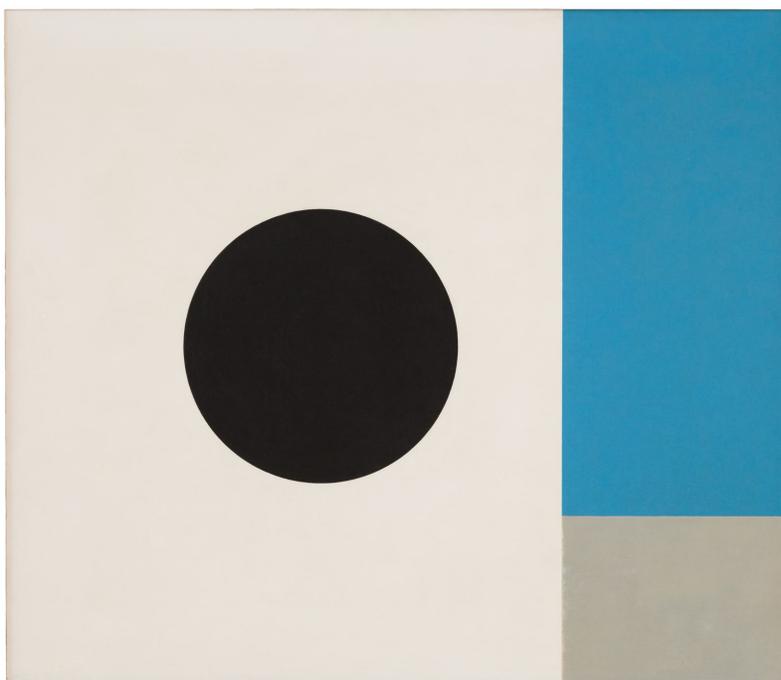


VAN DOREN WAXTER

John McLaughlin: *Marvelous Void*
November 2, 2016– January 7, 2017



John McLaughlin, *Untitled*, 1948, Oil on Masonite, 24 x 28 inches (61 x 71.1 cm) Signed, titled, dated on reverse

I want to communicate only to the extent that the painting will serve to induce or intensify the viewer's natural desire for contemplation without the benefit of a guiding principle.

— *John McLaughlin*

Van Doren Waxter is pleased to present *Marvelous Void*, an exhibition of seven paintings completed between 1948-1974 by the post World War II abstractionist John McLaughlin (1898-1976). Conceived and curated by Dr. Robert C. Morgan, this specific investigation into the purely abstract work of John McLaughlin will open November 2, 2016 and remain on view through January 7, 2017. The exhibition title derives from Sesshu Toyo, a 15th Century Japanese artist and Zen monk, whose approach to ink painting introduced the concept of

“emptiness” or the “marvelous void” into Japanese painting, ultimately influencing the work of the American painter five hundred year later. According to Professor Morgan: “The use of empty space moves through the paintings of Sesshu in a way that echoes the natural living environment as a seemingly infinite space. It was this idea that caught the attention of McLaughlin early on, and stayed with him throughout his career.”

This would prove deeply influential to McLaughlin in determining the use of rectilinear space as a "neutral structure" in his own hard-edge paintings. This unique exhibition will feature a selection of McLaughlin's geometric abstractions alongside two early Japanese ink paintings that exemplify Sesshu's concept. *Marvelous Void* represents the first time this connection between McLaughlin's practice and Sesshu's influence has been realized in an exhibition. McLaughlin's practice was devoted, in part, to reconciling Western sensibilities with Eastern notions of space, a deviation from the ideas and tempestuous style prominent in Abstract Expressionism. Enamored with Sesshu's manipulation of the negative space between objects, McLaughlin further distilled the spatial plane, reducing crisp, ordered forms so that the viewer's perception is augmented. The supremacy of openness that McLaughlin identified in both Eastern painting and Zen Buddhist teachings was resolved in his own canvases through an awareness and hierarchy of space—an optical berth, he argued, necessary for substantial introspection. While the sparseness of McLaughlin's forms is informed by the “marvelous void,” his reduced and layered constructions owe some debt to Western modernists such as Mondrian and Malevich. However, for McLaughlin, there were distinct differences.

Emphasizing these differences, the Curator states in his catalog essay: “This Eastern idea does not separate the conceptual from the material world, nor, for that matter, does it isolate the conceptual from the visual presence of color and form or make distinctions between the process of thought and the resonance of form.” The structure of the works on view—sharply defined vertical and horizontal bars bisecting color fields—are forceful, yet manage to elicit a meditative quality. McLaughlin confronts the Western preoccupation with the image by isolating and amplifying perception and space into pure abstractions with a profound connection to nature.

About the artist

John McLaughlin was an American abstract painter born in Sharon, MA in 1898. In 1935, McLaughlin and his wife Florence Emerson (descendant of Ralph Waldo Emerson) moved to Japan where they lived for three years. Upon their return in 1938, McLaughlin established a business dealing Japanese prints. It was around this time that he decided to start painting, which was brought to a halt just a few years later with the start of the War. Fluent in Japanese, McLaughlin was recruited as a translator by the Army during WWII. After the war, McLaughlin settled in Dana Point, California, where he started painting full time in 1946. Entirely self-taught, the artist continued to paint, with considerable success in his later career, until his death in 1976. He is currently the subject of a major retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (November 13, 2016-April 16, 2017).

About the curator

Robert C. Morgan met and began corresponding with John McLaughlin from 1969 to 1974. Their age difference was nearly fifty years. Morgan went on to get a Master of Fine Arts degree and a Ph.D. in Art History. In 1999, he was awarded the first Arcale prize in International Art Criticism in Salamanca, and the same year served on the UNESCO jury at the 48th Biennale di Venezia. In 2003, Dr. Morgan was appointed Professor Emeritus in art history at the Rochester Institute of Technology, and, in 2011, was inducted into the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, Salzburg. In addition to his scholarly career with books translated into Chinese, Farsi, and Korean, he continues to work and exhibit as a painter.

About Van Doren Waxter

Established in 2013, Van Doren Waxter specializes in American Abstraction from 1950-1990 exclusively representing the James Brooks Foundation, the Richard Diebenkorn Foundation, works on paper from the Al Held Foundation, the Harvey Quaytman Estate, the Alan Shields Estate, and the Hedda Sterne Foundation. Additionally, the gallery handles secondary market works, specializing in John Chamberlain, Mark di Suvero, Sam Francis, Helen Frankenthaler, Hans Hofmann, Ellsworth Kelly, Franz Kline, John McLaughlin and Frank Stella, among others.

Gratitude is extended to Erik Thomsen Gallery for the loan of two important scroll paintings; one attributed to Shugetsu (1440-1529), a disciple of Sesshu, and an anonymous Kano school scroll from 17th century Japan.

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