



ZAKANITCH



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Beauty is. It is as natural as breathing. Its allure is transforming. I don't think art is about anything else.

—Robert Zakanitch

To Robert Rahway Zakanitch, life is full of ordinary miracles and the boundless beauty of humanity, which he expresses on paper and canvas in what essayist David Pagel calls “a wild collision between freewheeling bohemian abandon and settled-down domestic sociability.”

Zakanitch, who was trained in commercial art and has a background in advertising, began to paint seriously amid the 1960s culture of artistic intellectualism, when beauty was out of fashion and Modern Art seemed bent on excluding rather than including its audience. After exploring Formalism and Abstract Expressionism, Zakanitch began painting what he described as “gestural things and patterns that were anathema to Modernism. Things that I didn't quite understand but felt good to me.” He wanted to get back to the human rather than pursue the abstract. He wanted to reclaim beauty.

By the 1970s Zakanitch had reached critical acclaim as a fine artist and as a founder of the Pattern and Decoration movement. More recently, Zakanitch uses line, form, color, composition, and scale—especially scale—to create accessible, visually rich paintings. He wields his pencils and brushes with undeniable authority but generously invites viewers into his artistic process by allowing visible erasures, drips of paint, glimpses of gridwork and support materials, and bits of hand-lettering.

The first monograph on the artist's work, *Robert Rahway Zakanitch* presents more than one hundred of his paintings from 1962 to 2014 and provides critical consideration in essays by David Pagel and John DeFazio. For over fifty years Zakanitch has shown his artwork in solo and group exhibitions around the world, all the while reflecting on the nature of painting. His work is in many private and public collections, among them the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum, Whitney Museum of American Art, and Musées de Strasbourg, France. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1995.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

David Pagel is a professor of art theory and history at Claremont Graduate University in California and an adjunct curator at the Parrish Art Museum in Watermill, New York. He also regularly writes about art for the *Los Angeles Times*. An avid cyclist, he has been a five-time winner of the California Triple Crown.

John DeFazio is an architect, writer, critic, and adjunct professor at Drexel University, where he teaches architectural design and art-and-architectural theory from the sixteenth century through the present. Before joining the faculty at Drexel University in 1990, DeFazio taught at the University of Pennsylvania, Rutgers University, and Spring Garden College, Philadelphia. He lives in New York City, where he maintains his architectural and urban planning practice.

COVER:

Big Bungalow Suite III, 1992
Acrylic on canvas, 335.3 x 914.4 cm (132 x 360 in.)
Collection of artist

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“Robert Zakanitch: The Pursuit of Beauty” © 2016 John DeFazio

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doing away with the gap between art and life and re-insert life and its concerns into art.”¹⁴

Revitalized and with a new sense of mission, Zakanitch entered into a prolific period. His early *Pattern Paintings* were done in series, as were his earlier *Color-Field Paintings*, one springboarding off the other but never using the same motifs or composition. They also had accessible or humorous series names such as *Trellis Series* and *Carmen Miranda Series*. In 1977 Zakanitch had a well-received one-man show at the Holly Solomon Gallery in New York, followed by successful exhibitions in Switzerland and Germany showing works such as *Robespierre Pomegranates*, 1976; *Elephant Rose*, 1978; and *Feet of Clay*, 1978. With these pattern works Zakanitch was once again receiving positive critical attention. But more importantly, he finally felt he had found his true creative voice. It was coming from within him and was universal and accessible.

THE THIRD DOOR

The urge to embellish and the love of ornamental effect are basic to human nature. . . . By ornamenting or decorating, people of every society have sought to transform the merely useful into the beautiful, giving meaning and importance to an often drab reality. . . . The essence of ornament is its freedom from function. . . . Ornament is essentially free: free to move the eye, to intrigue the mind, to rest the soul; free to simply delight us.

—Robert Jensen, “The Ornamental Impulse”¹⁵

Zakanitch was intrigued with the idea of ornament and its role as a conveyor of meaning in both historical and contemporary contexts, which made him think more deeply not just about pattern but about the nature and meaning of ornamentation itself.

In 1982 works by Zakanitch and by his wife, sculptor and feminist artist Patsy Norvell,¹⁶ were published in the book *Ornamentalism: The New Decorativeness in Architecture and Design* by Robert Jensen¹⁷ and Patricia Conway. It included many key P&D artists, among them Robert Kushner, Valerie Jaudon, Kim MacConnel, Joyce Kozloff, and Miriam Schapiro; architects Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Charles Moore, Michael Graves, Roger Ferri, and Philip Johnson; and many “art furniture” designers and craft artists. “That book was very important,” Zakanitch said. “It showed just how big this all was. This was across disciplines—art, architecture, everything. This was a beautiful movement!”

Ornament, and ornamentation in particular, took on a deeper dimension for Zakanitch. He was never quite comfortable with the concept of decoration for decoration’s sake, as articulated by some of the other P&D artists. To him decoration implied something shallow and superfluous. Decoration was “applied onto something,” and an ornament is a singular decorative thing unto itself. But ornamentation was something much deeper. “To me ornamentation is a vast universe of sensations, rhythms—lines, ripples, curlicues, and flowing curves or jagged zigzags, and on and on. This universe is real and breathing, metaphysical and philosophical. Its subject matter alludes to the ‘all and everything,’ big and small, outside of painting.”

Zakanitch does not create ornaments or even ornamentation. Painter and friend Mark Friedman once probed: “But you are making ornamentation.” Zakanitch replied, “No. Ornamentation is the subject matter. I am making paintings, because the content of my work is always painting. Paint on canvas. Paint on paper. The nature of painting.

Ornamentation allows me to push the parameters of painting—the parameters of making art, for that matter.”

In an interview discussing the P&D movement, Joyce Kozloff pointed out that for the past eighty years, Modern artists have had only two choices for subject matter—representation or abstraction—and that the P&D artists were working in a manner in between. “Joyce’s cogent distinction of subject matter became revelatory for me. A seemingly endless source of imagery became accessible—imagery that I had always lived with and loved,” Zakanitch said, “but it wasn’t allowed into my work: first, because of the severe restrictions of Modern Formalist theory, and second, because domestic and gentle motifs and patterns were always associated with ‘woman’s work’ and femininity. Modern Art always had to fit safely in what I call the ‘masculine mystique,’ where domination is considered manly. However, slowly all this extraordinary imagery of great beauty around me was becoming available to me. It was the opening of a brand-new door of subject matter, both emotionally and visually, into ‘mainstream painting.’ The old Modernism would never be the same. It grew into a new Modernism far different from anything the critics or the Museum of Modern Art had ever expected.”¹⁸

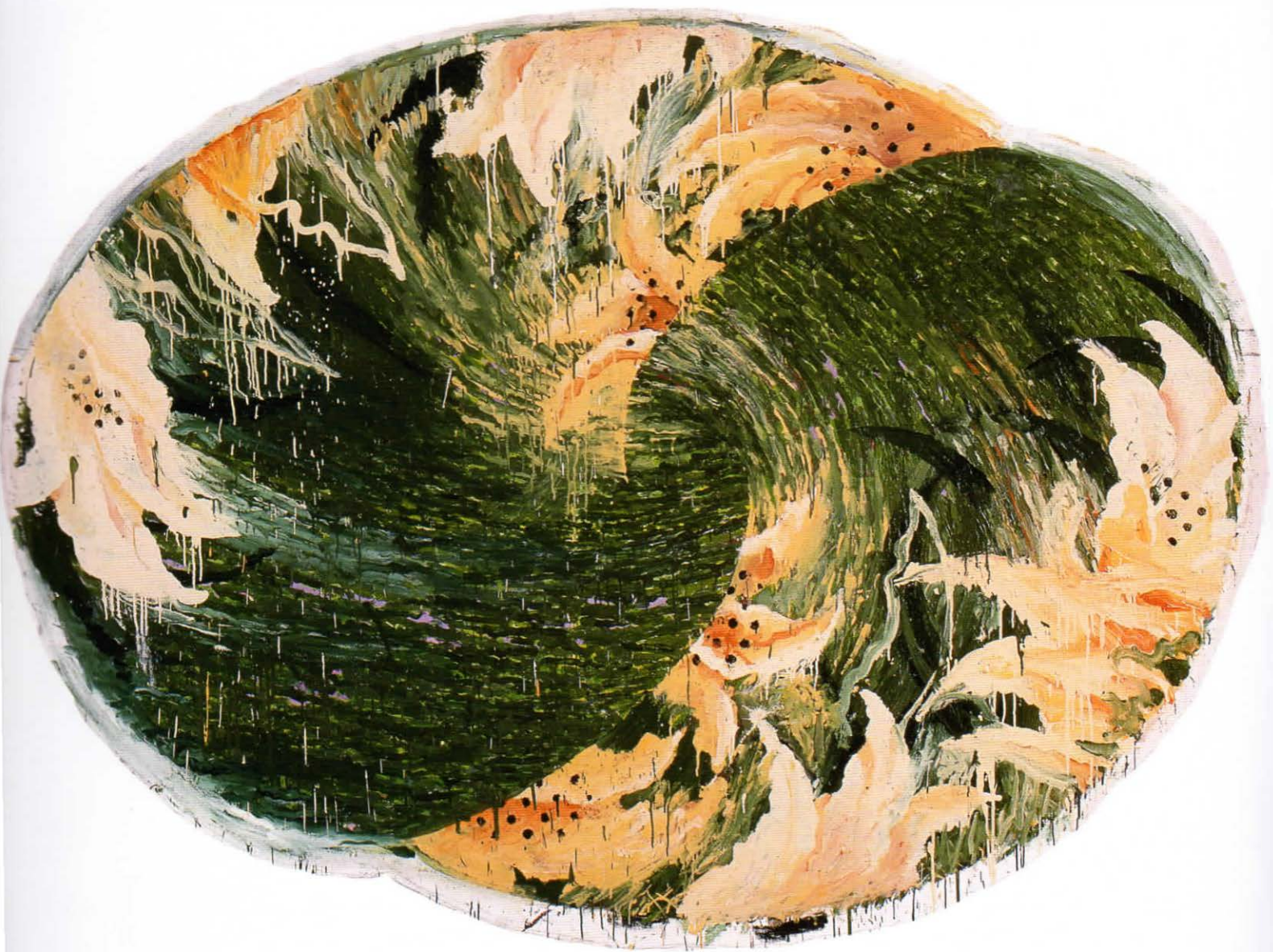
RETURN OF THE FIGURE

In 1988 Zakanitch showed *Platter Series* and *Souvenir Series*, perhaps the major turning point in his work since the late 1970s *Pattern Paintings*. “That ‘88 show for me was the most courageous and scariest I ever did, because I was introducing many different images and subject matters. I had almost eliminated the use of pattern, realizing that pattern was only a small part of the field of ornamentation.

Ornamentation would now encompass plates, platters, angels, dogs, cows, castles, sunsets—all would be allowed to exist in this endless world of ornamentation. My job was not to make ornaments, but how to make paintings of it all.”

The key work of the 1988 show was *Angel of Positive Rage*, 1986–87. With this painting Zakanitch introduced figurative representation into his work. It was an epic move—but a logical one. Figurative representation was the next barrier to be overcome: “The first was getting some of that Abstract Expressionist juice back into my painting, and that came through my use of repetition and then pattern. . . . But even before, I loved all painting, the whole history of it—the figure, representation, landscape, all of it. The problem was, how do you do it formally? How do you put it in a painting?” Zakanitch explained:

My courage to move in this direction had to do with the birth of my daughter, Amelia. Suddenly, there was this little baby everywhere. . . . She was just too beautiful! In art school, in anatomy class, we were always drawing adults . . . not children . . . but Amelia came along and she was just so beautiful, just so there. I had my model! And I would draw her. . . . I was working on a big painting in a new series, and I remembered all those beautiful ceilings I saw in Florence . . . domes where you are looking up and you have this distorted perspective with those putti and cherubs up there. And I had already been thinking about bringing a figure into my work without the painting becoming representational. So I thought, ‘Well, here we go . . .’



Tiger Falls, 1985. Acrylic on canvas, 121.9 x 243.8 cm (48 x 96 in.). American Express Art Collection, New York

CHRONOLOGY

EDUCATION

1958 Newark School of Fine and Industrial Arts, New Jersey

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2013 *Hanging Gardens*, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
- 2010 *From a Garden of Ordinary Miracles*, Samuel Freeman Gallery, Los Angeles
- 2007 *Tween Series*, Werkstätte, New York
Lace Paintings, Locks Gallery, Philadelphia
- 2006 *Charms*, Spike Gallery, New York
Lace Paintings, Samuel Freeman Gallery, Los Angeles
Robert Rahway Zakanitch, Armory Art Center, West Palm Beach, Florida
- 2005 *Barryard Hijinx: Silhouette Series*, Spike Gallery, New York
- 2003 *Robert Rahway Zakanitch: Aggressive Goodness Series*, Spike Gallery, New York
Aggressive Goodness Series II, Patricia Faure Gallery, Santa Monica, California
- 1999 *Robert Rahway Zakanitch: The Curio Series*, Locks Gallery, Philadelphia
Robert Rahway Zakanitch, I Space, University of Illinois, Chicago
- 1997–98 *Larger than Life: Robert Rahway Zakanitch's Big Bungalow Suite*, Ruth Chandler Williamson Gallery, Scripps College, Claremont, California; traveled to Donna Beam Fine Art Gallery, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Polk Museum of Art, Lakeland, Florida; Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, University of Oklahoma, Norman
- 1997 *Formal Settings: The Lace Series*, Locks Gallery, Philadelphia
Robert Rahway Zakanitch, Patricia Faure Gallery, Santa Monica, California



Artist portrait, c. 1964. Unknown photographer

- 1996 *Robert Rahway Zakanitch*, Margulies/Taplin Gallery, Coral Gables, Florida
Robert Rahway Zakanitch: Big Bungalow Suite, Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe
Robert Rahway Zakanitch: The Grand Dad Series, Locks Gallery, Philadelphia
Robert Rahway Zakanitch: Selected Paintings, Riva Yares Gallery, Scottsdale, Arizona
- 1995 *Adornments*, Hirschl & Adler Gallery, New York
Big Bungalow Suite, University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City
Robert Rahway Zakanitch, Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, New York
- 1994 *Robert Rahway Zakanitch: Big Bungalow Suite*, SoHo Greene St. rented space in conjunction with *Recent Paintings*, Jason McCoy Gallery, New York
Robert Rahway Zakanitch, Nina Freudenheim Gallery, Buffalo, New York
- 1991 *Robert Zakanitch: Recent Works*, Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris, France
- 1990 *Robert S. Zakanitch: Souvenir Series*, Sidney Janis Gallery, New York
- 1989 *Robert S. Zakanitch*, Helander Gallery, Palm Beach, Florida
Robert S. Zakanitch, Marcus Gallery, Boston
- 1988 *Robert Zakanitch*, Robert Miller Gallery, New York
Robert S. Zakanitch, Tavelli Gallery, Aspen, Colorado
- 1985 *Robert S. Zakanitch: New Monumental Paintings of Pattern and Decoration*, Helander Gallery, Palm Beach, Florida
Robert S. Zakanitch, Asher/Faure Gallery, Los Angeles
Robert S. Zakanitch, Robert Miller Gallery, New York
- 1984 *Robert S. Zakanitch*, Robert Miller Gallery, New York
Robert S. Zakanitch, Delahunty Gallery, Dallas
Robert S. Zakanitch, Marcus Gallery, Boston
- 1983 *Robert S. Zakanitch*, Galerie 151, Palm Beach, Florida
Robert S. Zakanitch, McIntosh-Drysdale Gallery, Houston, Texas
Pattern Painting: Robert Zakanitch, Fondation du Château de Jau, Cases de Pène, France
- 1982 *Robert S. Zakanitch*, Asher/Faure Gallery, Los Angeles
Robert S. Zakanitch, Michael Lord Gallery, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Robert S. Zakanitch, Makler Gallery, Philadelphia
Robert S. Zakanitch: Recent Works, Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris, France
Robert S. Zakanitch, Marcus Krakow Gallery, Boston
- 1981 *Robert S. Zakanitch*, Robert Miller Gallery, New York
Robert S. Zakanitch, James Mayor Gallery, London, England
Robert S. Zakanitch, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
Robert S. Zakanitch, Greenberg Gallery, St. Louis, Missouri

- Robert S. Zakanitch*, McIntosh-Drysdale Gallery, Washington, DC
- 1980 *Robert S. Zakanitch: Neue Bilder*, Galerie Bruno Bischofberger, Zurich, Switzerland
Robert S. Zakanitch, Robert Miller Gallery, New York
Robert S. Zakanitch, Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris, France
Robert S. Zakanitch, Akira Ikeda Gallery, Nagoya, Japan
- 1979 *Robert S. Zakanitch*, Robert Miller Gallery, New York
Robert Zakanitch, Galerie Rudolf Zwirner, Cologne, Germany
- 1978 *Robert Zakanitch*, Galerie Liatowitsch, Basel, Switzerland
Robert S. Zakanitch, Robert Miller Gallery, New York
- 1977 *Robert Zakanitch*, Holly Solomon Gallery, New York
- 1974 *Robert Zakanitch*, Cunningham Ward Gallery, New York
- 1973 *Robert Zakanitch*, Cunningham Ward Gallery, New York
- 1971 *Robert Zakanitch*, Reese Palley Gallery, New York
- 1970 *Robert Zakanitch*, Reese Palley Gallery, New York
- 1968 *Robert Zakanitch*, Stable Gallery, New York
- 1965 *Robert Zakanitch*, Henri Gallery, Alexandria, Virginia

- In Defense of Sacred Lands*, Marcus Gallery, Boston
Art in Fashion / Fashion in Art, Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, New York
- 1986 *After Matisse*, Independent Curators International, New York
House and Garden: Tenth Anniversary Exhibition, Nassau County Museum of Fine Art, Roslyn, New York
Abstract Painting Redefined, The Fine Arts Center Art Gallery, State University of New York, Stony Brook
An American Renaissance: Painting and Sculpture since 1940, Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, Florida
- 1985 *American Art Now! Painting in the 1980s*, Columbus Museum of Arts and Sciences, Columbus, Georgia
Annottanta, Luogo d'esposizione, Bologna, Italy
- 1984 *Flower as Image in Contemporary Art*, Wave Hill Gallery, Bronx, New York
1 + 1 = 2, Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, New York

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *In the Pink*, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
Cutout/Decoupage, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
- 2014 *Summer*, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
- 2013–14 *Winter Blues*, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
- 2013 *Color: The Splendor Of*, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
- 2009 *A Three-Legged Table*, Samuel Freeman Gallery, Santa Monica, California
- 2005 *The Art of 9/11*, apexart, New York
- 2002 *Untitled: What's in a Name?*, Polk Museum of Art, Lakeland, Florida
Peinture...Peintures: une sélection d'oeuvres de la collection du Fonds régional d'art contemporain Languedoc-Roussillon, Petit Temple, Ganges, France
- 1998 *Flowers in Mind*, Locks Gallery, Philadelphia
- 1996 *Inside: The Work of St. Clair Cemin, Joel Otterness and Others*, California Center for the Arts, Escondido
- 1995 *Selections from the Steven Chase Collection*, Palm Springs Art Museum, Palm Desert, California
- 1989 *Exhibition of Master Works*, Riva Yares Gallery, Scottsdale, Arizona
The Natural Image, Stamford Museum, Stamford, Connecticut
- 1988 *The Flower Show*, Betsy Rosenfeld Gallery, Chicago
Manufactures du Sèvres, Porcelains, Paris, France
- 1987–88 *A View of the Workshop: Selections from Tyler Graphics*, Katonah Gallery, Katonah, New York



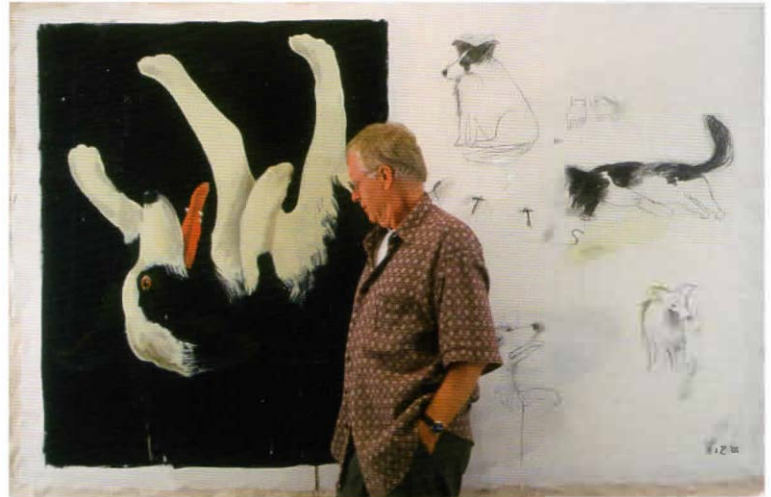
Artist portrait, c. 1971. Unknown photographer

New American Abstract Painting, Northern Illinois University's Fine Arts Festival, DeKalb, Illinois
Philadelphia Collects, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia

- 1972 *New American Abstract Painting*, Madison Art Center, Wisconsin
Painting and Sculpture Today, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana
32nd Annual Exhibition, Art Institute of Chicago
- 1971 *The Structure of Color*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Köln Kunstmarkt (art fair), Cologne, Germany
Recent Acquisitions, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
- 1970 *Lyrical Abstraction*, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut
- 1969 Whitney Annual, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
- 1968 *New Art USA Baroque-Minimal, Modern Art Museum*, Munich, Germany
The Pure and the Clear: American Innovation, Philadelphia Museum of Art
- 1967 1967 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

COLLECTIONS

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York
Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut
American Can Company, Greenwich, Connecticut
Brooklyn Museum, New York
Chase Manhattan Bank, New York
Denver Art Museum, Colorado
(The) Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York
High Museum of Art, Atlanta
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC
Lehman Brothers Kuhn Loeb, Inc., New York
Ludwig Collection, Aachen, Germany
Milwaukee Art Museum, Wisconsin
Morton G. Neumann Family Collection, Chicago
Musée régional d'art contemporain Languedoc-Roussillon, France
Musées de Strasbourg, Strasbourg, France
Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon, Portugal
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia
National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan
Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania
Phoenix Art Museum, Arizona



Artist portrait, 2003. Courtesy Spike Gallery, New York

Polk Museum of Art, Lakeland, Florida
Princeton University Art Museum, New Jersey
Rothschild Bank, Zurich, Switzerland
Sydney and Frances Lewis Foundation, Richmond, Virginia
Tate, London, England
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

AWARDS

- 1995 John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Grant
1970 Creative Artists Public Service (CAPS) Grant, New York

COMMISSIONS

- 1998–2006 Performing Arts Center of Greater Miami, Cesar Pelli & Associates, Florida
2003 Ivoryton, Connecticut
1999 Bellagio, Las Vegas
1985 Johnson & Johnson, New Jersey

TEACHING

- 2010 Drawing and Painting faculty member, Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute, University of Oklahoma, Lone Wolf
2008–09 Artist-in-residence, "Painting with Paint and Otherwise," workshop, Armory Art Center, West Palm Beach, Florida
1999 Drawing and Painting faculty member, Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute, University of Oklahoma, Norman
1996 Artist lecturer, Four Painters Program, School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston