

MINUS SPACE

WARD JACKSON (1928-2004)

"Ward Jackson's geometric abstract paintings constitute one of the great under-known bodies of work in Post-War American art." – Stephen Westfall, *Art in America*, April 2013

Ward Jackson was born and grew up in Petersburg, Virginia. He studied painting at the Richmond Polytechnic Institute of the College of William and Mary, now Virginia Commonwealth University, earning his Master's Degree there in 1952. While still in school, Jackson began to correspond with Guggenheim curator Hilla Rebay, which would eventually lead to his long tenure with that institution. In a series of letters, he sent drawings to Rebay for comment, and received critique and encouragement as a young artist.

Following graduation Jackson spent a summer studying with Hans Hofmann in Provincetown, Massachusetts, finally settling in New York City in the autumn of 1952. Jackson's work as a student had already attracted the attention of Park Avenue Cubist and critic George L. K. Morris who invited him to participate in an American Abstract Artists (AAA) exhibition in 1949 at the Riverside Museum, NYC. Morris, a founding member of the prestigious AAA, took Jackson under his wing and the two developed a close collegial relationship, which lasted until Morris' death in 1975. In 1976 Jackson was inducted into AAA and for many years exhibited with and served as the group's secretary.

As an emerging artist, Jackson exhibited in 1950, 1951 and 1952 at the avant-garde 57th Street gallery New Art Circle, founded by J.B. Neumann. In 1956, Jackson won first prize for painting at the New York City Center Gallery and had his first NYC solo exhibition at the Fleischman Gallery, which was part of the Tenth Street scene. He continued to have solo exhibitions at Fleischman Gallery annually through 1960. In 1960, he exhibited with Kenneth Noland, Frank Stella, and Jules Olitski in the *Metropolitan Young Artists Exhibition* at the National Arts Club, NYC.

In the early 1960s, inspired by the work of painters such as Piet Mondrian and Josef Albers, Jackson moved away from the gestural style that had marked his earlier work of the 1950s and began to develop his signature austere, hard-edged geometric compositions on square and diamond-shaped canvases. In 1964, his black and white works were first exhibited at the Kaymar Gallery in NYC. This pivotal exhibition, *Eleven Artists*, organized by Dan Flavin, brought together for the first time artists identified with the emerging movement Minimalism, what *The New York Times*, at the time called "the avant-garde deadpans". The exhibition included artists Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Sol Lewitt, Robert Ryman, Jo Baer, Frank Stella, Ward Jackson and others.

In 1964-65, Jackson exhibited black and white paintings at the short-lived, but seminal John Daniels Gallery, NYC, which was founded by Dan Graham and David Herbert. He also participated in *Black and White* at The Contemporaries Gallery in NYC and at The Atrium Gallery in Seattle, WA, in a three-person exhibition with Alex Katz and Bernhard Martin. In 1967-68, his work was included in exhibitions at the College of William and Mary, VA, and at The White House in Washington, DC. Also in 1967, he presented the exhibition *Black and White Diamonds 1963-1966* at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Jackson's black and white paintings are among his best-known works and mark the beginning of his use of crisp hard edges and the diamond format, formal elements that he continued to develop for the rest of his lifetime.

Ward Jackson expanded upon this personal and rigorous approach to abstraction, developing his ideas in the 4 x 6 inch "drawing books" that he always carried with him. He continued to exhibit widely in NYC and throughout the United States, as well as in exhibitions in Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Japan. Some of the highlights of his early career were annual solo exhibitions from 1968-1972 at the Graham Gallery, NYC. As the winner of three Virginia Museum of Fine Arts fellowships, in 1963, 1969 and 1971 respectively, Jackson had two solo exhibitions at the museum in 1971 and 1973. He continued to exhibit with distinction in group exhibitions at the museum through the 1980s.

Beginning in the 1970s until his death in 2004, Jackson also enjoyed an active career in Europe with numerous solo exhibitions in Germany, including at the Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg, in 1973; Galerie Adlung & Kaiser, Berlin, in 1988; Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen, in 1991; and Kunsthalle Bremen, Bremen, in 1992. Throughout the 1970s, he exhibited in significant group exhibitions in NYC, including at French and Company Gallery and Betty Parsons Gallery.

From 1973-1982, he had annual solo exhibitions at Beucker & Harpsicords Gallery, NYC. In 1975 and 1977, he had solos at Stow Gallery, Davidson College, NC, and The Fine Arts Center, Ocean County College, NJ. In 1985, Jackson's *Retrospective of Diamond Shaped Paintings 1960-1985*, was presented at Kendall Gallery, NYC, and that same year, he exhibited with Al Held in *Geometric Abstraction, Selections from a Decade, 1975-85* at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, NYC. The following year in 1986 Jackson had a solo exhibit at gallery J.N. Herlin in NYC. In 1987, Jackson's work was included in three noteworthy museum exhibitions: *Konkret Sieben* at Kunsthaus, Nürnberg, Germany; *A Quiet Revolution: American Abstract Art of The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum* at the Columbia Museum, SC; and *Geometric Abstraction and the Modern Spirit*, Neuberger Museum, NY.

In 1989, Jackson was included in the important exhibitions *Geometric Abstraction and Minimalism in America* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY, and *Arte Sistemático y Constructivo* at the Centro Cultural de la Villa, Madrid, Spain. Throughout the 1980s-1990s, Jackson's work continued to be shown in numerous European group exhibitions and in NYC at John Woodward Gallery, Marilyn Pearl Gallery, Condeso-Lawler Gallery and Todd Capp Gallery, as well as at Kyusendo Gallery, Kobe, Japan. Even as his health began to fail, Jackson continued to work and exhibit into the early 2000s. Late highlights were his inclusion in exhibitions at The Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome, Italy; The Mondriaan House and Museum for Constructive and Concrete Art, Amersfoort, The Netherlands; and the Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich, Switzerland.

In addition to his long career as a painter, Jackson was the first archivist of the Guggenheim Museum, working there for nearly 40 years. He also mentored dozens of young artists as the director of their viewing program. Apart from the archive itself, legacies from his long involvement with the museum include the remarkable group of photographs illustrating the history of the Guggenheim Museum and its associated artists which Jackson curated from the museum's archives and was on permanent display in the museum's cafe from 1996 until its recent renovation. Artist Dan Flavin's remarkable light installation from 1992 in the collection of the Guggenheim entitled, "*To Ward Jackson, an old friend and colleague, who, during the fall of 1957 when I finally returned to New York from Washington and joined him to work together in this museum, kindly communicated.*" utilized the entire ramp and commemorated both their lasting friendship and formative time working together at the museum.

Also noteworthy, Jackson joined forces with publisher Roger Peskin and Guggenheim staff photographer Paul Katz in 1969 to found the experimental folio publication *ART NOW New York*. This interesting venture paired loose prints of art works recently exhibited in the galleries with brief original statements solicited from the artists. Over a four-year run, *ART NOW New York* published the work of well over one hundred of the period's most significant figures, from Jasper Johns to Brice Marden, Louise Bourgeois and Robert Smithson. *ART NOW* gradually developed into the ubiquitous and well-known *ART NOW Gallery Guide*, for which Jackson served as advisory editor until 1998.

Widely known for his encyclopedic knowledge of art and artists, Ward Jackson was an active, opinionated, and informed participant in the New York art world that he so loved. He passed away from heart complications in February of 2004. His obituary, written by critic Ken Johnson, appeared in *The New York Times* and also in *Art in America*.

Posthumously Jackson's work has been championed by Guggenheim Museum curator Lisa Dennison, who included his painting *Transit* in their 2004 survey exhibition *Singular Forms (Sometimes Repeated): Art from 1951 to the Present*. Dennison also organized a memorial service for Jackson at the Guggenheim that was attended by past and then current directors, Thomas Krens and Thomas Messer, both of whom gave wonderful and personal eulogies. In 2007, Ward Jackson was given a comprehensive memorial retrospective, *Ward Jackson: A Life in Painting*, at Metaphor Contemporary Art in Brooklyn, NY, which was accompanied by a catalog featuring an essay by Stephen Westfall and a panel discussion regarding his legacy with Westfall, Jed Perl, Phong Bui and Matthew Deleget. An comprehensive interview with artist Julian Jackson, Ward Jackson's nephew, was also published on MINUS SPACE gallery's blog: *Ward Jackson - Heat at the Edges, A Conversation with Julian Jackson, and Matthew Deleget*.

Gary Snyder Gallery included Jackson's paintings in *New American Abstraction 1960-1975* at his gallery in 2008. In 2010, Snyder again included Jackson's paintings in the exhibition *1960s Revisited* at David Richard Gallery in Santa Fe, NM, where his work was singled out for favorable review. In 2012, David Richard Gallery mounted the major retrospective, *Ward Jackson: A Survey of Five Decades*, which included a catalog with essays by Lilly Wei and Stephen Westfall. In April 2013, Jackson was prominently featured in the article *The Hard-Edge Sign* by Stephen Westfall published in *Art in America* magazine. The article traced the history and development of geometric hard-edged painting in the United States and included a large-scale reproduction of one of Jackson's *River Series* paintings. *Ward Jackson: Black and White Diamonds 1960s* is the artist's first solo show with MINUS SPACE, where he has been exhibiting since 2013.

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

National Museum of American Art Smithsonian, Washington, DC
Museum of Modern Art, NY
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY
The Brooklyn Museum of Art, NY
San Francisco Museum of Contemporary Art, CA
Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, MA
Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond, VA
Bronx Museum of the Arts, NY
Museum of Fine Arts Houston, TX
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
Neuberger Museum, Purchase, NY
New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, NJ
Chazen Museum of Art, Madison, WI
Edward Albee Collection
New York University Art Collection, NY
Princeton University, Princeton, NJ
Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
Davidson College Art Gallery, Davidson, NC
British Museum, London, England
Kunsthalle Bremen, Bremen, Germany
Museum Morsbruch, Leverkusen, Germany
Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg, Germany

(Biography prepared by Rene Lynch & Julian Jackson)