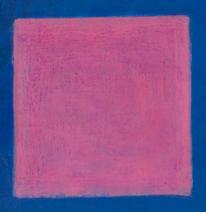


YVONNE THOMAS COMPLEXED SQUARES











YVONNE THOMAS, 1990

Photo: David Hiser

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SEPTEMBER 8 - OCTOBER 14, 2023

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ISBN: 978-1-960708-02-1 LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CONTROL NUMBER: 2023914590

The Early Career of Yvonne Thomas and the Complexed Squares Series (1963–1973)

committed painter throughout her life, Yvonne Thomas (1913–2009) exemplifies a woman artist who empowered herself through her work. While drawing from her mentors—Robert Motherwell and Hans Hofmann—and the stimulation around her in the New York art world, she pursued her own ideas, using the language of color as a perceptual, metaphorical, and emotive force. Maintaining a practice that was vital and inquisitive, Thomas embraced change, in the understanding that "reinventing interpretations of reality" have always played a major role in art.¹ The show this catalogue accompanies, *Complexed Squares*, exemplifies her pursuit of such reinvention, in works of subtlety, humor, exploration, and vivacity.

From Nice to New York, 1913-1936

The only child of Etienne and Victorine Navello, the artist was born Yvonne Armande Navello in Nice, France, on October 1, 1913. Her family's surname derived from a time when Nice was part of Italy. The sun-blessed coastal city was steeped in history, but it was also a cosmopolitan crossroads, drawing many modernist artists—Henri Matisse settled there in 1918. Culturally, Yvonne was part of that world. In school in Nice as a demi-pensionnaire (a weekly boarder), Yvonne made the decision to become an artist.

She loved the environment of her childhood. One of her earliest memories is of being "rocked in a cradle beneath the cloud-yellow Mimosas, orange trees, and a pale green Eucalyptus in her grandmother's Provençal garden" in Nice.² Part of her being, the colors of southern France would come forth in her art throughout her career. In 1925, she was abruptly uprooted, when her parents emigrated to the United States. Sailing from Marseille on the S.S. Roma, they arrived in Providence, Rhode Island, on September 12 of that year, when Yvonne was just shy of her thirteenth birthday.³ The family resided first in Boston. There she received a full scholarship to study at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts.⁴ The Navello family subsequently relocated to New York, where during high school, Yvonne traveled from the East 90s to Cooper Union in the East Village. At the venerable tuition-free art school, she received instruction from the Jersey City-born artist Alphaeus Philemon Cole (a descendant of Thomas Cole). Having attended the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Cole taught classes in portraiture and still life, from which Yvonne solidified her academic grounding.

She was still studying at Cooper Union in 1931, but when the Great Depression got underway, it became necessary for her to leave school in order to support herself.⁵ She was hired as a fashion illustrator by Best & Company, the New York department store known for offering tastefully designed clothing and apparel for the needs of "real women." Her drawings appeared regularly in advertisements for the company in the *New York Times.* Yet like many other artists of the era, she felt that commercial work was antithetical to being a true artist. At age twenty-three, when she returned from a trip to Europe in August 1936, she listed her profession on the ship manifest as "artist."⁶ A few months later, on October 11, 1936, her mother died suddenly from a stroke at age forty-nine.

Shortly thereafter Yvonne's father returned to France, where he had many family members. Although Yvonne would stay close to him and visit him and his second wife on many return trips to France, she felt already too rooted in New York to go back to the place of her birth.

Leaving Fashion for Art, 1936–1948

When she was alone in New York, instead of continuing her profitable illustration career, she decided to leave it, returning to her passion for art. She took private instruction in figural rendering and portraiture with the Russian painter Dmitri Romanovski and attended classes at the Art Students League, with Vaclav Vytlacil, the son of Czech immigrants, who had studied in Munich with Hans Hofmann, and also worked there as Hofmann's assistant. (In 1936, he helped establish the American Abstract Artists group.) Combining the lessons of Cézanne, Picasso, and the Fauves, "Vyt" depicted biomorphic and geometric forms while stopping short of the gestural methods of Abstract Expressionism.

On August 29, 1938, Yvonne married New Yorker, Leonard Thomas. The couple spent the following year in Paris, where the first of their two daughters was born. On their return to New York, Thomas enrolled in the Ozenfant School of Fine Art, New York, begun in 1939 by the French Cubist, Amédée Ozenfant. Along with Le Corbusier, Ozenfant was the initiator of Purism. A corrective to decorative directions in Cubism, the style was intended as rational, mathematical, and reductive, expressing enthusiasm for the beauty of the machine aesthetic and conveying the desire for a "return to order" after World War I (Fernand Léger is the best-known exponent of the style in painting). Under Ozenfant, Thomas worked on glazing, "like the old masters." She described the school's atmosphere as "clinical and stilted but inventive."⁷

Subjects of the Artist School, 1948-1949

In an extensive 1998 oral history interview with Tina Dickey-an artist and author who studied with Hofmann and is the editor of the Hofmann Catalogue Raisonné-Thomas recalled that in the early 1940s, she was "academic," but she wanted to move ahead. She attended lectures on Picasso and other modernist artists. During World War II, she and Leonard were living in Newport, Rhode Island, while he served as an officer at a naval base. There she often went up to her attic to copy images by Braque and Picasso. She recalled to Dickey that she did so "without quite knowing why or what she was doing"-she was "so anxious to change." She began creating landscapes that were simplified and stylized. She recognized that they "weren't really academic."⁸ The catalyst for the change she sought was her friend, Patricia Kane O'Connell, who had married the Chilean-born surrealist artist Roberto Matta in 1945. Patricia existed in two worlds: patrician New York society and the circle of European émigrés to which Matta belonged (including André Breton, Nicolas Calas, Max Ernst, Fernand Léger, Yves Tanguy, and Marcel Duchamp).⁹ Described as "a fiery particle" and deeply discerning, Patricia was a skilled photographer-especially known for photographing the works of Alberto Giacometti.¹⁰ She was also a savvy art collector, acquiring works by Duchamp, Joan Miró, and Yves Tanguy,

among others. One day Patricia went up with Yvonne to her Newport attic and on seeing her friend's work, she pronounced that there were people Thomas "had to meet."¹¹

Soon thereafter, Patricia introduced Yvonne to the newly formed Subjects of the Artist School, and Thomas attended during the sole year of the school's existence: 1948–49.¹² Situated in a loft at 23 East 8th Street, the school did away with the traditional "teacher-student" relationship, and those in attendance were "collaborators." The 1948 catalogue listed William Baziotes, David Hare, Robert Motherwell, and Mark Rothko as the school's "artists," but others who took part were Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Adolph Gottlieb, Hofmann, Lee Krasner, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, Richard Pousette-Dart, and Clyfford Still.¹³ In a March 1949 lecture, Motherwell called the school a place for "young people" to "hang around artists," and stated: "We talk to the students as we do to one another, trying to break down ignorance and clichés, encouraging each individual to find his own expression of inner life."¹⁴ Thomas stated to Dickey that each class had consisted of five artist-teachers and five students, along with a few other artists who attended briefly.¹⁵

The school sought to correct the notion that modern abstraction was pure formalism, stressing the idea that subjective feelings were the only "subjects" for artists to render. Students were to divorce themselves from such towering figures as Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Piet Mondrian, instead distilling their formal advances in problem sets.¹⁶ The result, according to Robert Hobbs, "was a radical demystification of modernism intended to empower the students."¹⁷ Projects in the school consisted, for example, of compositions structured with the use of only saturated hues. Thomas embraced surrealist methods at the school. There, she remarked, "you'd do abstractions. You'd be very free, and whatever came out, that's automatic, you'd put down. It's an inner sort of concentration." The meanings of works were discussed in the school's critiques, and according to Thomas, paintings "had to have a meaning." She viewed her work at the school as "authentically of the time," stating then: "Its spontaneity is close to my temperament. There is no influence of other artist's imagery, except for intellectual and philosophical ideas."18 At the school, she felt she had "finally come home."19 While there, Thomas attended lectures by the French art critic and historian Georges Duthuit on theories of aesthetics and Matisse (his specialty).²⁰

Motherwell took over the school when it closed, and Thomas continued to work with him. According to Thomas, Motherwell was "often amazed at the surprising color notes she was able to make work."²¹ She told Dickey that Motherwell changed her "whole way of thinking." She built on Motherwell's views in her existential quest for self-understanding through her art. In another 1949 lecture, Motherwell expressed the necessity in an individuated art world for artists to "reinvent painting." He commented: "One becomes a painter when existing painted objects do not wholly satisfy one's subjective unity of feeling, the sense of one's own unity."²² For the communication of such ideas, Thomas felt Motherwell's instruction was the best thing that happened to her: "I didn't even know [until then] that I would be an abstract artist with conviction," she recalled.²³ Her ability to do so was met with incredulity

by Baziotes, who pronounced: "I never thought for a minute you'd turn out to be a full-fledged abstract artist."²⁴ Despite the parity among the school's artists, women were not taken as seriously.

Study with Hofmann and The Club, 1950-1956

In 1950, Thomas and her family took a vacation rental for the summer in Truro, Massachusetts. Although she was already a working artist, she decided to enroll in Hofmann's school in nearby Provincetown. Looking back, she saw this as a "brilliant move," because Hofmann-whose approach was more theoretical than at Subjects of the Artist-helped her with many things she had ignored.25 She continued her studies under Hofmann in New York for about four months. Thomas was delighted with Hofmann's "energy, tremendous vigor and his assurance in his teaching and in his thinking."²⁶ In an undated typescript, she remembered his class as one in which everyone was "listening, fully absorbed, at each criticism." She recalled Hofmann's "vigor of expression, explaining and creating an abundance of possibilities around the model and room, using visual space and invented space in the Fauvist-Cubist tradition he was always aware of."27 Hofmann helped Thomas unleash her "overwhelming feeling for color, structuring new form in expressing nature and inner experiences." Of greatest significance to her was that Hofmann encouraged her to make color her all-consuming subject.²⁸

Along with many of the artists who had participated in Subjects of the Artist, Thomas became part of the artists' collective, known as "The Club," initiated in 1948.²⁹ Managed during its first six years by Philip Pavia, the gathering-primarily of Abstract Expressionists-met in an undecorated loft at 35 West 8th Street for lectures and discussions.³⁰ Thomas "never missed a Friday night" at The Club, where speakers included Hannah Arendt, Dylan Thomas, and Joseph Campbell.³¹ She attended the panels of poets and painters and remembers that "John Cage used to come and talk," while "[Franz] Kline and de Kooning were very much in evidence," along with Joan Mitchell, Philip Guston, and Pollock.³² After The Club gatherings, she joined the discussions that continued into the night at the Cedar Bar.³³ It is thus a myth that these were only men's gatherings. As a member of the The Club, it is more than likely-but not proven-that Thomas took part in the legendary Ninth Street Show, held May 21–June 10, 1951, in a storefront at 60 East 9th Street in Greenwich Village.³⁴ The show's announcement includes sixtyone artists' names, and Thomas's is not among them, but many artists took part who were not listed. Leo Castelli recalled that there were about "ninety painters in [the show] and they were almost exclusively . . . composed of artists who were involved with The Club."³⁵ The Ninth Street Show of 1951 was the first of five New York Paintings and Sculpture Annuals. Thomas participated in the four subsequent annuals, which were held at the Stable Gallery, at Seventh Avenue and 58th Street, from 1953 through 1956.³⁶

In a day when most married women were housewives, Thomas stood out for her dedication to work and a career. Art was not only her commitment but also her identity. An avid reader, especially of art history, Thomas was also at the center of the social life that provided a means of exchange among Greenwich Village artists. Elaine de Kooning, a close friend, recalled meeting Rothko at Thomas's "wonderful parties."³⁷ Thomas was especially



FIG. 1. FLIGHT, 1953, OIL ON CANVAS, 48 X 60 IN., Private Collection



FIG. 2. EARLY MORNING, 1956, OIL ON CANVAS, 48 X 60 IN., Private Collection

fond of Duchamp. With a shared cultural heritage, they understood each other, and their sense of humor coincided.³⁸ Her other close friends included Ad Reinhardt and Fay Lansner. Thomas was well known for her French gentility and delight in conversation.

Artistic Development, 1953-1963

The change that occurred in Thomas's art, as she embraced the freedom of color, is apparent in the difference between Flight, 1953 [fig. 1] and Early Morning, 1956 [fig. 2]. Hofmann's push-pull forces are apparent in both works, in dynamic pulsating spaces, and the palettes in the two works are similar, relying on gray-greens broken by white and complementary red-orange. Yet in the former, Thomas was more cautious and restrained, emphasizing volumes with planes that tilt, project, and recede without breaking the flatness of the surface. In the latter, the color has taken the lead, as if its material properties had been liberated, creating a sense of empathy for the viewer in feeling the life energies at work. Hofmann wrote often of the "empathy" that results from the inner vision received by the effect of three-dimensional experience on a two-dimensional surface, which Thomas was achieving.³⁹ Critics' comments indicate the change in Thomas's work. In a review of a three-artist show in 1954 that featured Thomas, Dore Ashton wrote that she painted "in an extremely low-keyed palette-cool yellow, slate blue, earth pink-and holds her forms in closely related surface planes." Ashton stated: "Here is a delicate, very subtle intonation, adjusted to atmospheric rather than energetic forces in nature."40 Of her first solo show, held at Tanager in October 1956, Lawrence Campbell noted that Thomas was "a painter with much technical equipment which shows in tasteful glazes and transparencies, and in her whites which are like veils, settling gently upon the canvas." However, Campbell observed that her last

paintings were more "automatist," noting that she was "working with larger, more deliberately selected forms." $^{\prime 41}$

By 1959, Thomas had become a fully gestural painter, creating all-over surfaces with energized spatial implications. Her view was that "the picture plane is just the idea of holding the surface. The meaning lies in the merging of the color and the form, and then the painting sort of breathes."42 In April 1960, Thomas had a solo show at the New York gallery run by Esther Stuttman. A friend of Milton Avery, Stuttman focused on women artists, showing the work of Marisol, Louise Nevelson, and Vita Petersen. The New York Times selected Thomas's exhibition for its "Around the Galleries" column, describing the work on view as: "big, brave gestures with paint and color [that] parade on energetic action paintings."43 Donald Judd reviewed the show in Arts. He started with criticism, observing that Thomas's paintings fit "too neatly in the New York style," being a "compendium of its more adaptable techniques." However, he did an about face, going on to state how such knowledge implemented "a fresh, clear, and uncomplicated lyricism-the kind one thinks of first, enjoyable, joyous, and a little pristine." To Judd, Thomas's work had the quality he felt was most important in art: "a distinctive aspect." He described her style admiringly: "wide brush-strokes and sweeps of color glissade to the plane of the bare canvas. The paint and the canvas are identified with one another, continued into each other, and the consequent speed and thinness of the surface engender the clarity and singleness of the poetry."44 Art News also covered the show, remarking that Thomas did not disguise who she was in "personal color harmonies," and that "the loose structure of her paintings . . . produces the sensation of looking through the outer to see the undergarments and then the bare flesh and bones."45 Stuttman held a concurrent show of Thomas's work in her Paris gallery, where a reviewer for Les Arts stated that it combined surging movements and skillful harmonization.46



FIG. 3. DIALOGUE, 1962, OIL ON CANVAS, 14 X 16 IN., Private Collection

In the following year, Thomas executed a number of works in which she juxtaposed two opposing colors, enunciated with layering that challenges the picture plane. The result, as in *Dialogue*, 1962 [fig. 3], is a relationship more emotional than illusionistic, giving such works a spiritual aspect.

From Windows to Complexed Squares, 1963-1973

These images paved the way for the minimalist route Thomas took beginning in 1963. Creating a series of works with repeating lozenge-like shapes in flat patterns, she adhered to the idea that an artist's consistent system did not represent a mechanical method but instead a point of reference for the expression of an artist's unique ideas and ways of seeing and exploring the world. Her approach dovetailed with the viewpoint of "systemic painting," a term used to describe work in an exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in 1966.⁴⁷ In its catalogue the influential writer and curator, Lawrence Alloway stated that a systemic approach could be just as creative and freeing as one that was existential and primal. Thomas embraced this idea in her "Windows" series in which she concentrated on a painting, not as a Renaissance picture window to look through but as a surface.⁴⁸ An inspiration was possibly Robert Delaunay's 1912 "Windows" series, but whereas Delaunay used painting surfaces to record visual perception, Thomas's interest was in the painting as a realm of its own. The light in these images filters across the repeating shapes, their variations in edge and size accentuating their actual reflective gualities. The Window, 1964 [fig. 4], makes her perspective evident. In the nocturnal image, an indoor dim incandescence engages the surface, blurring our vision, where blue light filters in, leaving a red afterimage, while pockets of luminous green perhaps result from the slits in a lampshade. The poet and art critic John Yau complimented Thomas's use of the grid to go beyond formal to emotive and naturalistic associations and associated her works with the 1960s grid works of Brice Marden.⁴⁹

Thomas continued to draw from the ideas of Hofmann, but she also departed from her former teacher. Overlapping with her "Windows" works, she began



FIG. 4. THE WINDOW, 1964, OIL ON CANVAS, 40 X 50 IN., Private Collection

a series of images featuring squares. She stated to Dickey that Hofmann liked geometry and that the square had been a symbol for him. Noting that she had never used the square previously, she acknowledged that her decision to do so "corresponded to Hofmann's thinking." For Hofmann, the creating and arrangement of squares and rectangles represented a purposeful choice by an artist to limit, order, or domesticate a piece of reality. In the placement of geometric forms into the right positions within the pictorial structure, Hofmann established "a system in which the artist is the central actor, the controlling and determining instance," as noted by Helmut Friedel in a 1997 book on Hofmann, coauthored with Dickey.⁵⁰ The geometric forms thus represent the artist's control over the spiritual realm of the picture plane. What differentiates Thomas's "Squares" from Hofmann's is the emphasis on color that was her passion. More than touch or form, she let color be the agent of spatial, relational, and emotional factors. She also let color speak for itself in the manner of Color Field painting. In Untitled, 1963 [fig.5] the colors in the repeating shapes produce the work's light-hearted rhythmic energy by contrast with Hofmann's more complex spatial tensions, in works such as Equinox, 1958 (Berkeley Art Museum, University of California).

In 1964, Thomas began to depict isolated squares that interact chromatically with ground hues. *Ideosquare*, 1964 [fig. 6], has a grid arrangement but the slightly irregular squares, in tones from dusty to rose magenta in a gold ochre field, communicate as if taking turns to come forward and recede. The effect is one of energy and life that belies the work's format. Yellow gold is again the ground in *Transition*, 1964 [plate 2]. The color was a favorite for Thomas. In 2006, she stated that a "yellow painting" appeared from time to time when she "felt a need to switch gears." She declared yellow to be her "favorite and obsessive color."⁵¹ Evoking the gold in Byzantine and Gothic paintings, the color fits the life of the spirit in which her art resides. Humor also exudes from *Transition* [plate 2], a work that suggests a Pop Art sensibility in its bright color and playfulness. While movement is achieved by the squares, cropped by the work's edges, it is also the result of color interactions, in which the yellow and pale orange squares appear more buoyant in the yellow painting than squares with more contrast. It is as if she animated Josef Albers' *Homage to the Square* within a spiritualized space. Her sense of humor can be seen in the cerulean blue square on the upper right, which appears to collide with a pale-yellow square, either turned on its side to form a cube or sitting on top of it. Both volume and spatial recession are implied in the optical illusion. *Squares*, 1965 [plate 1], is a work of elegant subtlety, in which squares either float or recede, depending on hue and saturation, within a surface blend of cobalt and ultramarine blue. Thomas commented that this exact hue was repeated consistently by Raphael in his Madonnas as "a symbolic association of Heaven."⁵² It functions similarly in Thomas's image.

Thomas exhibited these works at the Newport Art Museum in August-September 1964 and at the Rose Fried Gallery, New York, in May–June 1965. Two reviews of the former appeared in the *Newport Daily News*. One commented that the works on view were "indicative of [Thomas's] energetic disposition and commented on their color relationships as well as the interplay of palette and spatial planning.⁵³ The other reported that Thomas was "an original colorist, with much spontaneity and inventiveness," noting her "humor and imagination, in works with "varying textures . . . often achieving great subtlety in color treatment."⁵⁴

Thomas was well-positioned at the Rose Fried Gallery because Fried was another woman visionary, committed to the modern art movement in America. She gave the first United States exhibitions to Mondrian, Hans Arp,



FIG. 5. UNTITLED, 1963, OIL ON LINEN, 211/4 X 191/4 IN.

Paul Klee, Léger, Vassily Kandinsky, Max Ernst, Duchamp, and Sonia Delaunay.⁵⁵ Thomas's show at Fried's gallery was listed in the "Critical Guide to the Galleries" in the New York Herald Tribune, which stated: "This Frenchborn artist shows handsome abstractions in which the manipulation of the square is the predominant theme. These appear on canvas like some clearly articulated piano fuques, which stress color more than technique."56 The show received several reviews. A critic for Art News described the works on view as "impressive recent abstractions in which several squares of roughly equal size are lined up, shifted and maneuvered into position by means of color." The critic astutely noted that color was the agent that gives them "dominance or suppresses them, expands them, raises and drops them, makes them advance or recede (or both)." The critic stated: "All areas of the canvas are functioning and vital, with no neutralized spaces. These may be ideologically related to Hofmann, but they are sufficiently different from his absolute squares of color to achieve uniqueness."57 In the New York Post, Charlotte Willard commented that Thomas showed "growth and strength in her new show," stating "while she owes much to Hans Hofmann, she has her own personal color vocabulary."58

In September–October 1965, Thomas had a second show at Fried, consisting of seven oils and six collages. Amy Goldin remarked in *Arts* that color was the "chief actor" in the works. She stated that four paintings were produced with "a limited palette and a paint surface that modulates to suggest liquefaction or etherealization of the color. Only a few squares contrast with the ground, most are absorbed by it." Goldin noted that other pictures that had "a more even surface and a wider range of color" did not "rely on the density of the paint but forced the color to bear the entire burden of animating the surface."⁵⁹

Acrylic Paint, 1965-1973

Thomas had been an oil painter since the beginning of her career, but in 1964, while she was exploring the possibilities of the square, she decided that she wanted to experiment with a new medium. In a retrospective undated statement, she wrote: "I temporarily abandoned the medium of oil and concentrated on acrylic." She explained: "I paint to the saturation point, and through to my own possibility of an idea."⁶⁰ Among her acrylic works is Squares, 1964 [plate 3], in which she acknowledged the guick-drying medium in squares of different hues that push forward from the picture plane, which seems dense rather than translucent. In other acrylic works, the surface has become more tactile, almost carpet-like, so that while color areas are translucent, the ground is solid with little depth suggestion. In Complexed Squares, 1964 [plate 4], an elongated horizontal that is one of her largest paintings, the squares are no longer discrete shapes but formed instead by the overlapping of solid areas of swathed color, so that a gray-green glaze differentiates cobalt from lavender and Prussian from ultramarine blue. In Untitled, 1966 [plate 6], translucency creates solidity rather than recession. The work is one of "Complexed Squares" because the squares are implied, revealed, and the unintentional result of overlapped color. Pinwheel 1967 [plate 8], is another deceptively simple work imbued with humor, in which the flat, geometric pure colors appear to turn and whir. Thomas's work in acrylic corresponded with collages she created in the mid-1960s in which she cut out squares and created actual flatness in gridded designs that are yet imbued with multi-directional movement. With its upward foreshortening, Collage, 1964 [fig. 7] has an architectural sensibility, like the rusticated wall of a Renaissance church set on polychrome columns.

Quick-drying acrylic became an invitation to Thomas to incorporate canvas texture into her work. It also led her away from modulated color in a group of works she rendered from 1969 to 1976 in which she explored Cubist ideas while continuing her interest in planar spatial dynamics. The images suggest her obses-

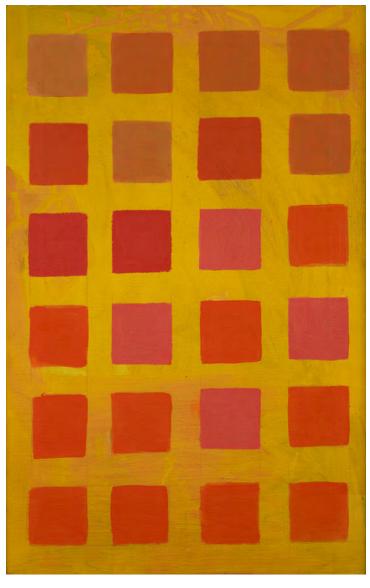


FIG. 6. IDEOSQUARE, 1964, OIL ON CANVAS, 22 X 14 IN.

sion with a particular structure. In horizontal rectangular formats, she reiterated a few elements that evoke architectural forms: arches, columns, walls, and windows. More complex than they appear at first, the volumes and spaces can be read in many different ways. Forms that appear solid and three-dimensional suddenly seem to become windows. Positive becomes negative space and vice versa. Some oblongs rise up before us as solid shapes—roadblocks or columns; others are portals in which the motion of the world is beyond our reach. Some evoke sunlight; others are nocturnes. In the series, Thomas conveys the relativity of appearance and reality, exemplifying Hofmann's view that "our understanding of space depends on the 'living' coherence of things."⁶¹

By the late 1970s, Thomas was using acrylic in gestural works with a landscape aspect but in 1983, she returned to oil, creating images with new figurative suggestions. In the 2000s, she was still producing "fresh, assured, and searching pictures," as noted by Ken Johnson in the *New York Times*. He commented that in a 2002 show at Cornell DeWitt: "There is the poetic buoyancy of Milton Avery, but also an expansive mystery that still belongs to Ms. Thomas alone."⁶² In February–March 2006, Thomas's second show at New York's Lohin Geduld Gallery, again displayed new work. She was ninety-five at the time. She painted until close to her death in August 2006.

As the "Complexed Squares" interval reveals, Thomas embraced change. In 2002, she reminisced that she had felt "wonderfully at home" in the ambiance of the Subjects of the Artist School, and that the period had been "a true liberation," in which she had discarded "old clichés of feeling" and "formal habits." It was a time for her when "fresh, genuinely felt plastic experience revealed a conduit of emotions that she had not felt before."⁶³ Her work of the following years reveals her openness to life through color and formal invention as she strove always to be true to her inner self. In the dynamic milieu of the New York art world, she formed her own means of expression and found herself. In 1998, when Dickey asked Thomas if she was from France, she replied at first: "I'm French yes," but after a brief pause, she clarified: "No, I'm American. . . . I consider myself very much of an American."⁶⁴ Thus, she acknowledged that she had not only made her life in this country, but felt her art belonged to it as well.

> −*Lisa N. Peters, Ph.D.* © Berry Campbell, New York

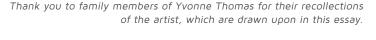




FIG. 7. COLLAGE, 1964, COLLAGE AND GOUACHE ON PAPER, 11 X 13% IN.

PLATE 1. SQUARES, 1965, OIL ON CANVAS, 48¼ X 48 IN.

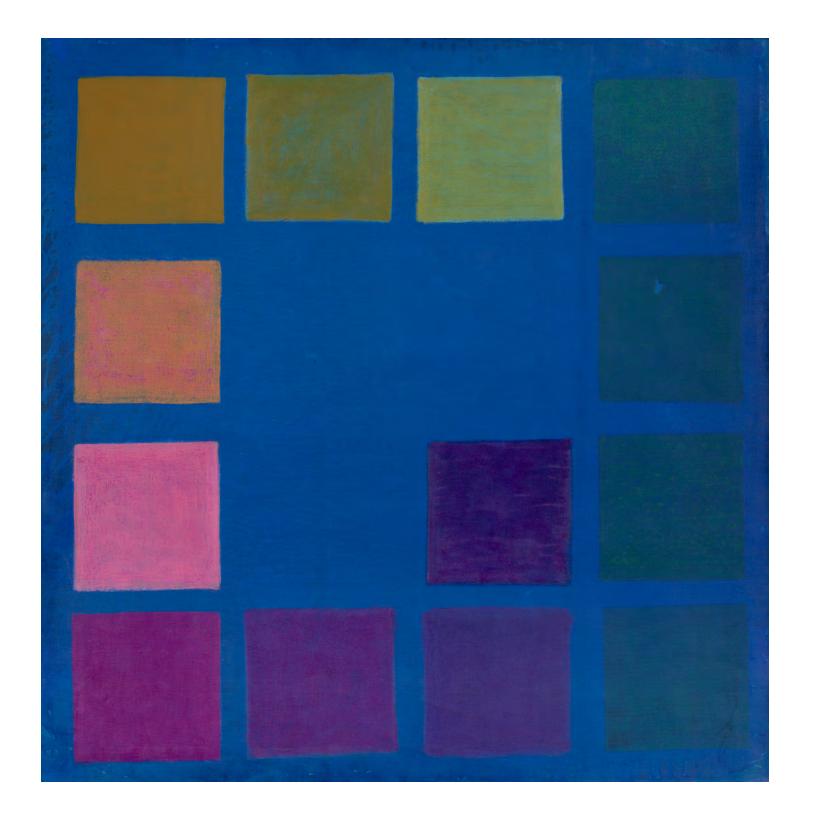


PLATE 2. TRANSITION, 1964, OIL ON CANVAS, 85% X 78¼ IN.

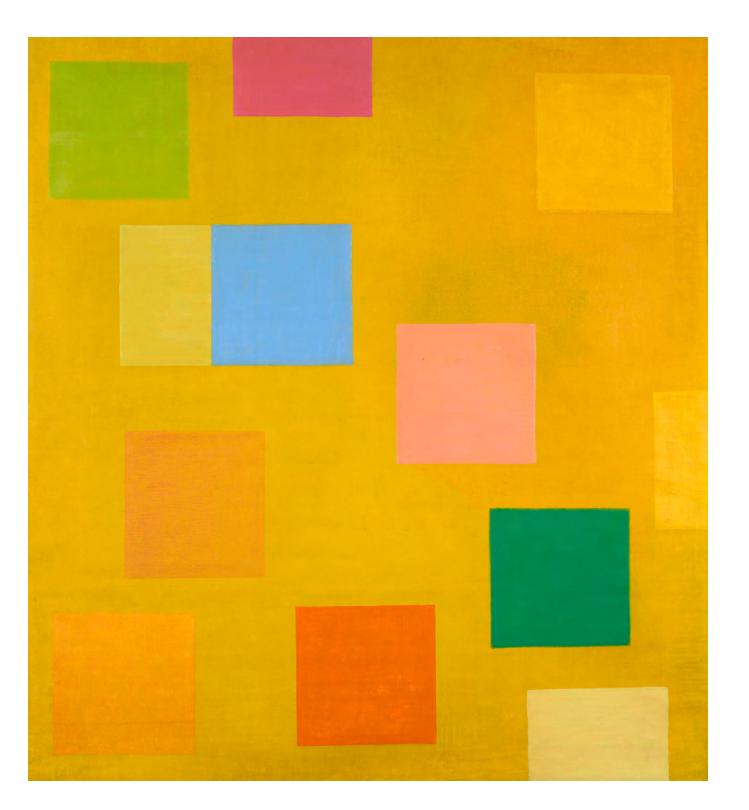


PLATE 3. **SQUARES**, 1964, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 28 X 24 IN.

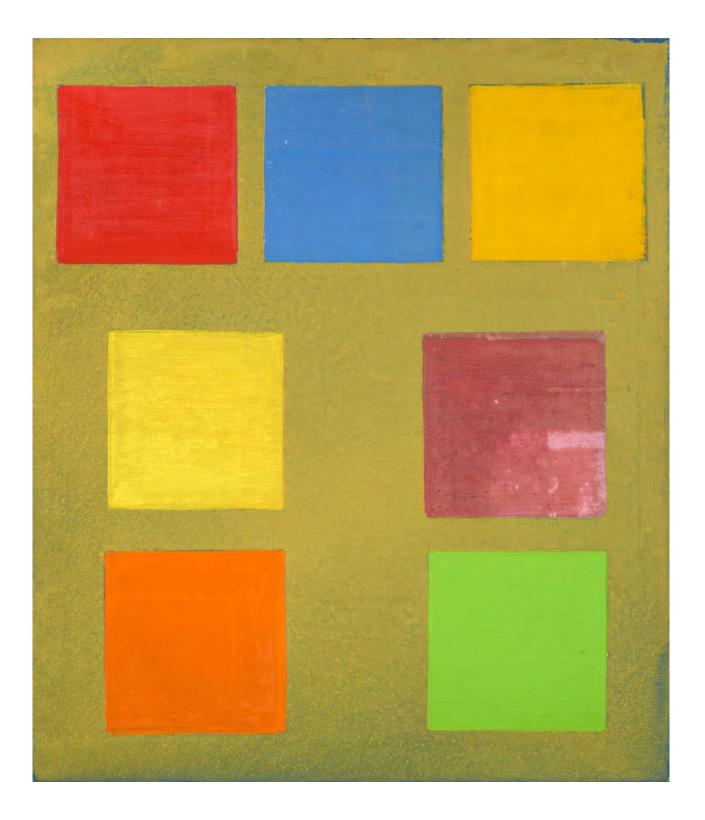




PLATE 4. COMPLEXED SQUARES, 1964 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 45½ X 91½ IN.





PLATE 5. UNTITLED, 1964, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 223 X 301/4 IN.

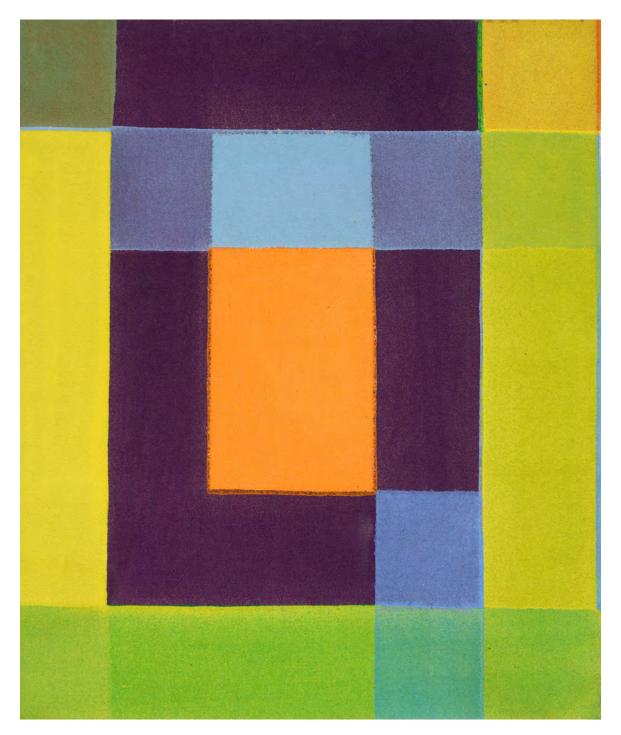


PLATE 6. UNTITLED, 1966, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 24% X 20% IN.

PLATE 7. TONDO, 1966, OIL ON CANVAS, 24 X 24 IN.



PLATE 8. **PINWHEEL**, 1967, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 27 X 29³/₄ IN.





PLATE 9 UNTITLED, 1976 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 29½ X 61% IN.



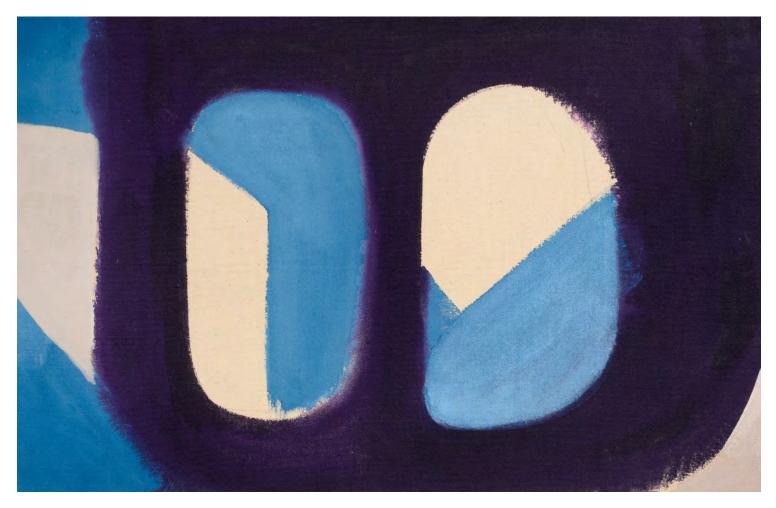


PLATE 10. **UNTITLED**, 1973, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 19 X $30\frac{1}{2}$ IN.



PLATE 11. UNTITLED, 1973, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 17% X 29% IN.

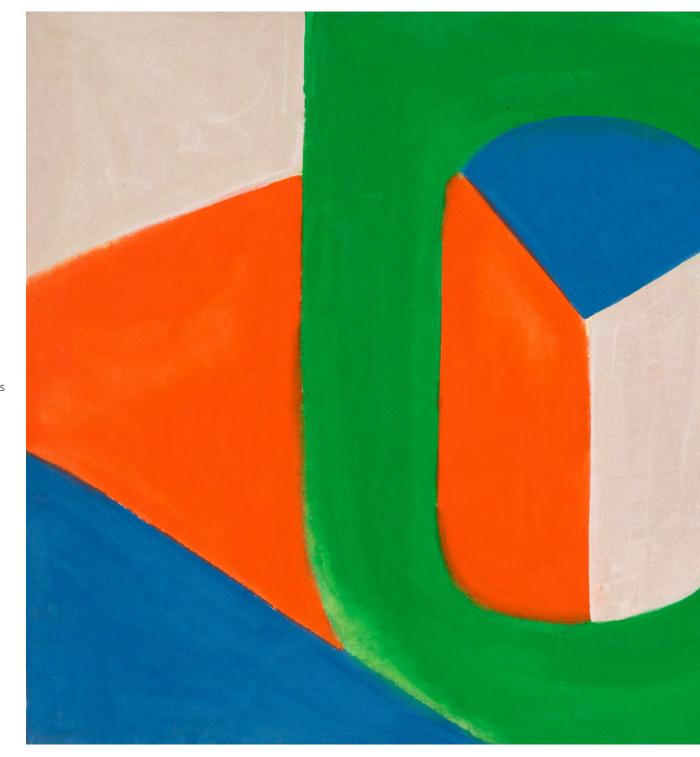


PLATE 12 **PARADE**, 1973 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 43% X 85% IN.





PLATE 13. UNTITLED, 1969, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 20³/₄ X 31¹/₄ IN.

- ¹ Artist's statement, June 30, 2001, reproduced in Yvonne Thomas: New York Paintings from the 1950s, exh. cat. (Chicago: Thomas McCormick Gallery, 2001), p. 1.
- ² April Kingsley, "Yvonne Thomas: 'I have an urge to enclose the world," Yvonne Thomas: Recent Paintings, exh. cat. (New York: Cyrus Gallery, 1989).
- ³ Indicated in United States of America, "Petition for Naturalization," for Yvonne Thomas (formerly Yvonne Armande Navello), after 1939, National Archives, Washington, DC.
- ⁴ Her study at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, is noted in "Philadelphia Bridal for Yvonne Navello," *New York Times*, April 30, 1938, p. 19. Information about her scholarship, courtesy of family members.
- ⁵ Newport Mercury, August 28, 1931, p. 7 (*Miss Yvonne Navello and Suzanne Remy have concluded their Newport visit and are returning to New York to resume art studies.") *List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States," October 7, 1929, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC. lists her father as a cook and her mother as a housewife.
- ⁶ "List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States," August 27, 1936, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.
- ⁷ "Like old masters," in "Yvonne Thomas: Chronological Biography," typescript, p. 3. Yvonne Thomas archives, Berry Campbell Gallery.
- ^a "Interview with Yvonne Thomas, New York, May 26, 1998, conducted by Tina Dickey, typescript, p. 17. Hans Hofmann Papers, [circa 1904]–2011, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (hereafter "Interview").
- Patricia came from wealth and privilege. Her mother, the former Daphne Isobel Carson Kane had colonial ancestry, and was a descendant of the Brevoort family. Her father John Harlin O'Connell was a Princeton-educated lawyer and bibliophile. The couple divorced in 1934 and Patricia attended private schools, made her social debut at the Pierre Hotel in 1941, and summered in Newport. In late 1948, Patricia divorced Matta and married Pierre Matisse (the son of Henri Matisse) on October 26, 1949. See John Russell, *Matisse: Father and Son* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), pp. 156–69.
- ¹⁰ Russell, p. 156.
- ¹¹ "Interview," p. 11.
- ¹² "Interview," pp. 11–12.
- ¹³ "Subjects of the Artist, School Catalog, 1948," Joseph Cornell papers, 1804–1986, bulk 1939–1972, Archives of American Art.
- ¹⁴ Robert Motherwell, "A Personal Expression," text of a lecture delivered March 19, 1949, in the auditorium of the Central High School of Needle Trades, New York, under the auspices of the Seventh Annual Conference of the Committee on Art Education, reproduced in Stephanie Terzio, editor, The Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, 1999), p. 62.

- ¹⁵ "Interview," p. 2.
- ¹⁶ Robert Hobbs, "Yvonne Thomas," unpublished typescript, 1999, p. 2. Courtesy Robert Hobbs.
- ¹⁷ Hobbs, p. 2.
- ¹⁸ Thomas, quoted in Hobbs, p. 4.
- ¹⁹ Hobbs, p. 4.
 - ²⁰ "Interview," p. 11.
 - ²¹ Noted in Kingsley, p. 2.
 - ²² Robert Motherwell, "Reflections on Painting Now," text of a lecture delivered in Provincetown, Massachusetts, on August 11, 1949, at a symposium titled "French Art versus U.S. Art Today," reproduced in Terzio, p. 67.
 - ²³ "Interview," pp. 2-3.
 - 24 "Interview," p. 3.
 - ²⁵ "Interview," p. 1.
 - ²⁶ "Interview," p. 2.
 - ²⁷ Yvonne Thomas, "Hans Hofmann," typescript, undated, Yvonne Thomas archives, Berry Campbell Gallery.

- ²⁹ "Interview," pp. 15–16. On The Club, see Mary Gabriel, Ninth Street Women (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2018), pp. 279–83, 394–96, 588, and other sources listed in Gabriel. Phong Bui, "The Club It Is: A Conversation with Philip Pavia" (The Brooklyn Rail, February–March 2001).
- ³⁰The Club moved to 14th Street in 1954. Gabriel, p. 588.
- ³¹ "Interview," p. 15.
- ³² "Interview," p. 15.
- ³³ "Interview," p. 15.
- ³⁴ Of the women who participated in the Ninth Street Show, Gabriel writes: "In addition to Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning, Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell, and Helen Frankenthaler, the following women were also in the *Ninth Street Show*: Perle Fine, Anne Ryan, Day Schnabel, Sonia Sekula, Jean Steubing, and Yvonne Thomas (p. 728n16).
- 35 Oral history interview with Leo Castelli, July 1969, conducted by Barbara Rose for the Archives of American Art, p. 5.
- ³⁶See Gabriel, pp. 472–73, 520, 556.
- ³⁷ Oral history interview with Elaine de Kooning, conducted by Phyllis Tuchman for the Archives of American Art, August 27, 1981.
- ³⁸Author's conversation with Gwenn Thomas
- ³⁹ Hans Hofmann, Search for the Real and Other Essays, Sara T. Weeks and Bartlett H. Hayes Jr. editors (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T., 1948).
- ⁴⁰Dore Ashton, "Tanager Group," Art Digest 28 (May 15, 1954), p. 26.
 ⁴¹L[awrence] C[ampbell], "Yvonne Thomas," Art News 55
- (October 1956), p. 9.
- ⁴² "Interview," p. 4.

- ⁴³ "Around the Galleries," New York Times, April 10, 1960, p. X13.
- ⁴⁴Donald Judd, "Yvonne Thomas," Arts 34 (April 1960), p. 65. For an analysis of Judd's comments on Thomas's work in the context of his critical perspective, see Vittorio Colaizzi, "Yvonne Thomas: The 'Singleness of the Poetry," Woman's Art Journal 41 (Spring-Summer 2020), pp. 3–10.
- ⁴⁵H. C., "Yvonne Thomas," Art News 59 (March 1960), p. 14.
- ⁴⁶ "Yvonne Thomas," Les Arts, April 17, 1960 (author's translation).
- ⁴⁷ See Lawrence Alloway, "Systemic Painting," introductory essay from the exhibition catalogue Systemic Painting, Guggenheim Museum, New York. Reprinted in *Minimal Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1968), pp. 37–60.
- ⁴⁸The series is discussed in Lisa N. Peters, *Yvonne Thomas:* Windows and Variations (1963–65) (New York: Berry Campbell Gallery, 2018).
- ⁴⁹ John Yau, "Eye Opener: The Art of Yvonne Thomas," in Yvonne Thomas Paintings, exh. cat. (Aspen, Colo.: Aspen Art Museum, 1993), p. 1.
- ⁵⁰Helmut Friedel, "To Sense the Invisible and to be Able to Create It—That is Art," in Helmut Friedel and Tina Dickey, Hans Hofmann (New York: Hudson Hills, 1997), p. 11.
- ⁵¹ Thomas, quoted in Michaël Amy, "Yvonne Thomas at Lohin Geduld," Art in America 94 (September 2006) p. 169.
- 52 Thomas, "Statement," June 30, 2001.
- ⁵³ "Yvonne Thomas," Newport Daily News, undated newspaper clipping, Thomas archives, Berry Campbell Gallery.
- ⁵⁴Clara F. Emerson, "N.Y. Artist Exhibits Here," Newport Daily News, August 19, 1964, ρ. 2.
- ⁵⁵ Joan Fine, Excerpts from "Remembering Rose Fried" https:// rosefriedcollection.com/about-rose-fried-collection/, accessed July 22, 2023.
- ⁵⁶ "The Galleries—A Critical Guide," New York Herald Tribune, May 22, 1965, newspaper clipping, Yvonne Thomas archives, Berry Campbell Gallery.
- 57 K.L.," Yvonne Thomas," Art News (May 1965), p. 14.
- ⁵⁸ Charlotte Willard, "In the Art Galleries," New York Post, June 13, 1965, newspaper clipping, Yvonne Thomas archives, Berry Campbell Gallery.
- ⁵⁹ Amy Goldin, "Yvonne Thomas," Arts Magazine 39 (September-October 1965), p. 64.
- ⁶⁰Yvonne Thomas, "Statement," undated typescript, Yvonne Thomas archives, Berry Campbell Gallery.
- ⁶¹ Hofmann, Search for the Real, and Other Essays, p. 65.
- ⁶² Ken Johnson, "Yvonne Thomas—Journeys: Part II," New York Times, February 1, 2002, p. F38.
- 63 "Statement on Early Work," March 7, 2002.
- ⁶⁴ "Interview," p. 17.

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Christine Berry and Martha Campbell opened Berry Campbell Gallery in 2013. The gallery has a fine-tuned program representing artists of post-war American painting that have been overlooked or neglected, particularly women of Abstract Expressionism. Since its inception, the gallery has developed a strong emphasis in research to bring to light artists overlooked due to age, race, gender, or geography. This unique perspective has been increasingly recognized by curators, collectors, and the press.

Berry Campbell has been included and reviewed in publications such as Architectural Digest, Art & Antiques, Art in America, Artforum, Artnet News, ArtNews, The Brooklyn Rail, Huffington Post, Hyperallergic, East Hampton Star, the Financial Times, Galerie Magazine, Luxe Magazine, The New Criterion, the New York Times, Vogue and the Wall Street Journal.

In September 2022, Berry Campbell moved to 524 West 26th Street, New York. The 9,000-square-foot gallery houses 4,500 square feet of exhibition space, including a skylit main gallery and four smaller galleries, as well as two private viewing areas, a full-sized library, executive offices and substantial on-site storage space. For further information please call at 212.924.2178, visit our website at www.berrycampbell.com, or email at info@berrycampbell.com.

²⁸ "Interview," p. 4.



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