## EDGE+COLOR

FINDLAY GALLERIES

### **EDGE**+COLOR

LEON POLK SMITH

ILYA BOLOTOWSKY

JOHN FERREN

WARD JACKSON

### FINDLAY GALLERIES

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As we continue to curate exhibitions of painting movements from the twentieth century, it is with great pleasure that we present to you an exploration of the threads between Ilya Bolotowsky, Leon Polk Smith, Ward Jackson and John

Ferren through generations, inspirations, reactions and the inevitability of a reductive, minimalist kind of abstraction.

Findlay Galleries would like to express our deep gratitude to the many people that contributed to the success of this exhibition including Rene Lynch and Julian Jackson who wrote the essay on Ward Jackson's black and white series, Peter Frank, Andrew Bolotowsky, Bran Ferren, Eddie Schnell,

Washburn Gallery, and the Leon Polk Smith Foundation.

LEON POLK SMITH



LEON POLK SMITH UNTITLED COLLAGE 14 INCHES DIAMETER FG© 137806



LEON POLK SMITH | DIAGONAL PASSAGE #2
OIL/CANVAS | 48 X 24 INCHES | FG© 137808



LEON POLK SMITH | DIAGONAL PASSAGE #4
OIL/CANVAS | 48 X 24 INCHES | FG@ 137809



LEON POLK SMITH

DIAGONAL PASSAGE SERIES

GOUACHE ON PAPER

14 1/4 INCHES DIAMETER

FG© 137807

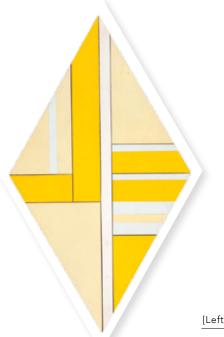
# THE NEO-PLASTIC SPACE

BY: PETER FRANK | LOS ANGELES | OCTOBER 2016

e think of "hard edge" abstraction as a phenomenon of the early 1960s, a reaction to abstract expressionism that anticipated minimal art with its broad, simplified

forms and its intense, often saturated coloration. The term "hard edge" in fact entered the late-modernist lexicon around that time as a synonymous (if somewhat sexier) label for "abstract classicism," a loose movement emerging out of southern California documented in a show of four painters (John McLaughlin, Lorser Feitelson, Frederick Hammersley, Karl Benjamin) that began at Pomona College and then traveled to London. (The "hard edge" handle was supposedly the artists' own, but London-based critic Lawrence Alloway was the first to use it in print.) Quickly, however, "hard edge" was applied to the work of painters such as Ellsworth Kelly, Jack Youngerman, and Al Held, "post-painterly" abstractionists, to use Clement Greenberg's term, who did not employ the staining techniques Greenberg encouraged - and to some, such as Kenneth Noland and (before 1965) Jules Olitski, who did.

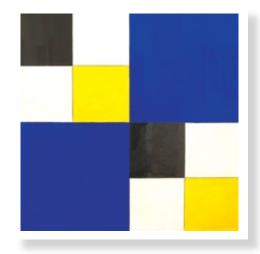
But a hard-edge practice had already established itself in New York as early as the late 1930s. Growing out of cubism and what was known of European geometric art - especially with the founding of the Museum of Non-Objective Painting in 1939 – this then-minority tendency relied on straight, crisply described lines, clear, often primary colors, and architectonic composition. The exemplar for painters such as Harry Holtzman, Burgoyne Diller, and Charmion von Wiegand was Piet Mondrian, the most articulate advocate (now that his friend Theo van Doesburg was dead) for a reductive geometricism in which formal relations were not simply angular but planar. The universal armature was the grid, but the abstract images constructed thereupon sought dynamic contraposition rather than the dispersed neutrality that minimal artists would seek in the grid decades later. Of course, the example of Wassily Kandinsky proposed a more eccentric and elaborate geometric painting, one that also attracted adherents in wartime America; but it is most evidently in the work of Mondrian's New York disciples that the "hard edge" operates as such - as a crisp, rigid delineation that acts at once as strut and as boundary.



Ilya Bolotowsky counted among New York's Mondrianic coterie, and to the day he died never abandoned the linear vocabulary, the vertical-horizontal orientation, or even the allegiance to primary colors he inherited directly from the Dutch painter. Bolotowsky differed from Mondrian, however, in the variety of his verticals and horizontals. Where Mondrian kept his black structures and borders consistent and (thereby) neutral, Bolotowsky came to employ edges and lines as autonomous elements equal in rhythmic intricacy, and thus in compositional significance, to the often attenuated color areas they bounded and ran past. He also often painted in non-standard formats such as the tondo, lozenge, and rhombus, playing (as Mondrian had) on the quasi-architectural dynamic established between the perpendicular forms of the painting itself and the skewed interruption provided by the eccentric bounds of the picture plane. The implication was either that the design of the painting responded to its container or that, conversely, the container functioned extraneously to the rectilinear schema it contained (implying that the painters' neo-plastic universe continued off the picture plane altogether).

[Left] Ilya Bolotowsky | Rhomb, Pale Yellow, Blue and White | collage | 15 1/2 x 8 7/8 inches | FG© 137893 [Below] Leon Polk Smith | Untitled | gouache and graphite on paper | 22 x 22 inches | FG© 137920

Although not part of the circle of painters around Mondrian in New York, Leon Polk Smith was impacted profoundly in the late 1930s by exposure to Mondrian's painting at New York University's Albert E. Gallatin Gallery of Living Art. By the 1960s, Polk Smith had simplified his forms into more or less binary relationships and was employing irregular contours and a nuanced, if still vivid, palette. As such, he exemplified the soi-disant hard-edge practice of the time. But as of the later 1940s Polk Smith was still digesting his discovery of Mondrian's rectilinear universe and trying to make it his own. His approach resembled Bolotowsky's, right down to the engagement of non-rectangular canvases, but relied more on a standardized black line and, significantly, played with near-symmetric composition. Such array of forms admitted more to the underlying grid, and suggested less architectural structure than it did exterior urban space. The mapping quality of Polk Smith's painting from this time seems to mirror Mondrian's own American work, both artists reacting to grid of Manhattan streets.





[Detail] John Ferren | Tabriz | acrylic/canvas | 23  $^{3/4}$  x 35  $^{1/2}$  inches | FG© 207494

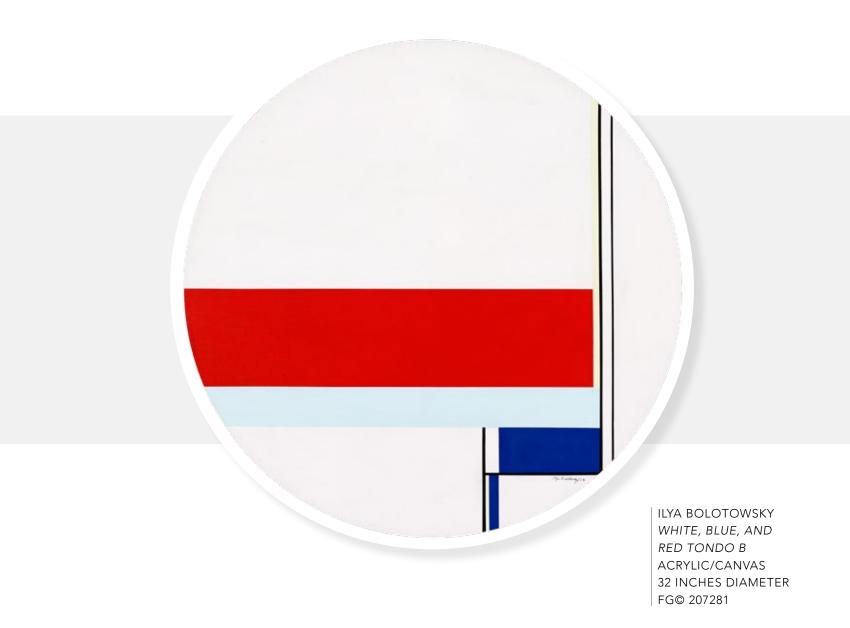
Polk Smith worked briefly at the Museum of Non-Objective Painting. Ward Jackson worked for decades at the Museum's successor institution, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Jackson's own allegiance to hard-edge abstraction played itself out in parallel to Polk Smith's, if a beat later. In the early '60s Jackson was generating a forceful series of black and white compositions that very much played off a consistent lozenge format – and very boldly relied on the symmetric disposition of forms while going back and forth between rectilinearity and eccentricity. Jackson, who had begun as a landscape painter, returned to color at the end of the decade, generating a series of vibrant, deeply hued paintings throughout the '70s that play with flat, often-veil like forms, offbeat arrangements, and, often, a sense of lateral or even forward movement, as if projecting off the canvas.

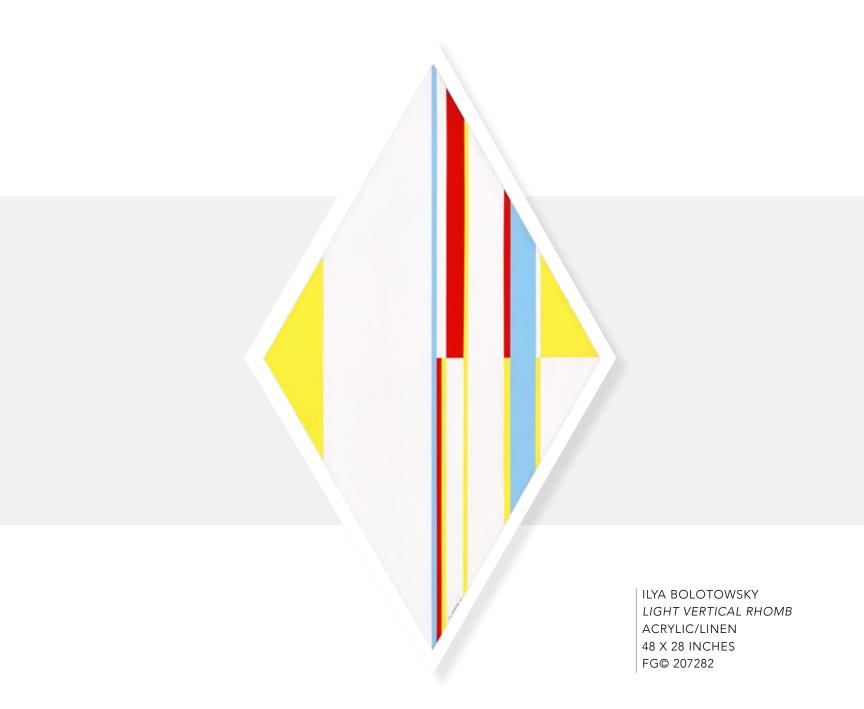
John Ferren is something of the odd man out here – an abstract expressionist in good stead (even president of the "Club" in the mid-1950s) while the other artists in the show were keeping things

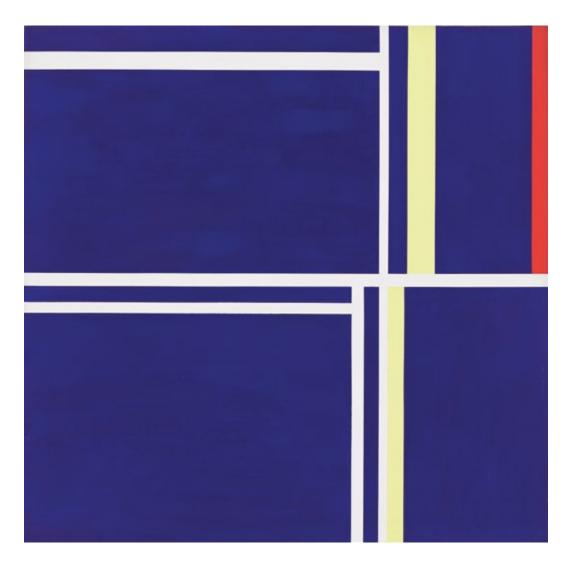
straight. But a constructivist component always lurked in even the most gestural of Ferren's work from the '50s, a legacy of the time he spent in Paris before the war in contact with artists such as Picasso and Kandinsky. Kandinsky was in fact the influence to whom Ferren admitted, and the density and complexity of Kandinsky's post-Bauhaus works, as well as their playful but constant reliance on an unarticulated symbology, recurs in Ferren's work of the later '60s. These paintings, luminous both in palette and in imagery, all rely on the interplay between straight and curvilinear forms, symmetrical and asymmetrical displacement, and the recurring presence of a mysterious shape, a kind of compressed halo or mirrored curve (actually curve-within-curve) floating on a vertical bias. This stoic, imposing form became the leitmotif in Ferren's painting throughout the last years of his life, a "hard edge" image as self-possessed as anything Mondrian proposed yet as open and alluring as geometry, enhanced by color, might allow.



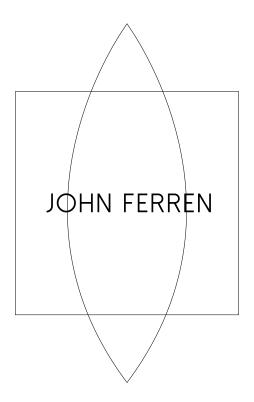


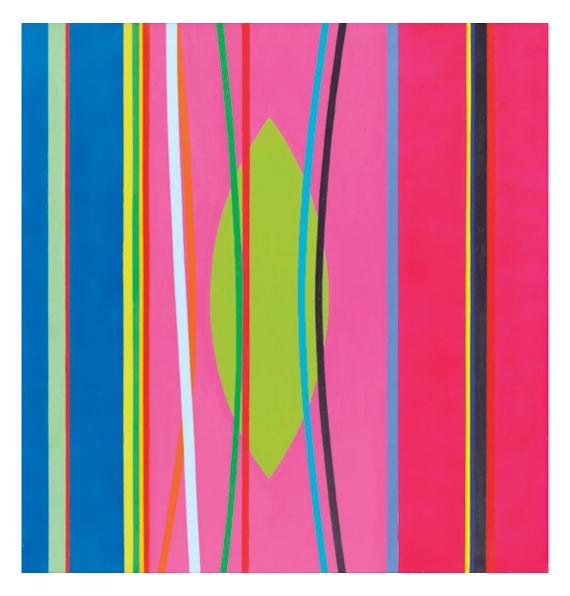




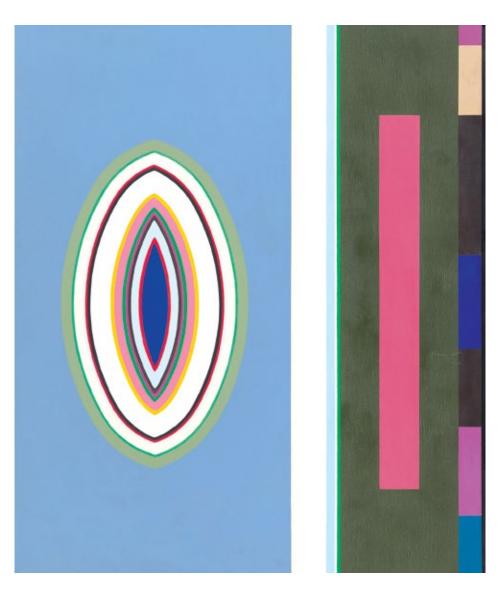


ILYA BOLOTOWSKY | BLUE ABSTRACTION IN A SQUARE ACRYLIC/LINEN | 40  $^{1/4}$  X 40  $^{1/4}$  INCHES | FG© 207283

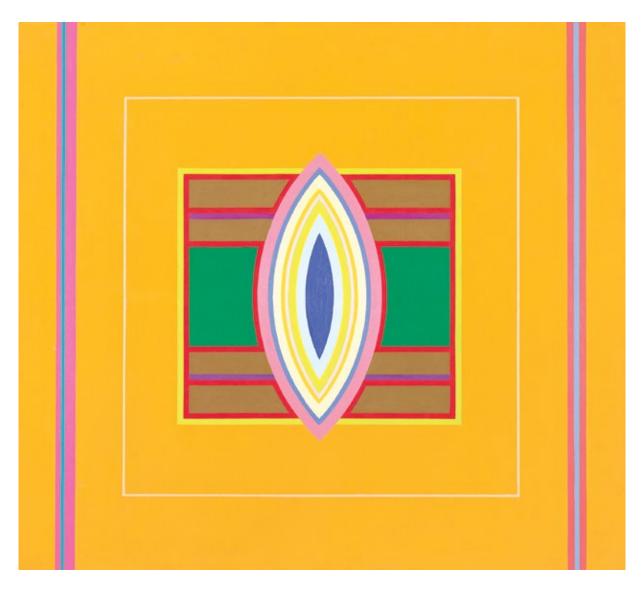




JOHN FERREN | FAHADREW | OIL/CANVAS | 40 X 38 INCHES | FG@ 207475



JOHN FERREN | PEACE | ACRYLIC/CANVAS | 72 X 60 INCHES | FG© 207483



JOHN FERREN | YELLOWSTONE YELLOW | ACRYLIC/CANVAS | 50 X 56 INCHES | FG© 207481



JOHN FERREN | RIDING | OIL/CANVAS | 52 X 40 INCHES | FG© 207478

# MARD JACKSON B&W DIAMONDS

n the early 1960's innovative American artists began to draw away from the gestural style of painting associated with the 1950's Abstract Expressionists. Some, known as the Pop artists, went in the direction of a critique of popular culture. Some flooded canvasses with color. They became known as the Color Field painters. Another group of artists took their explorations in a different direction, honing content to the

bare essentials of art, structure, form, surface, material, and support, and came to be known as the Minimalists. Ward Jackson was among this latter group who pared art to its core, finding resonance in the reductive. The pioneers of this new

reductive style were first exhibited in New York City in April 1964 at Kaymar Gallery, in the exhibition "Eleven Artists", organized by Dan Flavin, which brought together for the first time, artists identified with Minimalism; Ward

Jackson, Donald Judd, Sol Lewitt, Robert Ryman, Frank Stella, Jo Baer and Dan Flavin. Brian O'Doherty, art critic for The New York Times, dubbed them "The Avant-Garde Deadpans" and cited it as "one of the most provocative shows in town".

Ward Jackson's seminal Black and White diamond compositions created between 1961 and 1966 packed an extraordinarily communicative energy into a tightly constrained format. These works constituted Ward Jackson's first mature series of paintings, were exhibited and collected widely, and remain among his best known works. Their internal symmetries and tightly focused logic echoed his lifelong interest in meditation, and they marked the beginning of a style of painting that he would pursue for the rest of his life. In discussing these works

Ward Jackson wrote, "The diamond shape (or square on end) has the meditative power of a mandala and expands in a way that an ordinary square does not, since the measurement of the diameter across the center is wider than any of the outer or peripheral edges. Most of the diamond paintings have a vertical emphasis or rising energy expressing an outer as well as inner architecture, transmitting transcendental feeling through pure plastic elements. I have attempted to embody in my work an inner order that could express my most concentrated ideas."

The use of the diamond format with its powerful enclosing diagonals, had been pioneered by the early founders of nonobjective abstraction Piet Mondrian and Theo Van Doesberg.

The limitation of palette to black and white and reductive form had also been explored early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by the Russian constructivist Kazimir Malevich. In harkening back to these masters, Jackson found a way

to recover and expand upon a crisply graphic approach to painting that could best express his intellectual interests in the crystallization of experience and the expressive potential of a spiritual simplicity. Among his peers in this quest for a renewed clarity were Ad Reinhardt, Carmen Herrera, and Ellsworth Kelly, who similarly rejected the gestural mode of painting to find deeper meaning in carefully crafted hard-edged compositions. In the words of art historian and critic Eleanor Heartney, writing about Ward Jackson's Black and White Diamonds; "The reduction of form and color brushed away superficial meanings to clear the way for more eternal truths."

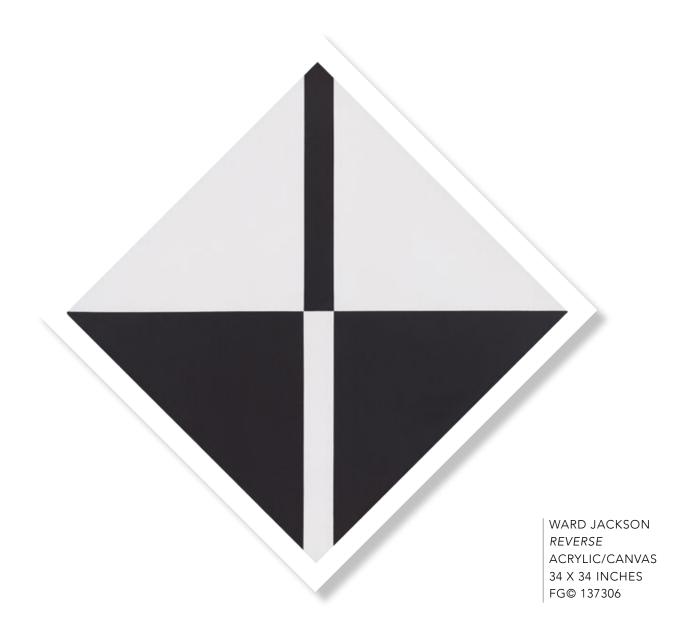
— Julian Jackson & Rene Lynch | November 2016

"The reduction of form and color

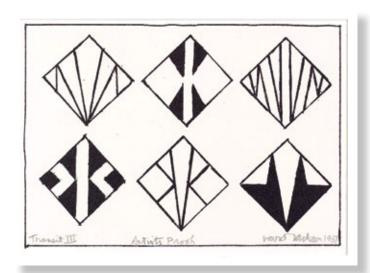
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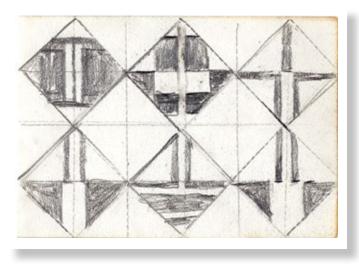




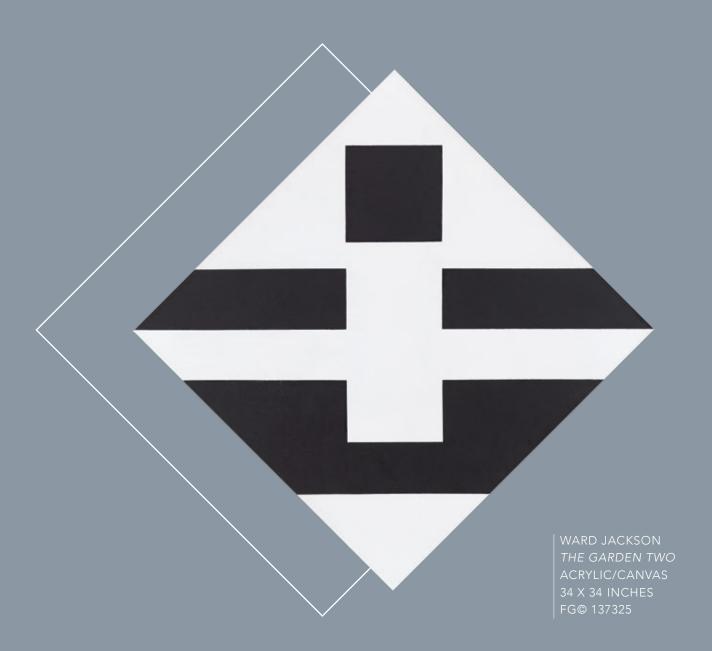
Ward Jackson | Transit III | lithograph | 4 x 6 inches | FG© 137369

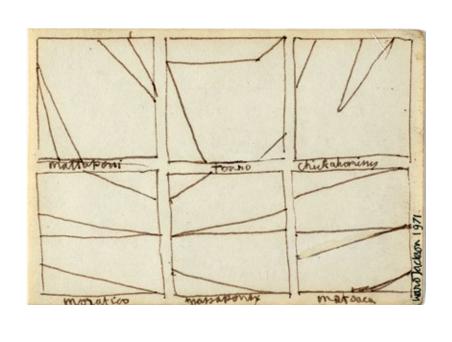




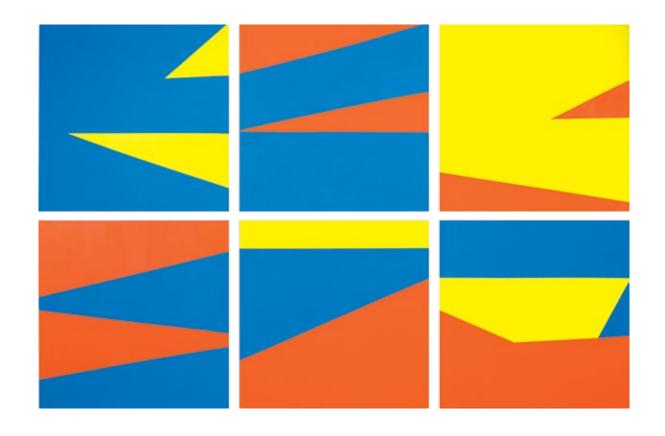


Ward Jackson | Reverse Studies | graphite on paper | 4 x 6 inches | FG© 137376





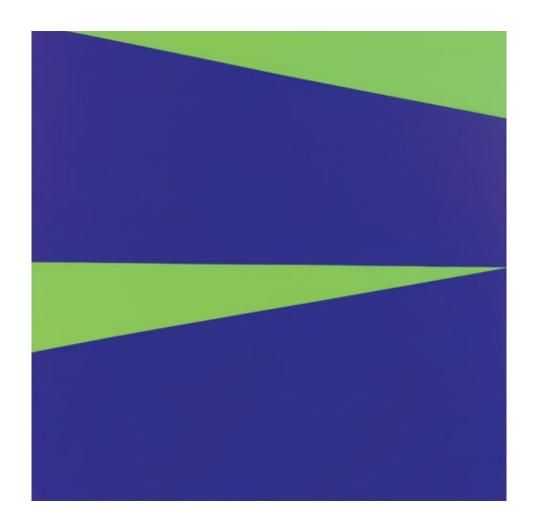
WARD JACKSON | VIRGINIA RIVER STUDIES
GRAPHITE ON PAPER | 4 X 6 INCHES | FG© 137368



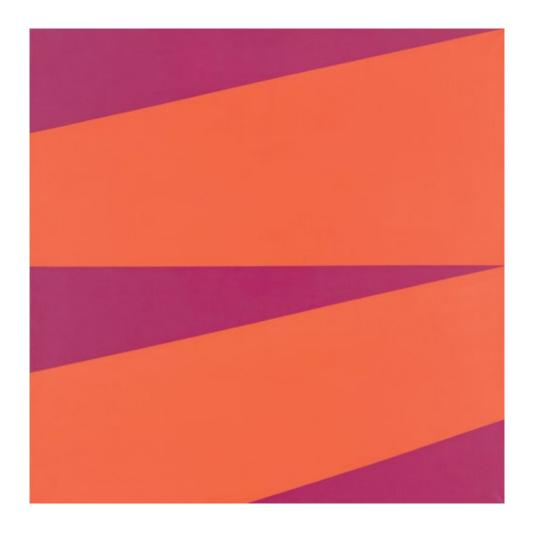
WARD JACKSON | VIRGINIA (HEXAPTYCH)
ACRYLIC/CANVAS | 72 X 108 INCHES | FG© 137337



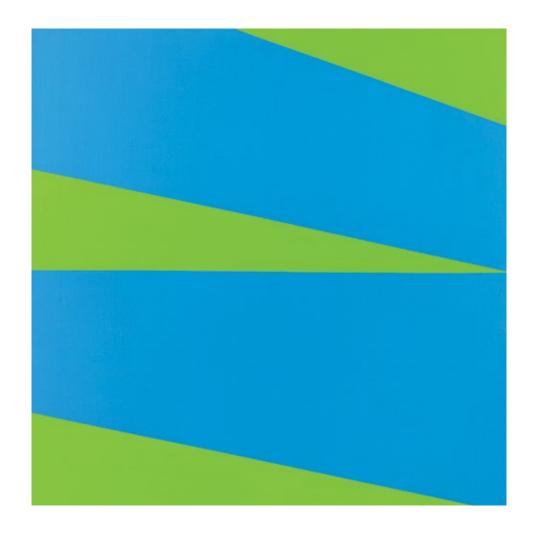
WARD JACKSON | VIRGINIA RIVER SERIES - CHINCOTEAGUE ACRYLIC/LINEN | 36 X 36 INCHES | FG@ 137332



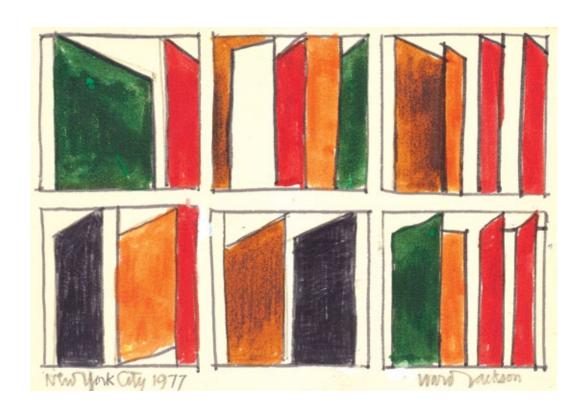
WARD JACKSON | VIRGINIA RIVER SERIES - POWHATAN ACRYLIC/LINEN | 36 X 36 INCHES | FG@ 137330



WARD JACKSON | VIRGINIA RIVER SERIES - CHINCOTEAGUE - MATOALA ACRYLIC/LINEN | 36 X 36 INCHES | FG@ 137329



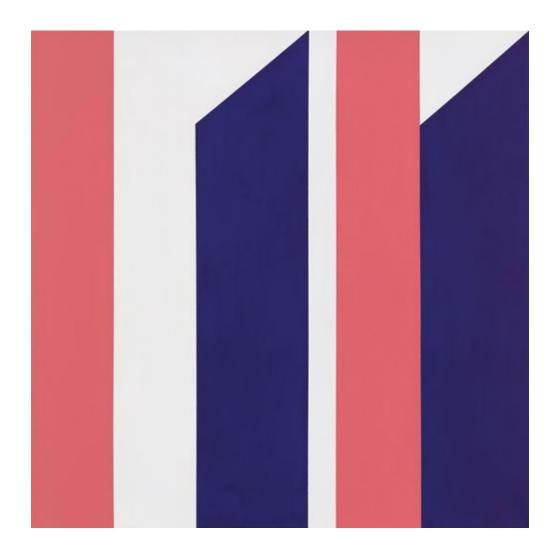
WARD JACKSON | VIRGINIA RIVER SERIES - MORATICO ACRYLIC/LINEN | 36 X 36 INCHES | FG@ 137334



WARD JACKSON | NEW YORK CITY (TOTEM II)
GRAPHITE ON PAPER | 4 X 6 INCHES | FG@ 137363



WARD JACKSON | CHORDS 2
ACRYLIC/CANVAS | 36 X 36 INCHES | FG@ 137349



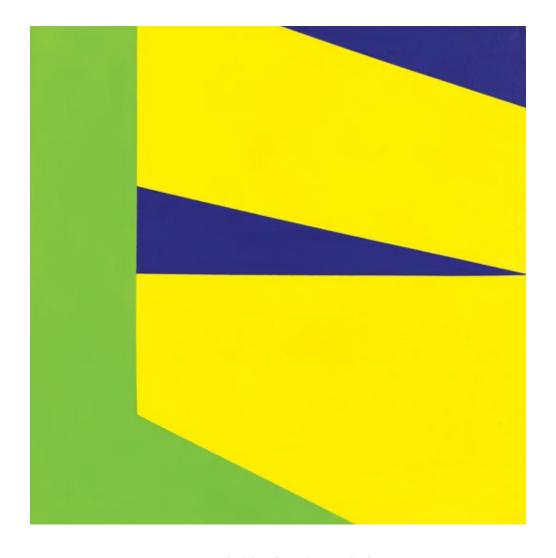
WARD JACKSON | CHORDS, MANHATTAN ACRYLIC/CANVAS | 36 X 36 INCHES | FG@ 137348



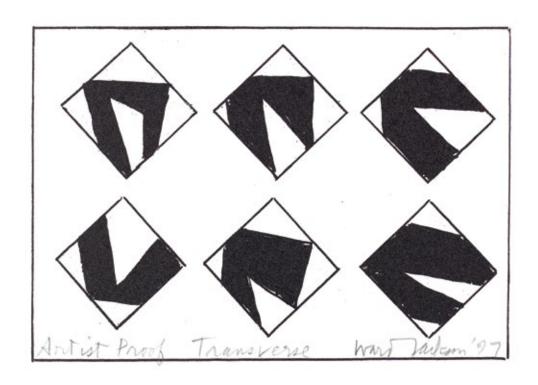
WARD JACKSON | NEW YORK CITY ACRYLIC/CANVAS | 36 X 36 INCHES | FG@ 137355



WARD JACKSON | NAGS HEAD ACRYLIC/CANVAS | 36 X 36 INCHES | FG@ 137339



WARD JACKSON | EASTERN SHORE ACRYLIC/CANVAS | 36 X 36 INCHES | FG@ 137340



WARD JACKSON | TRANSVERSE
LITHOGRAPH | 4 X 6 INCHES | FG@ 137370



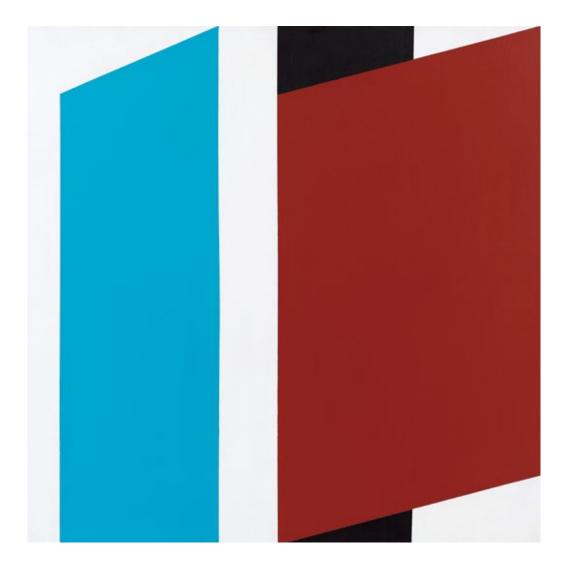
WARD JACKSON | UNTITLED (WTC)
ACRYLIC/CANVAS | 36 X 36 INCHES | FG@ 137347



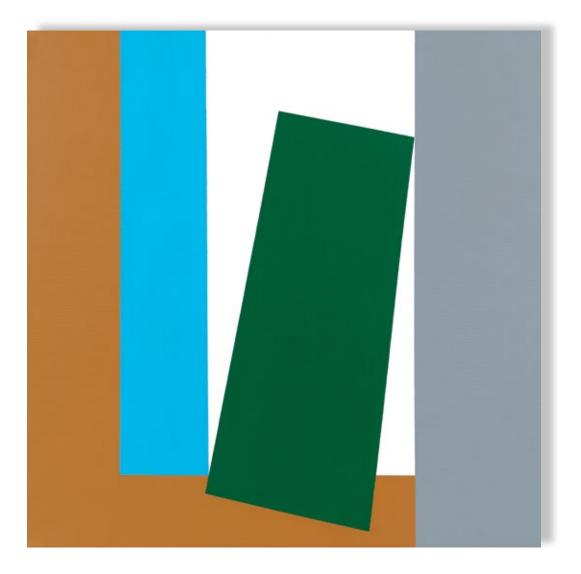
WARD JACKSON | TRIAD II
ACRYLIC/CANVAS | 36 X 36 INCHES | FG@ 137344



WARD JACKSON | VOLUME II
ACRYLIC/CANVAS | 36 X 36 INCHES | FG@ 137346



WARD JACKSON | UNTITLED (OXIDE)
ACRYLIC/CANVAS | 36 X 36 INCHES | FG@ 137354



WARD JACKSON | UNTITLED ACRYLIC/CANVAS | 36 X 36 INCHES | FG@ 137353



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