

eric firestone gallery

Michael Boyd: 1969 brings together a major series of paintings made by the artist in the late 1960s in response to a new environment. The work has not been presented as a group since the year they were made, when they were exhibited at the former art gallery of Cornell University. They are both pristinely abstract and profoundly associative of landscape, space, and light. They are paintings with gradient fields of blue, and ribbons of other colors, as punctuation.

Boyd (b. Waterloo, Iowa, 1936 - d. Ithaca, New York, 2015) began his career as an Abstract Expressionist in New York City and gradually moved toward hard-edged abstraction. His paintings of the 1960s utilize broad fields and blocks of color. However, in 1969, his work shifted dramatically. Boyd had been working as a graphic designer and, in that year, accepted a job at Cornell University to teach design. In response to the landscape and sky of the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York, he began to explore gradient fields of blue. Boyd's use of gradients and nuanced chromatic shifts would become further developed in his early 1970s work. Although his are pristine paintings, Boyd was more interested in the experiential, rather than color theory. The exhibition highlights this transitional period of Boyd's work, when his move to Ithaca predicated a personal vision, apart from the hierarchies from the New York art world.



Prior to 1969, Boyd was making shaped canvases; however he never fully embraced 1960s theoretical ideas of painting as an anti-illusionistic object. Instead — as these paintings make clear — he was interested in expanding the expressive and associative possibilities of painting. Despite his meticulous craftsmanship, the work always includes painterly, handmade elements, and he rooted himself within the legacy of Abstract Expressionism. The paintings reference places or themes with titles like “Airport,” “Scarab,” “Lakeside.” Boyd wrote, in 1991, “What matters is how one can use the resources of the medium to explore the mystery.”

Following Boyd's studies at the University of Northern Iowa and a stint in Ajijic, Mexico, Boyd split his time between Ithaca and New York City, where he maintained a studio in his Soho loft. Boyd had several solo exhibitions at Max Hutchinson Gallery in the 1970s, and was the subject of museum exhibitions at the Fine Arts Gallery of the State University of New York at Oneonta (1972); and a traveling exhibition originating at the Davenport Museum of Art, Iowa (1989), among others. His work is in the permanent collections of institutions including the Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, NY; The Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA; and the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY. Eric Firestone Gallery represents the estate of Michael Boyd, and this is the gallery's second solo exhibition of his work.

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