

eric firestone gallery



Thomas Sills (b. Castalia, NC, 1914–2000) began painting in 1952, inspired by his wife, Jeanne Reynal's work and collection of abstract art. He did not have formal training as an artist, but through Reynal he met a wide range of artists: from Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst to Willem de Kooning, Barnett Newman, and Mark Rothko. Sills's earliest paintings were experimental and employed an automatist approach; he used a variety of tools to apply paint and a diversity of materials on the surface of his paintings. By the late 1950s, he began working with an idea of equivalence between figure and ground, so that each form is both the positive and the negative of the form next to it. Often defined by a balance of just two colors, the compositions form radiating, optical sensations.

Speaking on his process, Sills remarked: "The main thing for me when I work is to say something worthwhile. My eyes must be open to see some of the good things. What I think about when I start painting is paint. A painter should paint only the way he wants to paint. There are no rules about it. I try not to destroy what comes out of my paintings. I don't fight it but let whatever is there, come out."

Sills was the subject of four solo exhibitions at Betty Parsons Gallery in New York from 1955 to 1961. In 1962 he exhibited with Paul Kantor Gallery, Los Angeles; and had a two-person exhibition with Reynal at the New School for Social Research, New York. In the 1960s and early '70s, he showed with Bodley Gallery, New York. He was the subject of solo exhibitions at Creighton University, Omaha, NE; and the Art Association of Newport, RI. Sills was also included in several important historic exhibitions of African American artists in the 1960s and early 1970s.

His work can be found in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, all New York; along with the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA. Sills is represented by Eric Firestone Gallery where he was the subject of a major solo presentation, *Thomas Sills: Variations, Paintings from the 1950s–70s* (2022); acclaimed by critic Martha Schwendener in the New York Times.

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