

(On cover) Grid 11 Saranac, 1971, Acrylic on Canvas, 102 x 208 inches

# Thomas Downing: Washington Color Painter

January 5 – June 28, 2013

## 499parkavenue / The Lobby Gallery

499 Park Avenue (at 59th Street), New York, NY 10022

Gallery hours: Monday - Friday, 8am - 6pm

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

499 Park Avenue and Hines, through their exhibition program, actively contribute to the cultural community as an expression of ongoing commitment to excellence in the visual arts and architecture.

Thomas Downing: Washington Color Painter

Curator: Dorothy Solomon, DSA Fine Arts

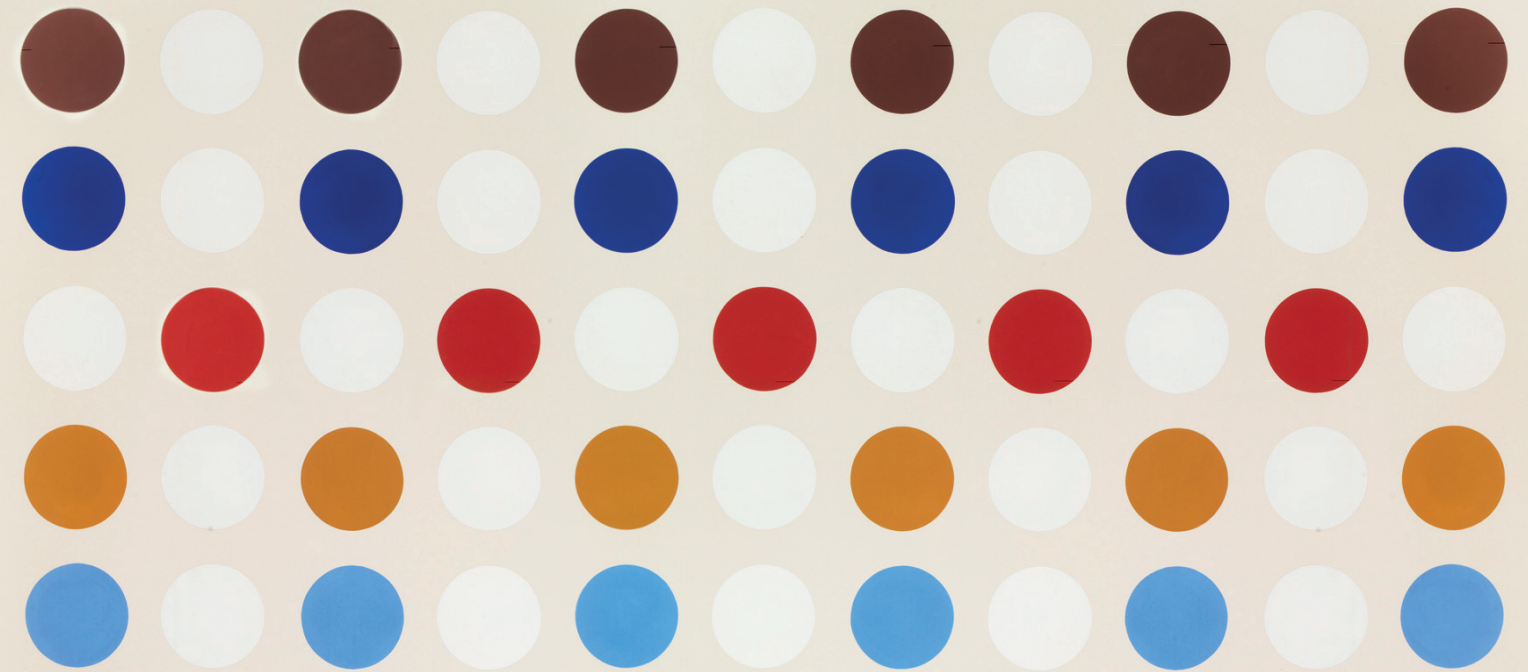
Design: Lenore Goldberg, Hines

Essay: Gary Snyder

For more information about the work in this show, please contact

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Hines



## Thomas Downing: Washington Color Painter

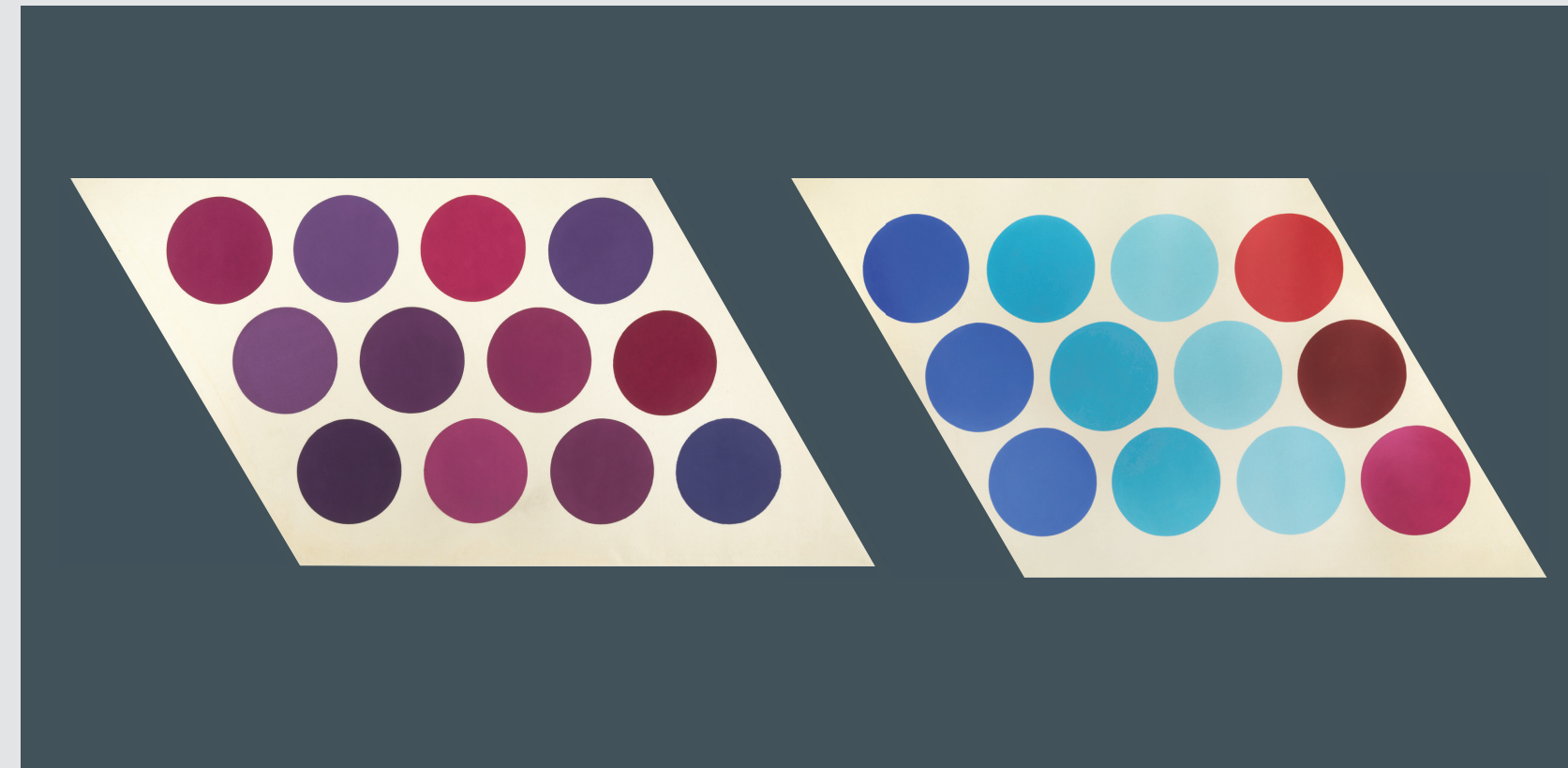
**Thomas Downing** (1928 – 1985) was one of the Washington Color School painters, a loosely affiliated group of artists working in Washington, DC in the late 1950s and 1960s. Influenced by the stain paintings of Morris Louis, Downing and others embraced a harder edged geometry of stripes and circles to develop a new style of abstract painting that was part of the “Color Field” movement.

Best known for his “Dot” paintings, which incorporate deeply saturated high-keyed color circles, or dots, in clean grids, Downing anticipates the spot paintings of Damien Hirst by thirty years.

Downing, along with other Washington Color Painters Gene Davis, Morris Louis, Howard Mehring and Kenneth Noland, were included in the landmark exhibition [Post Painterly Abstraction](#), organized by the influential critic Clement Greenberg for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1964. Greenberg’s selections were “meant to illustrate a new trend in abstract painting,” and he emphasized the differences between the new work and the “thick paint and tactile effects” of Abstract Expressionism. Perhaps most important was the “high keying, as well as lucidity, of their color.”

Of the artists in that show, Thomas Downing’s paintings were arguably the most prescient – Greenberg chose three of Downing’s “Dial” paintings, seven foot square unprimed canvases consisting only of a series of large and medium sized dots of pure color saturated into the canvas and organized in a clean geometry.

In these works, and works similar to those on exhibition here, Downing was on the cutting edge of a new sensibility in the 1960s, a clean cut sensibility that was recognized with his inclusion first in the Post Painterly Abstraction show, then again, with emphasis on opticality, in the Museum of Modern Art’s [Responsive Eye](#) show in 1965, and then again, with emphasis on repetition and system, in the Solomon Guggenheim’s [Systemic Painting](#) exhibition of

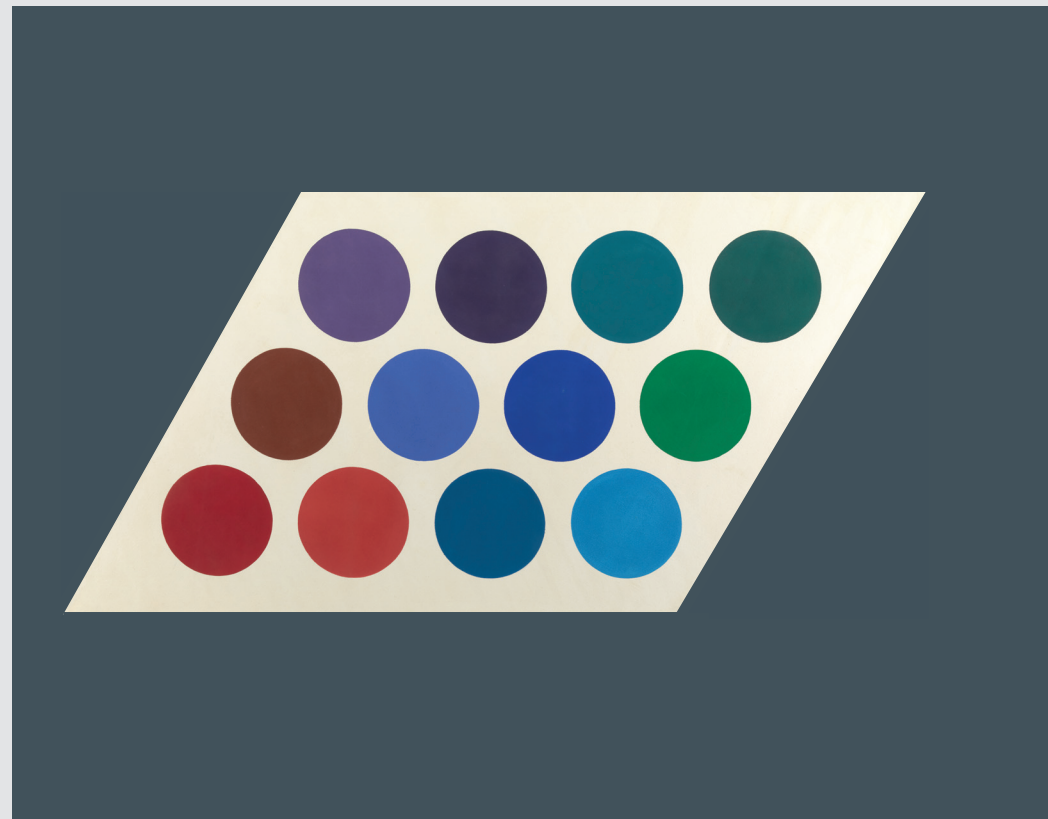


Untitled, c.1965, Acrylic on Canvas, 55.5 x 115 inches

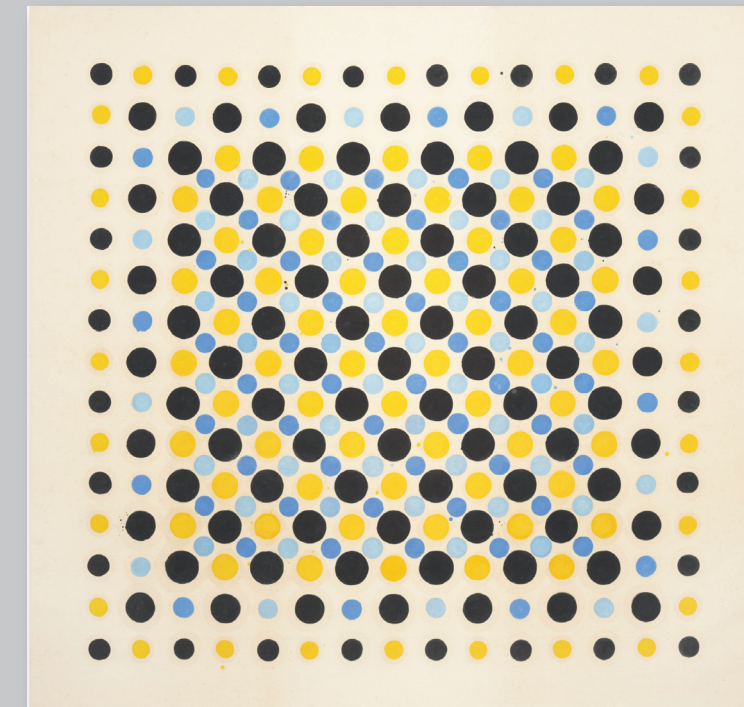
Untitled, c.1965, Acrylic on Canvas, 61.5 x 115 inches

## Thomas Downing

Hines would like to thank  
**The Estate of Thomas Downing**  
 through the auspices of the  
**Gary Snyder Gallery**  
 529 West 20th Street, 10th Floor  
 New York, NY 10011  
 (T) 212.929.1351  
 for the loan of the paintings in this exhibition,  
 on view through June 28, 2013.



**Untitled, 1965**, Acrylic on Canvas, 53 x 109 inches



**Morning Star, c.1961**, Acrylic on canvas, 86.5 x 90.25 inches



## Thomas Downing

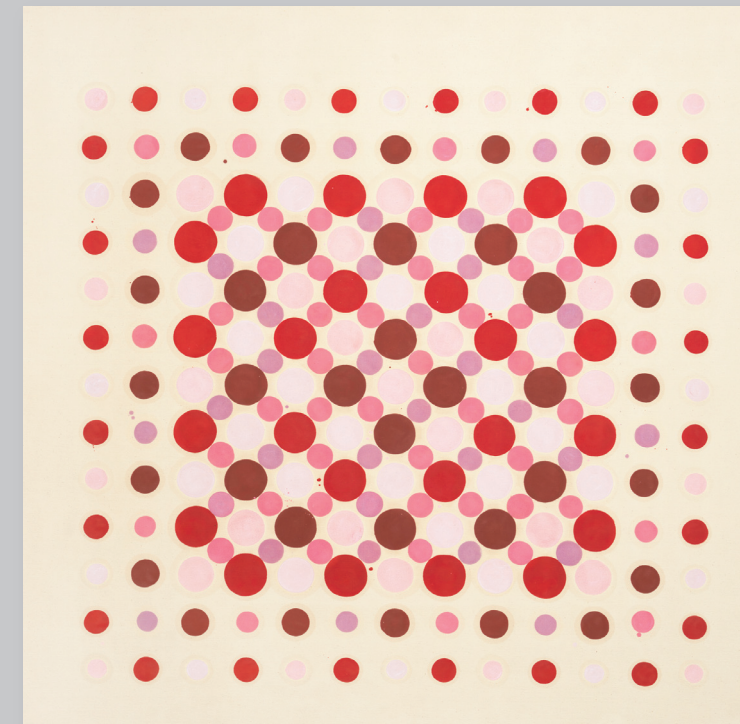
1966. Downing was also in The Washington Color Painters exhibition of 1965, organized by Gerald Nordland, Director of the Washington Gallery of Modern Art, which also included Davis, Louis, Mehring, Noland, and Paul Reed.

Born in Suffolk, Virginia in 1928, Thomas Downing graduated from Randolph Macon College in Virginia. In 1949 he entered Pratt Institute in New York, and was exposed to New York artists such as Hans Hoffman, Jackson Pollock and Adolph Gottlieb. After leaving Pratt, Downing taught in Norfolk, Virginia before receiving a European grant from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in 1951. In Europe, Downing studied at the Academie Julien in Paris, and then lived for a short time in Florence. Returning back to the United States, Downing enrolled, in 1954, at Catholic University, where he met Kenneth Noland, who was to have a significant impact on his work.

The paintings here on view show Downing exploring a range of possibilities in the use of the dot. He wrote, “The grid in effect separated the color and allowed each one to work independently with greater clarity and intensity.” Further, Downing was intrigued by “. . . the way a dot would isolate an instant of color and repeat it over a broad field, gave to color the equivalent of an electric charge . . . the surface would pulse and come to life.”

It has been said that it takes 50 years to more fully understand an artistic decade – this seems to be particularly true of the 1960s, where the wide range of minimalism, color field, hard edge abstraction, pop and pop abstraction are only now being fully fleshed. Thomas Downing has emerged as an important artist of this period, and this small exhibition of large paintings should serve to reinforce his standing.

**Gary Snyder**



**Valentine**, 1962, Acrylic on canvas, 82 x 83.75 inches