

LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

Leon Polk Smith

55 Main Street
East Hampton, NY
May 20 – 31, 2021

For the latest exhibition in East Hampton, Lisson Gallery is pleased to present a selection of works by Leon Polk Smith, the influential American artist considered one of the founders of hard-edge style of Minimal, abstract art. The presentation features an important 1967 multi-panel canvas painting as well as a group of rare early works on paper from the 1940s.

The exhibition tracks the trajectory of Leon Polk Smith's practice from an exploration of Piet Mondrian's Neo-Plasticism in the 1940s to a unique visual vocabulary of soft curves and distinctive shaped canvases that would come to exemplify Smith's body of work in the 1960s and 70s. The 1967 work on view, *Yellow Diamond*, embodies this singular language which subverted the prevailing laws of mid-century Abstract Expressionism and balanced pure, geometric forms with vibrant colors and unorthodox canvases. In this work Smith conjoins two oval canvases, their shapes stabilized by hard-edged contours in yellow and black that reflect the Native American aesthetics and philosophy of the artist's upbringing combined with the artistic innovation and vibrancy he experienced while living in New York City.

Shown for the first time at Lisson Gallery, Smith's early works on paper demonstrate the influence of the De Stijl generation on his artistic journey. Smith discovered the work of Mondrian at the Albert E. Gallatin Gallery of Living Art at New York University during his studies at Columbia University's Teachers College in 1936. This encounter, along with those of the work of Constantin Brancusi and Hans Arp, profoundly changed his perception of color, form and most importantly, space within his works, which, combined with his own upbringing amongst the vast plains of the Oklahoma landscape, created his intuitive style.

This exhibition is presented in East Hampton ahead of a solo exhibition of works by Leon Polk Smith, curated by Lynn Zelevansky and opening this September at the gallery's flagship location at 504 West 24th Street in New York. Smith's work is currently the subject of two major solo museum exhibitions in North America. *Leon Polk Smith: Hiding in Plain Sight* is on view through July 4, 2021 at the Heard Museum of Art in Phoenix, Arizona, and *Leon Polk Smith: Big Form, Big Space* is on view at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver until August 22, 2021.

Lisson Gallery's East Hampton space will continue its focused format featuring both influential, historical artworks and debuting new bodies of work in an experimental, intimate setting. Following the Leon Polk Smith exhibition the gallery will offer presentations by [Ceal Floyer](#), [Laure Prouvost](#), [Sean Scully](#) and [Allora & Calzadilla](#), among others. The gallery will be open to the public each Thursday through Saturday, from 11am to 6pm, Sundays from 12 – 5pm and Wednesdays by appointment.

About Leon Polk Smith

Considered one of the founders of the hard-edge style of Minimal, abstract art, Leon Polk Smith (1906 – 1996) rose to prominence in the late 1950s and early 1960s with his distinctive shaped canvas series — the *Correspondences*. These large canvases typically consist of two vibrantly-coloured painted shapes defined by a precise but often irregular contour. By 1967, Smith's circular explorations introduce additional panels and define his shaped, multi-part *Constellation* series of paintings and drawings, among his most exuberant and inventive compositions.

Smith established his key motifs while perusing an athletic catalogue in the late 1940s. Examining the pencil drawings of baseballs and tennis balls in it, Smith began to imagine that from these simple shapes he could create a new kind of space. As he

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described: “It was flat and the same time it was curved. It was like a sphere. The planes seemed to move in every direction, as space does. And so I thought, maybe that is because that’s on the tondo. I’ve got to find out if that is true or not. I’ve got to do some on a rectangle to see if the form and the space still moved in every direction. And it did. So it was exciting to do a painting on a rectangle that seemed to have a curved surface. It was the first time, you see, that I had made an important step myself, or contribution in art.”

By introducing this single curving line, Smith created two pictorial spaces, allowing for the interchangeability of positive and negative space. He developed this signature style over the following decade, beginning with creating a series of paintings in which he explores the circle by developing a curvilinear shape within it using two colours, and later experimenting with more colours in oval, rectangular and square shapes. While Minimalist peers of his during that time were shifting away from Modernism, Smith was wholeheartedly advancing the formal and rational elements of the Modernist tradition.

A retrospective of Smith’s work was organized by The Brooklyn Museum, New York, in 1996. His work is in numerous public and private collections worldwide including Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY, USA; Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois, USA; The Brooklyn Museum, New York, USA; Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, USA; Crystal Bridges Museum of Art, Arkansas, USA; Dallas Museum of Art, Texas, USA; Detroit Institute of Art, Michigan, USA; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA; The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., USA; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California, USA; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA; Morgan Library and Museum, New York, USA; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA; Kunsthalle Nürnberg, Germany; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; MACBA – Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Buenos Aires, Argentina; Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany; Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany; and Vancouver Art Gallery, British Columbia, Canada, among others.

The Leon Polk Smith Foundation was established by the artist and has been active since Smith's death in 1996 at the age of ninety. Its mission is to preserve and promote Smith's art and legacy. More information on Leon Polk Smith can be found at the foundation's website, www.leonpolksmithfoundation.org.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across two spaces in London, two in New York, one in Shanghai, as well as temporary spaces opened in 2020 in East Hampton and London’s Mayfair district. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estates of Leon Polk Smith, Ted Stamm and Roy Colmer.

In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes and Wael Shawky.

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