estate of the artist
Easy Ride, 1985
Acrylic on canvas
50 x 120 in
(127 x 304.8 cm)
Estate of the artist
Long Horizons, 1984
Acrylic on canvas
80 x 610 cm
(31.5 x 240 in)
Estate of the artist

Big Space - Black
Line, 1966
Acrylic on canvas
80 x 90 cm
(31.5 x 35.5 in)
Estate of the artist
ference in level, so that the line dividing the colors is horizontally recomposed.

The "architectural" purity of a transitional work, *Constellation Architectural Rhythms Black–White* (acrylic on canvas, 1970), consisting of two tondos, anticipates the single "tondo" works of 1976. The 1970 work is innovative in its use of adjacent "tondos," while the twin right-angles invite the viewer to perceive them as a single form.

In 1976, a new series of "tondo" works in black and white, saw the light of day. A first group was exhibited at the Galerie Denise René in February–March 1977, preceded by preliminary drawings whose rigor can only be compared to the early circular compositions of Neoplasticism.

The austere, geometric elements of Lois Polk Smith's art subtly assert themselves in these works through their absolute frontality. A simplification of the form-space relationship in pure flatness still guarantees, as in certain works of the end of the 1950s, the possible interplay of inverted planes that the relationship of black and white particularly lends itself to (#7612, acrylic on canvas, 1976). A central form in the shape of a cross appears with its corners on the periphery (#7619, *White Cross*, acrylic on canvas, 1976; *Pearl Gray and Black Cross*, acrylic on canvas, 1976).

Doesn't severity become merely apparent when an eloquent, mixed form (renewing the formal combination of straight line and curves) is integrated with the circular format (#7602, acrylic on canvas, 1976), or when the rigor of the concept is softened by the quality of the pearly gray (the edges of *Pearl Gray and Black Cross*)?

Forms with rectilinear edges develop from the square like the form that advances to meet the black plane in #7612. A white rectangular element "suspended" from the upper edge by its curve is another invitation to penetrate its mystery, through the subtle elevation, suggested by the curvature (#7691, *Open Door*, acrylic on canvas, 1976).

In a different and extremely refined color register, diffuse light gray and white, of which Smith is a great master, the angular gray shape of #7616.
Open Composition, 1940
Oil on canvas
52 x 28 in
(132.1 x 71.1 cm)
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (TX)
Open Space, 1990
Acrylic on canvas
(67.7 x 69) in
(172.4 x 152.4 cm)
Estate of the artist
Devin Brice, 1992
Acrylic on canvas
30 x 32 in
(76.2 x 81.3 cm)
Estate of the artist

Event in Red, 1994
Acrylic on canvas
72 x 36 in
(182.9 x 91.4 cm)
Estate of the artist
(acrylic on canvas, 1976), with two straight sides intersected by an oblique line, is adapted to the circular form. With this work the artist's art of exacting plasticity, with its inner radiance rendered by color and the quality of the relationships, makes a lasting mark.

The year 1978 was dominated by the spirit of a form, for example, the impenetrable oval curve in #7801 (acrylic on canvas), which is perhaps the last echo of the curves of the 1950s (First One) to be found in the interdependence of two curved spaces (the enlarged oval withdraws to the points of possible 'intersection' with the circumference).

Form can be the expression of the fullness of a contained tension, like the impressive one in #7802 Cross Roads (acrylic on canvas, 1978), a large oblique cross implying a movement created on the plane by its edges parallel to those of the square element.

Yet again the transposition of a structural theme onto a different tonal relationship (the gray and white of Cross Roads Grey, acrylic on canvas, 1978) is a device deployed to give the color an indefinable expressive power.

It is still the expansion of the form that is evoked by the planes of Ax – Black White (acrylic on canvas, 1978) and the radiant form of Rising Red (acrylic on canvas, 1978).

Red Wing (acrylic on canvas, two panels, 1979) was one of the works that creates to a high degree the dynamic balance which lies at the core of Leon Polk Smith's entire oeuvre. It appears first and foremost like a composition in space, an actual, bold conquest of the wall plane through the originality of the configuration. The unity of the work rests on the relationships of tension created in the asymmetry of the colored planes and through the "exchange" of straight lines and curves between one panel and the other. The art of equilibrium, of the intuitive calculation of the measure of the colored surfaces is added to the purely geometric combination. The response between the two panels arises from the adjustment of the straight lines and curves and from the intense dialogue between black and red. If the whole—the pregnant unity of a form—is more than the sum of its parts, Smith's art of synthesis illustrates and magnifies this principle of gestalt psychology in this work.

Some works from the end of the 1970s consisting of several parts are composed of assembled panels, to which the internal form gives a sense of continuity, as in George Washington Bridge #2 (acrylic on canvas, three 'tongos,' 1979) and Long Journey (acrylic on canvas, three rectangular panels, 1980).

The form-space relationship was still to evolve and change in the works of the "Form Space Series" (1980–82). Two (identical or dissimilar) geometric shapes confront each other on either side of a space (the spatial arrangement of the panels is different in each work). The works in the "Form Space Series" embody one of the artist's fundamental aspirations, the integration of form and space (of which the "Constellations" were the first stage). The idea of a dialogue of forms in a diptych relationship is expressed here. Though Smith chooses simplicity (the reduction of color in the monochrome panels), these flat forms, the most "architectural" in the whole of his oeuvre, have the power to metamorphose their internal relationship each time (Form Space Series #2, acrylic on canvas, 1980; Form Space Series #4, acrylic on canvas, 1980; Form Space Series: Black Red, acrylic on canvas, 1981; Form Space Series: Yellow – Blue, acrylic on canvas, 1982).

The spiritual lightness of White Painting nos. 1–4, 1987, a group of four panels whose increasing interior divisions modify the profile and create a suggestion of levitation, anticipates the spirit of the final period.

Smith was anxious not to consider any formal solution definitive. Each series contains the embryo of the following one, and, at the same time, older ideas also take shape in a new mold, enriched by recent innovations.

Smith returned to a new series of "shaped canvases" in 1983. Sunset Carribe (orange and bluish-green), New Moon for August (white and blue) and At Sunrise (red and black), acrylic on canvas, 1983, both grave and joyous, combine their asymmetrical planes, with recurring curves bending back onto expressive ovals.
In the 1984–85 works, wooden bars, the visible part of the construction, contribute to the originality of the new shaped forms, with marked edges. Their extended width is another way of opening up the form to the space and accentuating its expansion (Purple under Curve, Green — Two Black Edges, acrylic on canvas, 1984, or Violet with Red Curve, acrylic on canvas, 1985).

The form remains extraordinarily compact, as attested by a new series of black and white works including Floating Black (acrylic on canvas, 1984), Easy Ride and Long Horizon (acrylic on canvas, 1985).

**Big Space — Black Line** is a large angle made by a pure line and a narrow black plane. The artist first experimented with this on the walls of his studio, and the last stage is this work of acrylic on canvas (1990). The relationship with the space becomes immaterial in the association of a line and a plane that are not closed. The supreme relationship of a full form and a single line is reminiscent of the wall-reliefs of 1978 (The Place 1, 2, 3, wall-reliefs) that combined a wooden shape in relief with a drawn line on small panels (The Place no. 1), or the same shape and its painted equivalent (The Place no. 3).

The work on the line, color and space appears together in the “Yonder” series (Yonder Orange, acrylic on canvas, 1990; Yonder Purple, acrylic on canvas, 1990; Yonder Blue, acrylic on canvas, 1990; Yonder Turquoise Green). The “Yonder” works express nostalgia for something out of sight, for a dim distance (as the title itself suggests), rendered plastically by a single form linked to a line that could be limitlessly extended.

The desire to open up the space already underpinned the significance of certain works from the 1940s. Open Composition (1946, contemporary of the first “Exchanges”) symbolically expresses this through the spaces between the carefully arranged groups of forms. The distance covered between Open Composition and Open Space (1990, the lightest work inscribed on a wall space) throws light on the inner logic of the development of Smith’s whole oeuvre. In Open Space, the simple ribbon can replace the acrylic line when installation in a gallery (Galerie Hoffmann, Friedberg, 1991–92) or a museum (Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, installations of 1993 and 1995) demand it. Can Open Space, a wide open angle constituted by three lines whose orientation and thickness may vary, be merely a symbol?

In 1992, in an impressive series of gray works (the color of the panel), Leon Polk Smith invested the line with a new power. The black lines determine new relationships with space and invent unexpected and sometimes humorous configurations. Pairs of inverted lines dialogue whilst containing portions of indefinite space as in Jubilee (acrylic on canvas, 1992), Playing One (acrylic on canvas, 1992), Jubilee Square (acrylic on canvas, 1992). Sometimes the isolated, but not disembodied, line expresses the force of a path, a broken line cutting deep angles (Open Door, acrylic on canvas, 1992), the angular line and plane (Black Angle on Gray, acrylic on canvas, 1992), the continuous line of an uninterrupted movement (Zig-Zag Gray, acrylic on canvas, 1994).

The line form concept is taken to the extreme of an internal distillation but the intrusion of the luminous or saturated color yet again upsets the formal elements. The black angle on a deep blue plane (Dark Cobalt Blue, acrylic on canvas, 1992) is more than a transposition of the angle onto a wall space (“Open Space”). This work discreetly anticipates the fullness of life-forces that only has an equivalent in the profound universe of color and line, both symbolic and concrete, the line cutting through the tall, orangey-red rectangular plane (Event in Red, acrylic on canvas, 1994), the concise stable line in a radiating blue (Event in Blue +, acrylic on canvas, 1994), or the white curve that harmonizes with the bluish green of the “tondo” (Event in Green, acrylic on canvas, 1994). Elsewhere a fluctuating curve gives rise to an immaculate gray in a curved space (Event in Grey, acrylic on canvas, 1994) and a regular angular line rigorously cuts through another enveloping blue (Event in Blue, acrylic on canvas, 1994). Meanwhile, the “open” angles recurring at the top of a circular canvas (Event in Orange, acrylic on canvas, 1994), the “spiritual” angles “opening up” the sides of a black tondo (Event in Black, acrylic on canvas, 1994), and the black contained lines cutting through deep red (Event in Scarlet, acrylic on canvas, 1995) yet again give the angle and the pure line an essential life function.
Event in Grey, 1984
Acrylic on canvas
Dia. 50 in
(127 cm)
Estate of the artist
We must salute the gestalt and conceptual mastery of Leon Polk Smith's art, which permitted him to confront, completely independently, the younger generation of New Abstraction from which he was separated by only twenty years or so.

The rigor and poetry of his oeuvre link him to Hard-Edge and pure abstraction, however, the original and solitary vocation that guided his most springing impulses and innovations led him, inevitably, to transcend the limits of pure relational art, whose mysterious power he never ceased to feel. A cosmic intuition runs through his prolific oeuvre, which caused him tirelessly to invent new plastic relationships, through gradual and decisive stages, and his art became even more purified in its final distillation.

Footnotes:
1 History of the collection the A.E. Gallatin Collection, set up in spring 1927, was housed in New York University Library.
2 In 1933, it was transferred to the Art Institute of Chicago.
3 The evolution of new abstraction, 1933-1935.
5 This statement is found in the artist's own words.
8 "The Art of America's Abstraction," 1934.
12 "The Art of America's Abstraction," 1934.
16 "The Art of America's Abstraction," 1934.
34 "The Art of America's Abstraction," 1934.
38 "The Art of America's Abstraction," 1934.


* Dier Blau – Rood*, oil on canvas, 1945, 31 x 23 in (78.7 x 58.9 cm), estate of the artist. Reprod. in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble exh. cat., op. cit., p. 32.

* Gray Column*, oil on canvas, 1945, 72 x 48 in (182.9 x 121.0 cm), estate of the artist. Reprod. in color in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble exh. cat., op. cit., p. 33 (dated 1947). This essay refers to the chronology suggested by Lawrence Alloway in the *Cézanne Chichibu* brochure, *Geometric Painting 1933–1953* by Leon Polk Smith, Nov. 1970 (the structural group comprised works from 1945 to 1947).


* Blue, Black, White*, oil on canvas, 1946, 27 x 50 in (68.6 x 127 cm), *Birmingham Museum of Art (AL)*.

* Guiraud, gouache on paper, 1946, 24 x 16 in (61 x 40.6 cm), *Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield (MA)*.

* New York City*, oil on canvas, 1945, 47 x 33 in (119.4 x 83.8 cm), *Whitney Museum of American Art, New York*. This work was shown in the exhibition *Geometric Abstraction*, University of Nebraska, exh. cat., op. cit. (repr. in b/w, p. 50) and in *Mondrian and Non-Plasticism in America. A Remark* (Nancy Troy), *Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven (CT)*, Oct.-Dec. 1979 (repr. in b/w in exh. cat., no. 41). This work is also reproduced in the Ludwigshafen and Grenoble exh. cat., 1989, op. cit., p. 99 (in b/w). The title alone can be seen as an early homage to Mondrian (New York City, the snow of the series, oil, and adhesive tape, dating from 1940-41), repr. in color in Leon Polk Smith American Painters, exh. cat., op. cit., pl. 4.

* G. W. B. (George Washington Bridge), oil on canvas, 1945, 52 x 22 in (132.0 x 55.9 cm), estate of the artist. Reprod. in color (black, yellow, and white) in Leon Polk Smith, exh. cat., *Galerie Denise René, Dec. 1973*.

* Unite certain “disciples.”* Leon Polk Smith did not have any personal contact with Mondrian (see Nancy Troy, op. cit., p. 195).


Glamer at Kunsthalle Zürich, Kunsthalle Zürich, Sammlungshäfte (p. 57); Relational Painting, oil on canvas, 1995, 47 1/4 x 40 1/2 in. (120 x 102 cm), Yale University Art Gallery, repud. in catalogue, pub. cit., p. 300, no. 305; in a Checklist of American Painting at Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven (CT), 1982, no. 59: it developed with the "tendons," Relational Painting Tondo # 1, oil on canvas (133 cm), Kunsthalle Zürich (repr. in cat., pub. cit., p. 175), and evolved toward his mature style from 1945 on, can be already seen in Relational Painting Tondo # 3, oil on panel, 1945, diam. 37 1/2 in. (96 cm), repro. in Fritz Glamer, Kunsthalle Bern (exhibition by Max Bill), Aug.-Sept. 1972, no. 2, and in Margot Staller, Fritz Glamer (Zürich: A.B.C. Verlag, 1976), p. 76. See also Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America 1907-1944, pub. cit., essay by Nancy Torrey, pp. 147-49.


Red-Black, oil on canvas, 1946-47, 40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm), estate of the artist. Reputed in color in Galerie Chalmetre brochure, 1970, op. cit., and in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble exh. cat., op. cit., p. 34.

Blue-Red-White, oil on canvas, 1946, 35 x 38 in. (88.9 x 96.5 cm), estate of the artist.

Red-Black-White, oil on canvas, 1948, 38 x 38 in (96.5 x 96.5 cm), estate of the artist. Reputed in color in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble exh. cat., op. cit., p. 34.

Lawrence Alloway, introduction to the Chalmetre Gallery brochure, 1970, op. cit. Lawrence Alloway applied the all-over concept to paintings in the structural series whose formal elements are reminiscent of letters or months he describes as cartouches.

Lawrence Alloway, ibid., Post-Mondrian Painters in America, May-June 1949, Sidney Janis Gallery ("For Release", typescript document, Sidney Janis Gallery Archives). List of participants: Albers, Boshkovsky, Diller, Glamer, Holzman, Moore, Peress, Salmouse, Smith. The press release says: "This exhibition introduces to the public a group of painters artists under the title of Post-Mondrian Painters. Their work is presented here may briefly be described as horizontal-rectangular, two-dimensional space painting."

W. P. L. oil on canvas, 1949, 48 x 32 in. (121.9 x 81.3 cm), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (gift of Dr. and Mrs. Arthur Loya). Repud. in color in Leon Polk Smith American Painters, exh. cat., op. cit., pl. 12.

This work is closest to the rhythm and linear division of Mondrian's Broadway Boogie-Woogie. On Diller's evolution, see "Barney Diller, 1942" (essay by Nancy Torrey, pp. 78-79).

Gray Yellow White, oil on canvas, 1949, 46 x 36 in. (116.8 x 91.4 cm), estate of the artist. Reputed in color in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble exh. cat., op. cit., p. 34.

"Dialpage Passage no. 9," oil on canvas, 1949, 46 x 36 in. (116.8 x 91.4 cm), estate of the artist. Reputed in color in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble exh. cat., op. cit., p. 36.

"Dialpage Passage no. 9," oil on canvas, 1949, 46 x 36 in. (116.8 x 91.4 cm), estate of the artist. Reputed in color in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble exh. cat., op. cit., p. 36.


"Dialpage Passage no. 7," oil on canvas, 1949, 43 x 15 in. (109.2 x 38.1 cm), The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit (MI). For Mondrian, as opposed to Van Doesburg, only the purely orthogonal relation (the "universal expression" resulting from "an equivalence of horizontal and vertical expression") embodied the ideal of Neoplasticism and could permit it to extend into architecture and the environment. See on this subject the interview printed in The New Art — The New Life — The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian, op. cit., pp. 316-357 ("An Interview with Mondrian."") 1945, by James Johnson Sweeney.

"Dialpage Passage 120," oil on wood panel, 1947, diam. 24 in. private collection.

"Dialpage Passage 120," oil on canvas, 1947-51, diam. 24 in. private collection.

"Dialpage Passage 120," oil on canvas, 1947-51, diam. 24 in. private collection.

"Dialpage Passage 120," oil on canvas, 1947-51, diam. 24 in. private collection.

"Dialpage Passage 120," oil on canvas, 1947-51, diam. 24 in. private collection.

"Dialpage Passage 120," oil on canvas, 1947-51, diam. 24 in. private collection.

See Lawrence Alloway on the way Leon Polk Smith used the oil medium (the first layer diluted with water) was followed by many other layers, in his introduction to Leon Polk Smith, exh. cat. Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham (MA), Apr.-May 1966, and San Francisco Museum of Art (CA), May-June 1968, p. 3.

For Mondrian "form" became the synonym of "relation" (located planes through their position and size as well as through the color value plastically express only statics not forms), in Le Non-plasticisme, Principe général de l'Equivocation plastique (Paris: Lalanne Rosenberg, 1930). The mystic circle, symbol of the infinite summed up in the "One" is doubled the most important response to the philosophical ideology of Piet Mondrian. Fritz Glamer's evolution became crystallized in the "tendons." It is in this favored shape that the artist introduces the slanting or oblique plane "to determine" the space and to abbreviate the form. "My concern in painting has been to bring about a purer and closer
inter-relation between form and space. [...] This may be seen clearly in the circle, the strongest form symbol of openness. A multiplicity of nowhere quadrilaterals, one side of each segment of the circumference, establishes the structure and becomes one with the space. ("A Visual Problem."") In ten, given at The Club, 8th Street, Feb. 25, 1949; extracts published in Twelve American Ashcan Artists, The Museum of Modern Art, 1956, Dorothy C. Miller ed., p. 28; and Dorothy C. Miller, "Fitz Glarner," in New Art in America. Fifty Painters of the 20th Century, John LH. Rouse, Lloyd Goodrich, D. Miller (eds.), NY Graphic Society, 1957, p. 235. This text was published in French in "L’Esquisse d’Amérique — Vue d’ensemble et Tendances diverses") in Art d’Amérique No. 1 (June 1951), A German version of the text was published in "Künstler im Die Blaue Reiter. Painting and printed in Fitz Glarner, exh. cat. Kunsthalle Bern, Aug.-Sep. 1972.


Circle in the Square, oil on canvas, 1947, 23½ x 23½, in 160.3 x 160.3 cm, exact of the artist. Reproed in DiLaurenti Gallery cat., 1967, op. cit., p. 1. The placement of certain surface fragments near the periphery already anticipates the 1958 work, Facette der Fenster.

"Ifc Square" nos. 3, oil on canvas, 1948-49, 48 x 14 in (121.9 x 35.6 cm), exact of the artist. Reprod. in bro in Ted Castle, 1979, op. cit., p. 36. "Ifc Squares" no. 5, oil on canvas, 1939, 48 x 14 in (121.9 x 35.6 cm), exact of the artist. Reprod. in bro in the introduction to the Grenoble exh. cat. op. cit., p. 14.

"Four Blue Dragons," oil on canvas, 1950, 15 x 12 in (38.1 x 30.5 cm), private collection.

"Black Yellow White," oil on canvas, 1950, 12 x 24 in (30.5 x 61 cm), exact of the artist.

"Opposite Angles," oil on canvas, 1949-50 (red, grey, black, white), 51 x 19 in (127 x 48.3 cm), exact of the artist.

"Opposite Angles — Black and Grey," oil on canvas, 1950, 24 x 12 in (61 x 30.5 cm), exact of the artist. Reprod. in Leon Polk Smith — A Dialogue in Black and White, exh. cat., op. cit.

"White — White no. 1," oil and graphite on canvas, 1948, 43 x 15 in (109.2 x 38.1 cm), exact of the artist. Reprod. in Galerie Denise René cat., 1973, op. cit., and in Ludwigshafen und Grenoble cat., op. cit., p. 58. See also the larger version: "White on White no. 2," 1950, 45 x 30 in (119.2 x 76.2 cm), private collection, reproed. in Galerie Denise René cat., 1973, op. cit. and in Leon Polk Smith — A Dialogue in Black and White, exh. cat., op. cit.

"Black — Black," oil on canvas, 1950, 50 x 35 in (127 x 88.3 cm), exact of the artist. Reprod. in color in Galerie Denise René cat., 1973, op. cit. in Ludwigshafen und Grenoble cat., op. cit., p. 58.


Leon Polk Smith’s development at that time already separated him from other followers of Mondrian’s art; see also the review by H.C.,” “To the Post,” in Artnews (Apr. 1960).

On the debate on the “new geometry,” see Sidney Tillon. “What Happened to Geometry,” in Art (June 1959), p. 44 (Smith accepts the modern dogma of surface as a new indication of a self-sufficient image sums up all the dexterity that manipulates the discipline. Economy and virtuosity serve each other through an image of worth and elegance”); H.H. Amason. “The New Geometry,” in Art in America, 3 (1960), p. 68 (Smith has “a small and expressive effect, whether classic or romantic in approach, whether narrowly interpreted or broadly included”).

Antonis no. 1, oil on canvas, 1958, diam. 57½ in. (146.8 cm), estate of the artist. This work was shown in Modern Contemporaries. The David Herbert Gallery, New York, 1960 (photograph of the cat. by Barbara Butler, reprod.).

Antonis no. 3, oil on canvas, 1958, diam. 57½ in. (146.8 cm), estate of the artist. The work was shown in Modern Contemporaries. The David Herbert Gallery, New York, 1960.


Leon Poll Smith, 1965, ibid., p. 83, expressed himself as follows: “This does create two worlds; in direct opposition to each other: and yet so well related that they fit into each other as a jigsaw puzzle must.”

This nuance of interpretation appears in the conversation of 1964, ibid., p. 84: “the negative and the positive are interchanging.”

Exhibition at the Galerie Chadeaux, Oct. 1965


Cohel Violets – Deep Violet, 1960, 68 × 67 (173.7 × 171.5 cm), estate of the artist. This work was shown in Six American Abstract Painters, Arthur Tooth Gallery, London, Jan.–Feb. 1961 (ill. in cat.). Reproduced in Lawrence Alloway, 1974, op. cit., p. 60.

Correspondence Yellow Point, 1961, 67 × 57 (170.2 × 135.3 cm), Galerie Hoffmann, Friedberg (Germany). This work was shown in “65′ Annual Exhibition of Selected Directions in Contemporary Paintings and Sculpture,” The Art Institute of Chicago, 1962 (rep. in cat.). Reproduced in b/w in cat. Ferrier de Parke – Shapes of Color, Knoedler Bros., Apr.–May 1957.

Lawrence Alloway, introduction to Six American Abstracts Painters, exh. cat. op. cit.

The writer concludes his essay with the following words: “The appeal to Leon Poll Smith in the context of hard-edge abstraction: ‘Then, in Smith, as in the best of the painting which is exhibited in this exhibition, the work of art confronts one, as real as an object, bright as heraldry, and charged with an esoteric mystery.’ The same critic defined the characteristics of the hard-edge style in an article referring to this exhibition: “Six from New York,” in Art International (Mar. 1961).”


Correspondence Red Green Large no. 8, oil on canvas, 1965, 60 × 38 1/2 (152.4 × 97.8 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduced in color in DiLaurenti Gallery, exh. cat., 1967, op. cit., no. 8 and in Ludovisgahan and Greobro cat., op. cit., p. 47 (not exhibited).

Correspondence Black – Silver, oil on canvas, 1962, 68 × 65 (172.7 × 145.3 cm), estate of the artist.


Correspondence Red – White no. 1, oil on canvas, 1963, 86 × 68 (218.4 × 174 cm), Galerie Hoffmann, Friedberg (Germany). Reproduced in color in Ludwigshafen and Greobro cat., op. cit., p. 46.

Correspondence Black – Blue, oil on canvas, 1965, 68 × 66 (218.4 × 172.7 cm), Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (TX). Reproduced in color in Ludwigshafen and Greobro cat., op. cit., p. 52, and in Leon Poll Smith, South American Painter, exh. cat., op. cit., pl. 23.

Correspondence Black – Yellow, oil on canvas, 1963, 76 × 51 (193.7 × 129.5 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduced in color in Galerie Denise René cat., 1973, op. cit. in Ludwigshafen and Greobro cat., op. cit., p. 49.


Lawrence Alloway, introduction to Six American Abstracts Painters, exh. cat. op. cit.

The writer concludes his essay with the following words: “The appeal to Leon Poll Smith in the context of hard-edge abstraction: ‘Then, in Smith, as in the best of the painting which is exhibited in this exhibition, the work of art confronts one, as real as an object, bright as heraldry, and charged with an esoteric mystery.’ The same critic defined the characteristics of the hard-edge style in an article referring to this exhibition: “Six from New York,” in Art International (Mar. 1961).”


Correspondence Red Green Large no. 8, oil on canvas, 1965, 60 × 38 1/2 (152.4 × 97.8 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduced in color in DiLaurenti Gallery, exh. cat., 1967, op. cit., no. 8 and in Ludovisgahan and Greobro cat., op. cit., p. 47 (not exhibited).

The expression “catalyst” was used by the critic Jules Langsner in the context of the exhibition Four Abstract Classics, San Francisco Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Sep.–Oct., 1959 (introduction to the cat., p. 10).

Correspondence Black – Silver, oil on canvas, 1965, 80 × 60 (203.2 × 152.4 cm), estate of the artist.

Correspondence Black – White, oil on canvas, 1965, 80 × 60 (203.2 × 152.4 cm), private collection.


Correspondence Green – Orange, oil on canvas, 1966, 82 × 69 (208.3 × 175.3 cm), estate of the artist. This work was exhibited in Ludwigshafen and Greobro (not rep. in the cat.).


Correspondence Yellow – White, oil on canvas, 1967, 94 × 94 (238.8 × 238.8 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduced in Lawrence Alloway, 1974, op. cit., p. 69, in color in Leon Poll Smith American Painter, exh. cat., op. cit., pl. 27.

Correspondence Green – Red, oil on canvas, 1968, 80 × 80 (203.2 cm), estate of the artist (exhibited at Ludwigshafen).

Correspondence Black – Orange, oil on canvas, 1958, 88 × 120 (218.4 × 304.8 cm), estate of the artist (exhibited at Ludwigshafen; not rep. in the cat.).

A right angle is drawn inside Correspondence Green – Yellow, red oil on canvas, 1968, 80 × 80 (203.2 cm), estate of the artist.


169. (Teaching position at the University of Hawaii, 1965-1969.)


172. 50th anniversary, exh. cat., ed. in Ludwigshafen und Grenoble cat., op. cit., p. 96.

173. The reproduction of the work in the Amurso Art Center cat. is accompanied by the following statement by the artist: "The various areas are still wet, but they do not remain so. With careful observation, they take various forms begin to curve in every direction, like sculptured space moving in, out, up, down, around, back and forth. Each area pressing the other. The mystery is this situation, coupled with an ennui-like, silent contemplative serenity."


175. The opposition of the lines and the role of the space on the wall is found again in the 1975 "Correlation." Estimations Yellow - Black - Red, acrylic on canvas, 53 × 37 in. (134.6 × 94 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduc. in color in Ludwigshafen und Grenoble cat., op. cit., p. 63.

176. 54 in. (137.2 cm) in height, private collection, is reproduced in Lawrence Alloway, 1974, op. cit.

177. "Three Yellow Ovals, acrylic on canvas, 1965, 77 × 104 in. (195.6 × 264.2 cm) estate of the artist.


181. The reproduction of the work in the Amurso Art Center cat. is accompanied by the following statement by the artist: "The various areas are still wet, but they do not remain so. With careful observation, they take various forms begin to curve in every direction, like sculptured space moving in, out, up, down, around, back and forth. Each area pressing the other. The mystery is this situation, coupled with an ennui-like, silent contemplative serenity."


183. The opposition of the lines and the role of the space on the wall is found again in the 1975 "Correlation." Estimations Yellow - Black - Red, acrylic on canvas, 53 × 37 in. (134.6 × 94 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduc. in color in Ludwigshafen und Grenoble cat., op. cit., p. 63.

184. 54 in. (137.2 cm) in height, private collection, is reproduced in Lawrence Alloway, 1974, op. cit.

185. "Three Yellow Ovals, acrylic on canvas, 1965, 77 × 104 in. (195.6 × 264.2 cm) estate of the artist.


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191. The opposition of the lines and the role of the space on the wall is found again in the 1975 "Correlation." Estimations Yellow - Black - Red, acrylic on canvas, 53 × 37 in. (134.6 × 94 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduc. in color in Ludwigshafen und Grenoble cat., op. cit., p. 63.

192. 54 in. (137.2 cm) in height, private collection, is reproduced in Lawrence Alloway, 1974, op. cit.
1978, 82 x 82 (208.3 x 208.3 cm), private collection. Reproduced in Lean Polk Smith American Painters, exh. cat., op. cit., pl. 32.

**As = Black Edge.** acrylic on canvas, 1975, 78 x 86 (203.2 x 215.9 cm), estate of the artist.

**Being Red.** acrylic on canvas, 1980, 90 x 120 (228.6 x 304.8 cm), estate of the artist. This cohesive force characterizes the work of the artist, from their early pieces to their more recent works.

**Boy on a Surfboard.** acrylic on canvas, 1978, 78 x 86 (203.2 x 215.9 cm), estate of the artist.

**Old Friends.** acrylic on canvas, 1979, 46 x 181 (116.8 x 457.2 cm), The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Reproduced in J. P. Smith Painters, exh. cat., op. cit., pl. 7A.

**The wailing Wall.** acrylic on canvas, 1980, 90 x 110 (228.6 x 279.4 cm), estate of the artist.

**White painting n. 1-4.** acrylic on canvas, 1987, group of 4 canvases, each 90 x 120 (228.6 x 304.8 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduced in B. L. Smith American Painters, exh. cat., op. cit., pl. 95.

**Young Man as a Painter.** acrylic on canvas, 1980, 90 x 110 (228.6 x 279.4 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduced in color in Lean Polk Smith, Selected Works, 1943-1962, op. cit., and in Lean Polk Smith American Painters, exh. cat., op. cit., pl. 39.

**Forest Scene.** acrylic on canvas, 1980, 90 x 110 (228.6 x 279.4 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduced in color in Lean Polk Smith, Selected Works, 1943-1962, op. cit., and in Lean Polk Smith American Painters, exh. cat., op. cit., p. 17.

**Forest Scene R2.** acrylic on canvas, 1980, two panels, 90 x 144 (228.6 x 365.8 cm), Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York (gift of the artist). Reproduced in color in Lean Polk Smith, Selected Works, 1943-1962, op. cit., Forest Scene R2, acrylic on canvas (dark green), 1980, two panels, 75 x 118 (190.5 x 299.7 cm), estate of the artist. This work was exhibited at the Burnett Miller Gallery, Los Angeles, in May-June 1987 (see Colin Gardner’s review in the Los Angeles Times, May 22, 1987). Reproduced in b/w in Lean Polk Smith Large Paintings, 1979-1981, exh. cat., op. cit., and in color in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble cat., op. cit., p. 74.


**Forest Scene R4.** acrylic on canvas, 1980, 90 x 110 (228.6 x 279.4 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduced in color in Whishaw Gallery brochure, 1982, op. cit., and in color in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble cat., op. cit., p. 75.

**Forest Scene R5.** acrylic on canvas, 1980, 90 x 110 (228.6 x 279.4 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduced in color in Whishaw Gallery brochure, 1982, op. cit., and in color in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble cat., op. cit., p. 75.

**Forest Scene R6.** acrylic on canvas, 1980, 90 x 110 (228.6 x 279.4 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduced in color in Whishaw Gallery brochure, 1982, op. cit., and in color in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble cat., op. cit., p. 75.

**Forest Scene R7.** acrylic on canvas, 1980, 90 x 110 (228.6 x 279.4 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduced in color in Whishaw Gallery brochure, 1982, op. cit., and in color in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble cat., op. cit., p. 75.

**Forest Scene R8.** acrylic on canvas, 1980, 90 x 110 (228.6 x 279.4 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduced in color in Whishaw Gallery brochure, 1982, op. cit., and in color in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble cat., op. cit., p. 75.

**Forest Scene R9.** acrylic on canvas, 1980, 90 x 110 (228.6 x 279.4 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduced in color in Whishaw Gallery brochure, 1982, op. cit., and in color in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble cat., op. cit., p. 75.

**Forest Scene R10.** acrylic on canvas, 1980, 90 x 110 (228.6 x 279.4 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduced in color in Whishaw Gallery brochure, 1982, op. cit., and in color in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble cat., op. cit., p. 75.

**Forest Scene R11.** acrylic on canvas, 1980, 90 x 110 (228.6 x 279.4 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduced in color in Whishaw Gallery brochure, 1982, op. cit., and in color in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble cat., op. cit., p. 75.

**Forest Scene R12.** acrylic on canvas, 1980, 90 x 110 (228.6 x 279.4 cm), estate of the artist. Reproduced in color in Whishaw Gallery brochure, 1982, op. cit., and in color in Ludwigshafen and Grenoble cat., op. cit., p. 75.

20 Open Space, acrylic on canvas, 1990, 68 x 60 (172.7 x 152.4 cm), estate of the artist.


23 Playing Dice, acrylic on canvas, 1992, 56 x 38 (142.2 x 96.5 cm), private collection.

24 Jukebox Square, acrylic on canvas, 1992, 90 x 52 (228.6 x 132.1 cm), estate of the artist, repro'd in *Leon Polk Smith American Painter*, exh. cat., op. cit.; "Open Door", acrylic on canvas, 1992, 90 x 52 (228.6 x 132.1 cm), estate of the artist.

25 Black Angle on Gray, acrylic on canvas, 1992, 72 x 48 (182.9 x 121.9 cm), estate of the artist.

26 Zig-Zag Gray, acrylic on canvas, 1994, 56 x 38 (142.2 x 96.5 cm), estate of the artist.

27 Dark Celestial Blue, acrylic on canvas, 1992.


29 Event in Blue, acrylic on canvas, 1994, 66 x 54 (167.6 x 137.2 cm), estate of the artist. Repro'd in color in *Leon Polk Smith American Painter*, exh. cat., op. cit., p. 44.

30 Events in Green, acrylic on canvas, 1994, diam. 58 in (147.3 cm), estate of the artist.

31 Event in Grey, acrylic on canvas, 1994, diam. 58 in (147.3 cm), estate of the artist.

32 Event in Orange, acrylic on canvas, 1994, diam. 58 in (147.3 cm), estate of the artist. Repro'd in color in *Leon Polk Smith American Painter*, exh. cat., op. cit., p. 43.

33 Events in Black, acrylic on canvas, 1994, diam. 58 in (147.3 cm), estate of the artist.

34 Event in Scarlet, acrylic on canvas, 1995, diam. 18 in (45.7 cm), estate of the artist.

Claudine Hamblin

The author was born in Brussels in 1946 and graduated with a degree in art history and archaeology from the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, the Free University of Brussels. She was appointed to the Conseil Culturel de la Communauté Française de Belgique in 1979.

In 1977, she obtained her doctorate from the University of Amsterdam with a thesis (written in Amsterdam, Darmstadt, and Berlin) on the influence of Constructivism and Neoplasticism on the evolution of the Wiener Werkstätte, titled Le Bauhaus, and published by l'Age d'Homme, Lausanne, in 1980. At the same time, she became a member of the International Association of Art Critics (IAAC).

Seeking a subject that would cement her artistic specialization, the author devoted herself to intensive research on the American avant-garde of the 1960s, under the late Professor Hans L.C. Jaffe (Amsterdam), which brought her into close contact with contemporary society. She pursued this research during her many trips to the United States, where she tirelessly sought out the artworks that were to directly inspire the book. The author amassed the benefits of her personal contacts with the artists as well as the works themselves. She constantly added new authentic documents, acquired from archives, galleries that were important in the 1960s, and the numerous institutions she visited, to the vast wealth of information.

This vital work of both a concern to faithfully represent the artworks described, the spirit of their times, and the artists’ messages. It encourages reflection and enlightens the reader as to the aesthetic of Modernist art in its purest and most distilled forms.