

PRESS RELEASE

Kimber Smith

Paintings: 1965 – 1980
March 7 – September 4, 2020



Kimber Smith (1922 - 1981)
ZDAY 1979
Acrylic on canvas
64 x 67 1/2 inches
162.6 x 171.5 centimeters

Cheim & Read presents Kimber Smith, *Paintings: 1965 – 1980*, the gallery's first exhibition with the artist, and his first exhibition in the US since 2011.

Kimber Smith (USA; born 1922 Boston, MA; died 1981 Southampton, NY) had his first exhibition at The New Gallery, New York, in 1951, where his work was paired with Joan Mitchell's; the same gallery gave him his first solo only three years later. Smith's effortless style anticipates the work of influential artists such as Mary Heilmann, Richard Aldrich, and Joe Bradley.

The works in the exhibition are characterized by liberated brushstrokes, loosely rendered geometric shapes, and intense colors. Hal Foster, in a review that appeared in the April 1979 issue of *ARTFORUM*, describes Smith's imagery as "fluent forms of color on unprimed ground, much of the canvas bare," in which the "motifs sustain a delightful, erotic play."

Breezily crisscrossing the divide between painting and drawing, Smith organizes his radically spare canvases through slashes of color that flicker and zigzag across the surface, coalescing into shapes or splintering them apart. His floating arrays of forms, overlaid by graffiti-like markings, look back to the spiritual abstraction of Vasily Kandinsky and ahead to the hard-etched grittiness of Jean-Michel Basquiat. The disarming sparseness of many of his works resonate in their emancipation from traditional formal concerns such as hierarchical compositions. Smith's canvases seem to distill art-making to its essentials, reconstructing the painted image from scratch.

In his widely influential essay, "Provisional Painting," published in May 2009 in *Art in America*, Raphael Rubenstein cited Smith, alongside Joan Miró and Martin Barré, as one of the precursors to a new approach to painting, a discipline Rubenstein suggests is, "in part, a struggle with a medium that can seem too invested in permanence and virtuosity." Rubenstein states that Smith's "stylistic fusion" anticipates Mary Heilmann's "informal formalism, ... splash[ing] Matissean insouciance over the serious-minded legacy of Abstract Expressionism." But for all its freedom and lyricism, Smith's paintings also retain, as Joseph Masheck puts it in the December 1973 issue of *ARTFORUM*, "a stubborn edge."

In 1954, Smith decamped to Paris where he lived and worked in an expatriate community of American painters who included Mitchell, Sam Francis, and Shirley Jaffe. His work was included in the 1958 survey exhibition of American abstraction, *Die Neue Amerikanische Malerei*, at Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland, organized by the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Smith returned to the US and taught in Ohio at the Dayton Art Institute, and the museum presented a solo exhibition of his work in 1965. Smith moved back to New York

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in 1966 and earned significant critical acclaim; he exhibited his work at a number of galleries, including André Emmerich, and received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1971.

After Smith's death in 1981, his work was exhibited posthumously at the Carnegie International, Pittsburgh, PA (1985); the American Center, Paris (1985, 1988); Vitalita Nell'Arte, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, which traveled to Palazzo Grassi, Venice, and Kunsthalle, Recklinghausen, Germany (1986). A retrospective exhibition was held at Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland (2004), which traveled to the Josef Albers Museum, Bottrop, Germany (2004-2005).

His work has been exhibited recently at Modern Art, London (2011), Graham & Sons, New York (2011), Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris (2016), and at the Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid (2018-2019). Kimber Smith's work is represented in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Dayton Art Institute; Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Kunstmuseum Winterthur; Kunsthaus Zurich; Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna; Musée des Beaux-Arts de Reims, Reims; among others.

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