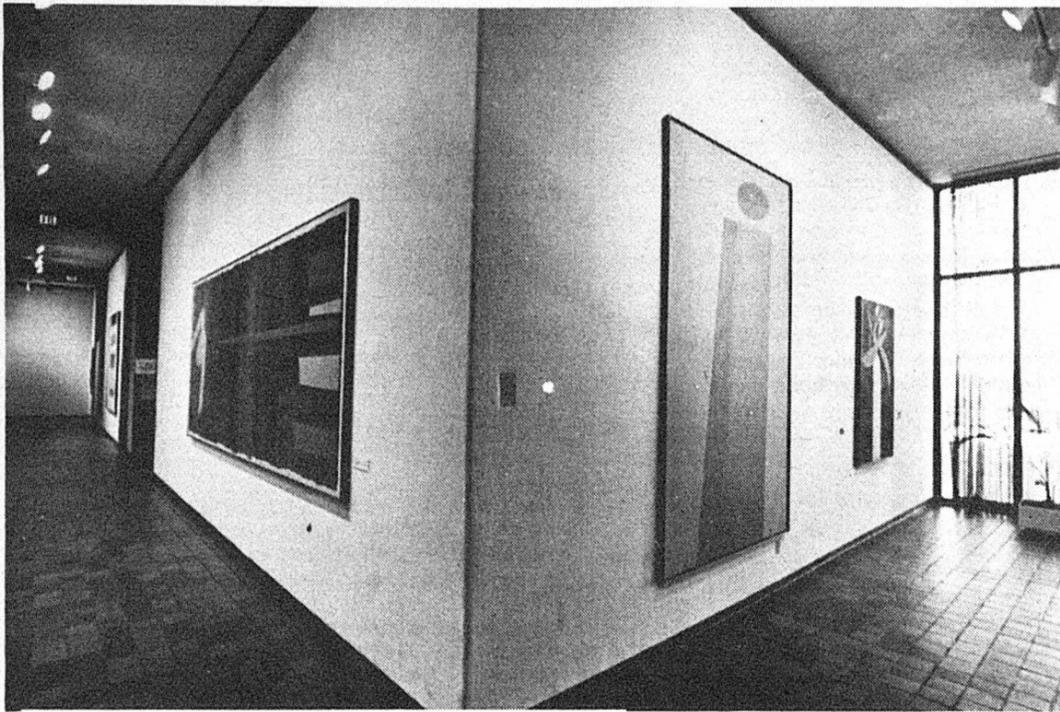


An artist of a different color

Sliding into the Bush



Some of the Jack Bush Collection at the Edmonton Art Gallery.

by Dan Bagan
and Gerry Rasmussen

Monday afternoon a major contemporary artist, Jack Bush, presented a lecture and slide show in TL12. The lecture was part of an Edmonton visit for the artist which included the official opening of his retrospective show last Friday evening at the Edmonton Art Gallery. Both the opening and the lecture were well-attended, attesting to Mr. Bush's reputation and popularity.

Bush's distinctly modernist work is concerned with color relationships in what can be

generally termed "color field" paintings. The large exhibit clearly shows the artist's flexibility over the last twenty years. The paintings are large, joyous, brilliant affirmations of his love of color and painting. In a larger sense, his love of life and involvement in art is clearly evident. Bush's work contains a range of characteristics from lyrical, painterly statements (such as *Basin St. Blues*), to highly electric dazzling color (as in *Red Pink Cross*), to slick and sometimes decorative qualities (as in *Sudden*).

Throughout the whole show

the most striking characteristic seems to be a strong sense of design and a carefully-controlled color sense attuned to the needs of each individual painting. The best paintings might be termed "seductive" experiences, other works are perhaps less successful because either the design or the color becomes too dominant. When this happens, the works become strong visual experiences sometimes overbearing to the eye.

Basin St. Blues is perhaps the best example of Bush's painterly qualities. It is an active yet refined painting with a loosely brushed surface and a range of colored strokes, each carefully-controlled in strength. A related picture, *Salmon Concerto* is an exuberant display of lyric rhythm and lush color. Upon closer inspection, however, Bush's sophistication becomes evident; the use of various colors, and white, creates rhythm and balance in what may appear to be a deceptively simple pattern. Such ability to appear both simple and complex may be one essential characteristic of a great artist. Two other very satisfying works are the highly energetic *Zip Red*, and *Island*.

Some works however, such as the previously mentioned *Red Pink Cross* do not seem to possess that interesting interplay of subtlety and brashness. *Red Pink Cross* is an exceedingly

dazzling display of color; red, blue, pink and orange all fight for attention. In most works a tension is created by the control of the edges of his color areas, often all his shapes come up to the edges in a uniform manner and stop, holding one's eye completely in the picture surface. One obvious example of a tendency toward slickness can be found in *Sudden*, a tall thin painting whose shapes are brushed right on raw canvas. Tight, hard edges and decorative design lend to the feeling of slickness. To the artist's credit however, he admirably sidesteps the many trappings of his stylization and never produces what

gained audience and reputation and is considered today to be a painter of great strength and individuality.

A delight to listen to, Bush presented himself and work without pretense. He spoke of his initial inspirations, various series of paintings stemming from such unlikely sources as random paint splatters, store window sashes, but clearly the paintings do not rely on external images.

Recently described as "a grand old man of Canadian painting," Bush jokingly admitted he seems to have inherited the title from A.Y. Jackson. Ironically, both were once



could easily be a commercial painting.

During the Monday afternoon presentation, Bush was very unassuming and spontaneous in tracing his history for the capacity audience. Briefly, Jack Bush started his life as an artist at the age of nineteen in 1926 both in commercial and fine art fields. Over the years he gained a spot on Toronto art circles, working in Group of Seven landscape traditions. Only in the late 1940's did he first become aware of modern movements in painting. Then in the 1950's he completely changed his work and began painting as he finally believed and felt he should.

In the course of the last twenty years he has steadily

scourged of Canadian art in its respective eras. In closing, Bush passed on some worthy advice to the large crowd: "have patience."

For the young audience was most worthwhile advice would be equally worthwhile take in the Jack Bush retrospective at the Edmonton Art Gallery on exhibit until February 15.

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