

Washington 10 create with stains, dyes, plashi areas

Ten Washington Artists, 1950-1970 (Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis, Gene Davis, Thomas Downing, Howard Mehrling, Sam Gilliam, Blaine Larson, Michael Clark, J. K. Knight, and Rochne Krebs) are at the Edmonton Art Gallery until March 8.

This Exhibition deals with the work of ten artists from Washington, D.C., who form what is generally known as the Washington Colour School. Like most exhibitions covering a period of time, the works are not all from the same period and there is a gradation in the ages of the artists and thus the time when they came to painting. The pattern falls roughly into Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis, the senior and most established men of the show, closely followed by Gene Davis, Howard Mehrling and Thomas Downing with the remaining artists marking the younger generation who are still in the process of establishing themselves.

The reviews by Virgil Hammock and Bob Harvey in the Edmonton Journal Friday, February 6 have provided us with a general background as

or similar to the work of the Canadian Jean-Paul Reopelle. Louis' early work "Distance of Time" 1952 shows how prior to seeing Frankenthaler's work his major influence was in the drip formations of Pollock and in a very short time turned to stain paint, a form which was to remain in his painting until his death in 1962. There are two fine examples of his later works in the exhibition: "Beta-Psi" from a series painted in 1960-61 and "Pillar of Fire" from 1961.

Noland took slightly longer to find form for his painting, and in the late 1950's started a series of target formations using improved canvas and thin paint of which he was to paint some 200, moving from soft edged bleed circles up to stronger, harder edged of 1960-61 which operate somewhat more optically. The exhibition includes one of the earlier of this series, "Untied" 1958. Again the catalogue traces his development and the exhibition includes one of his finest series, the horizontal shape paintings. "Magus" 1967 is a fine example of this series, the only better that I've seen being in the collection of the Whitney Museum, New York.

works I find the formations of color constructed in sequences which could be said to parallel music. This is not important for my appreciation of the work, except to observe the groupings of these formations, which only exist in groups and not in the individual bands of color as in a Noland.

In Thomas Downing's latest work he deals with tricks that I think Lewis and Noland have made a point to avoid. Downing is a well respected artist who was in close contact with the energies and thought of New York in the late 1950's and with the Washington Cocoran Workshop (a studio belonging to the Cocoran Gallery in Washington, which is awarded for use to local artists. Noland, Lewis and most of the other artists in the show have worked there at some time.) On his return to Washington, D.C., in 1956 he worked there with his good friend Howard Mehrling.

Downing's earlier works use a circle (spot) as a repeated motif and in some, like that in the exhibition "Blue Electric" in 1962 become almost optical in the vibrance of the color. His work seems to have changed somewhat in that his late works use an illusion created by the drawing and the shaped canvas, almost leading to the making of an object. The tricks he is using are well worn and have me feeling very little for the rather obvious statement. I find his earlier paintings much more interesting in that they offer time for contemplation.

Howard Mehrling has three works in the exhibition, two of which are from the late 1950's when he also worked with imprinted canvas and liquid, dye-like solutions of paint. The third painting is one of his best of this Z series. The earlier works I view with great interest although I question whether or not I find them slightly decorative, a question I cannot answer until I live with them a little longer. I have certain difficulties with his painting "Interval" 1968 due to the association it creates for me with some of Noland's work. However, his work is some of the most interesting and together with Lewis had a great impact on many young painters. Perhaps this accounts for all the stain paintings of the 1960's.

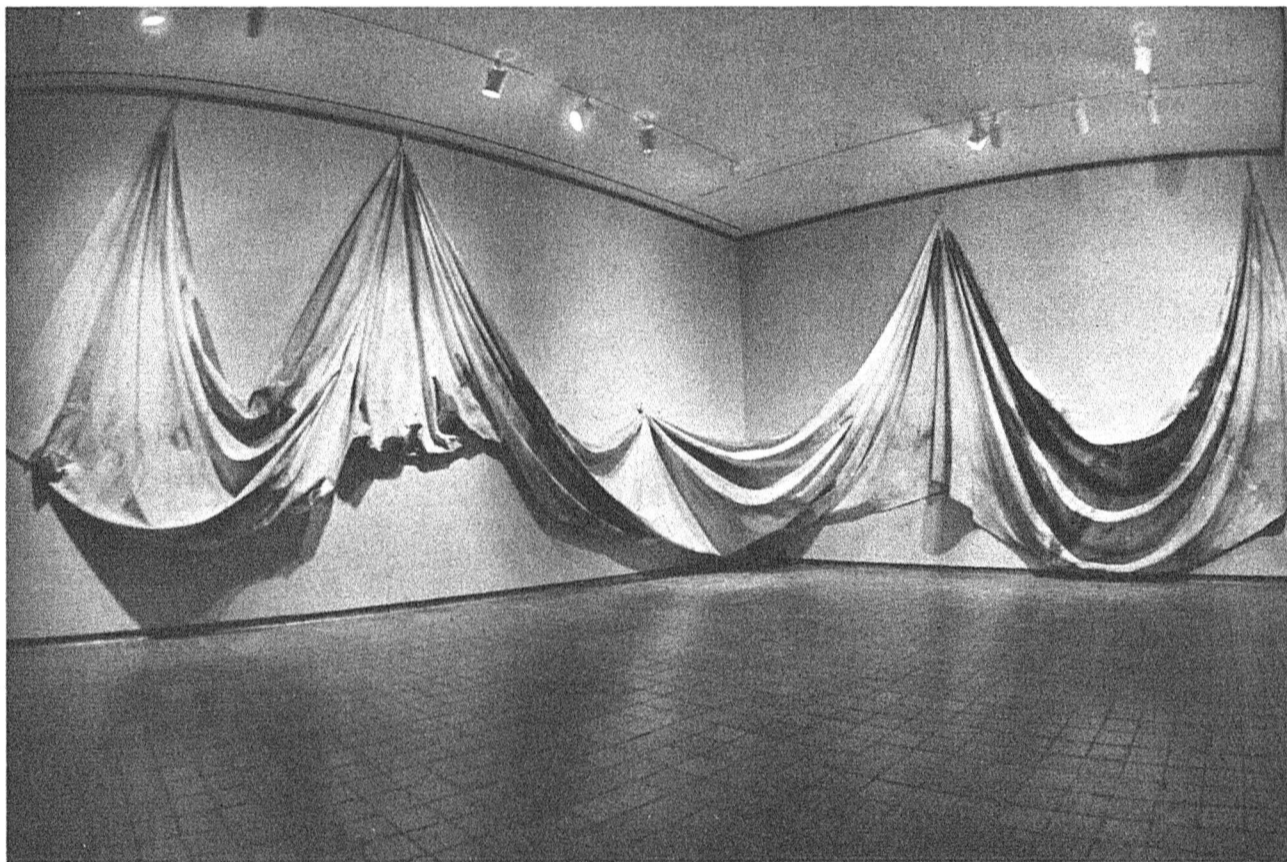
Sam Gilliam is a black artist who together with Rochne Krebs, his friend and studio companion at the Cocoran Workshop, have some of the best work of younger artists in the show and certainly seem to be the most interesting of Andrew Hudson's younger selection.

Blaine Larson's work is actually off the wall or at least leaning against it in its bio-morphic shape. The character of the work is somewhat rugged, although appearing very cool in the outline. He himself claims a deep interest in nature and bio-morphic form, lives in the country and collects old medical books, does a great deal of drawing and says he is fascinated by line. This has sometimes crept into his painting on objects, as with "Painted Furniture" 1966 shown in the catalogue.

I find his best work a series of shapes such as that included in the exhibition, "Sylvicola" 1968. His work is interesting and I think suffers in its setting next to the power of the Noland. I would agree with Andrew Hudson, who hung the show, that generally difference in works makes for complimentary hanging but in this case it's not so.

Rochne Krebs is a law unto himself, dealing with new and exciting forms. His early works were in the sculptural form of chevrons, somewhat reminiscent of Noland's work. He gradually included see-through plashi areas until they become all clear plashi, see-through, see-onto and see-into, making just the same propositions which are made in his laser beam "Photon" which he terms "Sculpture minus object." In his clear plashi sculptures he has moved to the point of the disappearance of his object, the spaces being read by the light lines or edges of the planes which reflect light.

— by Graham Peacock —



—DAVE HEBDITCH PHOTO

to how the exhibition came about and some of the views of Andrew Hudson, who organized the Exhibition, together with a history of the *artisti*, not to mention the creative talents of the Journal photographer and his "A Distinctive Palette". I propose to discuss the Exhibition more fully and deal with the relationships and involvement of the artists and the works represented.

Morris Louis (1912-1962) together with Kenneth Noland (1924-) worked in Washington, D.C., during the 1950's, a time when the New York School of Abstract Expressionist painters like Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline and Willem De Kooning were providing controversial gusto for the world of painting. Louis and Noland were both still working in a fairly tight and controlled manner inherited from the Cubists. They were both excited by the new freedoms set forth in Abstract Expressionism and by the work of Pollock in his use and feeling for paint, but from all accounts had only seen the odd painting on trips to New York.

In this Exhibition we see Noland's work of the next year "Element of Blue" 1954, which has the dramatic experience of Expressionism, the point of Pollock and is in the manner of Philip Gaston,

In both Noland and Louis there is resolution and commitment to the statement they make in painting. Their philosophy is that upheld by Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko and Adolf Gottlieb, who proclaimed "the impact of elemental truth" which favors the "simple expression of a complex thought." Louis said, "Painting can be anything but it has to be something." Both artists tried to remove what they call tricks from their art which had existed through the drawing of cubism to find a simple form as a vehicle for the exciting experiment of color. Noland said, "A breakthrough also means a limitation, a reduction of the possibilities." These paintings are noted for a reduction in the depth and space in which the eye can move and are noted for their shallow surface space.

Gene Davis has two paintings in the exhibition, "Black Popcorn" and "Color Needles" show good contrast in their color and sensitivity. Having been a newspaper editor for most of his life, he entered into painting in the mid-sixties. His painting is influenced deeply by his worldly experiences and often reflects objects of color which he has seen. He is greatly interested in jazz and its rhythmic formations, and his titles often reflect these influences. In looking at both of the represented