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For a long time we will remember this time of pandemic and the common effort of all cultural institutions to keep interest in art alive.

Galleria Fumagalli has been sharing archival content to continue promoting its artists and nurture the dialogue between art, context and public. The entire program of the gallery's appointments will remain online on the webpage [#iamstayinghome](#), constituting a precious document of this particular historical moment.

We thank you for your attention and invite you to have a look at our last initiative: an overview of the work of American artist **Kenneth Noland**, spanning from the late 1950s to the 1970s.

KENNETH NOLAND



Kenneth Noland in his studio in Port Clyde, Maine in 2006. Photo courtesy Galleria Fumagalli

Kenneth Noland was born in 1924 in Asheville, North Carolina, and passed away in 2010 in Port Clyde, Maine.

In 1946 he enrolled at Black Mountain College, near Asheville, where he attended Joseph Albers' lessons; two years later he left for Paris to study painting and sculpture with Ossip Zadkine. After returning to USA, he settled in Washington DC and started teaching at the Institute of Contemporary Art, and then at the Catholic University. His early works were influenced by Paul Klee, but he soon moved away from Abstract

Expressionism, experimenting with a new style that will be defined as Color Field Painting, which encourage to pay attention to the fundamental elements of painting, from the pigment to the physical and perceptive edge of the pictorial space.

Noland's investigation was marked by primary series: in 1956 he started the **Circles** (also called **Targets**), square canvases on which he painted concentric rings of colour, focusing on the interaction between the different backgrounds that unleashed a sort of energy expanding the work beyond the limits of the canvas. In 1962 he replaced the rings with a zig-zag pattern in the **Chevrons** series, followed by the **Diamonds**. At the end of the '60s approached a new style characterised by horizontal **Stripes** proposing a radical painting prone to Minimalism. In the following decade he produced the **Plaids** and the **Shaped Canvases**, works that emphasised the abstraction through the asymmetry of the canvas and refusing the idea of painting as a "window onto the world".

In 1964 Noland exhibited in the traveling exhibition *Post-Painterly Abstraction*, curated by Clement Greenberg, which affirmed **Color Field Painting** as an important new movement of contemporary art in the 1960s, which also included Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis.

In 1977 the first major retrospective was held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. The exhibition then travelled to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington DC, and to the Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio, before ending at the Denver Art Museum. Among the most recent solo exhibitions in institutions: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2010), The Butler Institute of American Art, Warren OH (2007), Tate, Liverpool (2006), Museum of Fine Art, Houston (2004), Naples Museum of Art, Florida (2002), Southern Vermont Art Center, Manchester VT (2001).

In 1964 he was present at the 32nd Venice Biennale.

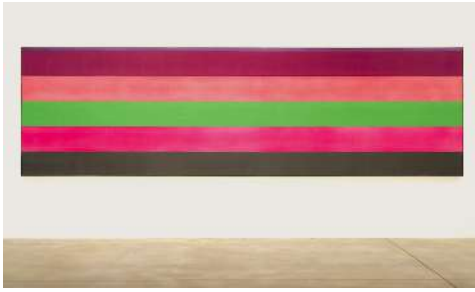


Exhibition view: *Kenneth Noland. 12 Works*, Galleria Fumagalli, Bergamo, 2005. Courtesy Galleria Fumagalli

PURE ABSTRACT PAINTING

Since the beginning, Kenneth Noland drew attention back to the "pure" abstract painting, moving away from representative or narrative art. Rejecting the experiences of Action Painting, where the emphasis of gesture and matter could come about on bases that were still representative, he focused on the constitutive elements of painting such as the relationship between pigment and support, and especially on the physical and perceptive edge of the painted surface.

Noland, together with his friend Morris Louis (both prominent figures of Color Field Painting), was a pioneer in the use of acrylic paint: this medium allowed the painter to work also on the unstretched and unprepared canvas (unlike oil paint that creates evident fractures as it dries), as well as obtaining a more or less diluted colour, and therefore with different degrees of transparency. The artist presented himself as an experimenter who, through daily practice, discovered how diluted pigment can interact with the raw canvas, without priming.



Kenneth Noland, *Via Bound*, 1970, acrylic on canvas, 130x446 cm. Courtesy Galleria Fumagalli

Colour, and its perception, is definitely the element that most attracted Kenneth Noland. Far from the optical games of Op Art, he combined colours and proportions in ever-surprising balances giving consistency and harmony to the backgrounds.

Noland's painting was based on conception in series in which the artist verified all the possible combinations between pigments, supports and perception.

«I practice; I guess I've got obsessed with the idea of practice. Art is a practice» K.N.



Exhibition view: *Kenneth Noland. 12 Works*, Galleria Fumagalli, Bergamo, 2005. Courtesy Galleria Fumagalli

CIRCLES (TARGETS)

During his upbringing Kenneth Noland became a keen student of history of art, getting acquainted with the works of the first painters who chose the path of abstractionism, from Matisse to Cézanne, to the more recent Gorky and Rothko. Colour was certainly the subject of his research, initially accompanied by a certain fascination for the landscape (like Cézanne, for example) and for the inherent energy of things.

Hence, he created the first series of square canvases (*Circles* 1956-62) in which nothing real was represented, but a series of concentric coloured rings which seemed to unleash a latent energy or evoke a rotating movement.

Initially, the outlines of the rings were traced in an irregular way, as an echo of contemporary Informal experiences, to become increasingly defined in the canvases of the early 60s.



Kenneth Noland, *Untitled*, 1958, acrylic on canvas, 96x96 cm. Courtesy Galleria Fumagalli

CHEVRONS

In 1962 Kenneth Noland began to replace the concentric ring pattern with diagonal bands: in the *Chevrons* he aimed at organising the colour in triangular shapes pointed towards the lower part of the picture.

This body of works provided an ideal means to experiment with the relationship between the painted image and its canvas support. In the earliest paintings, Noland filled the entire surface with paint, however he soon began to leave areas surrounding the chevrons untouched, juxtaposing painted and unpainted surfaces to draw attention to the fusion of colour and material.

Furthermore, while in the earliest canvases the tip of the "V" was centred on the axis of symmetry of the canvas, only occasionally reaching past the edge of the picture plane, from 1964 Noland started to de-centre the composition, pulling the tip of the chevron away from the line of symmetry, but maintaining the top edge of the support as the base of the triangle. **In shifting away from the centre, Noland could emphasise the tension and instability between the triangular shape and the limited space of the canvas that encloses it.**



Kenneth Noland, *Trans Shift*, 1964, acrylic on canvas, 254x288,3 cm. Courtesy Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Art © Estate of Kenneth Noland/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

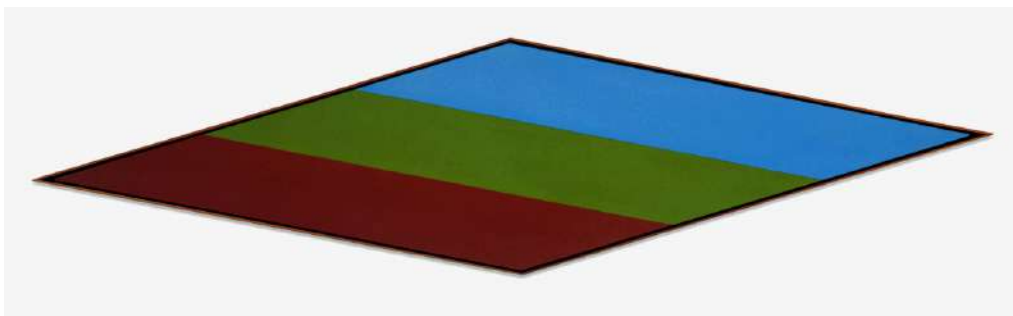
DIAMONDS

A development of the *Chevrons* is the *Diamonds* series (1964-69), the first paintings in which the shape of the support directly interacted with the colour backgrounds.

Initially, the square canvas was simply rotated and hung on the corner so as to subvert the orientation of the "V" shape (these are the works called *Square Diamonds* from 1964-65); afterwards the canvas became shaped, stretched and squeezed into a narrow, elongated panel.

So the form of the canvas determined the expression of the form depicted, reversing the values of traditional pictorial art conceived to be passively contained by a square or rectangular canvas.

The tension created by the diagonal bands recalled that of the asymmetrical *Chevrons*; however, more intense colours were added, and a more vivid sense of colour expansion in the space was evoked by the bands that stretch out endlessly.



Kenneth Noland, *Mute*, 1967, acrylic on canvas, 63x253 cm. Private collection, Rome. Courtesy Galleria Fumagalli

STRIPES

While the shapes of the *Chevrons* and the following *Diamonds* allowed to best investigate the dialogue between support and painted form, it seems that at the end of the 1960s Kenneth Noland came to regard these geometric forms as too assertive, almost sculptural, at the expense of his pure search for colour and its perception.

For this reason, the artist went back to a more neutral form of the canvas, favouring the rectangular format of the *Stripes* series started in 1967. These canvases, almost double in length than width, were marked by horizontal stripes of pure colour, also achieved by using tape to obtain a straight and defined edge.

The stripes, actual infinite horizons, lead the viewer's eye from one side of the canvas to the other, suggesting a sense of dynamism and infinity.

By offering such a large surface, the horizontal bands reinforce the continuity of colour and its optical value. The chromatic composition was never random: bands of different width, soft colours, deep greys, repeated intervals offer a complex variety, as if they were musical chords transformed into images.



Kenneth Noland, *Regal Grey*, 1970, acrylic on canvas, 163x290 cm. Courtesy Galleria Fumagalli

PLAIDS

A new body of works dates back to the early 70s: the *Plaids*. Square canvases presented thin coloured stripes, already tested in the *Stripes*, but here intertwined to form actual grids recalling the checkered pattern of plaid.

The *Plaids* are the result of a mature study of colour which involved the overlapping of different backgrounds. For the first time the colour physically crossed another colour.



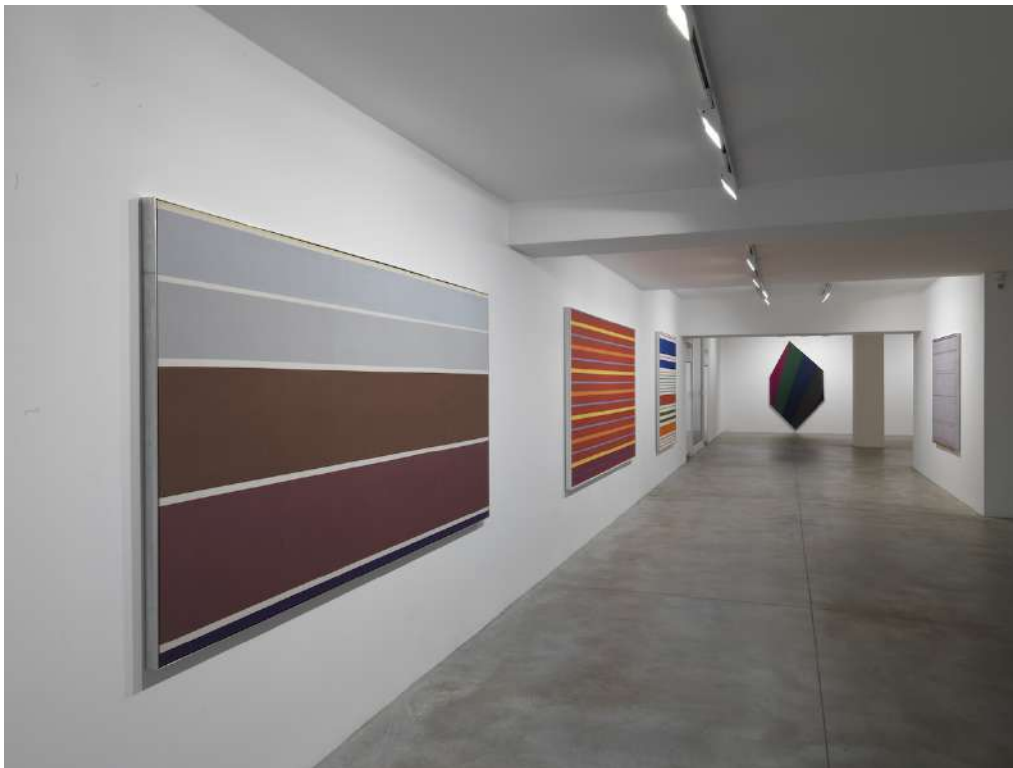
Kenneth Noland, *Call*, 1973, acrylic on canvas, 266x266 cm. Courtesy Galleria Fumagalli

SHAPED CANVASES

The *Shaped Canvases*, made between 1974 and 1981, and marked by asymmetrical edges, brought the relationship between the internal shape and the shape of the support to new levels of interaction and complexity.

In the *Diamonds* there had already been a certain logical relationship between external edges and internal portions, however in the late 70s this link became increasingly close. While the external edges tended to asymmetry and instability, the internal shapes and, above all, the chromatic composition restored balance.

These works refused the right-angle layout of the painting, which was deprived once and for all of its role as a "window" onto reality. On the contrary, the edge is the element most emphasised with colour that grew intense along the perimeter, leaving the centre of the work looking somehow stripped.



Exhibition view: *Kenneth Noland*, Galleria Fumagalli, Bergamo, 2008. Courtesy Galleria Fumagalli

«Through abstract art (which is not abstraction, i.e. the empirical synthesis – geometrically or Impressionistically inclined – of what the eye perceives) investigated with direct practice, never mediated by the act of painting (which is quite a different matter from "colouring"), Noland makes painting not just a mental, but also an existential experience. Thus does abstract painting, whose two dimensions also refute another illusion or "distraction", the one created by installation art, albeit Minimalist, environmental and "inhabitable", become more "true" and real than the reality variously pursued by so much contemporary art, and not only of a figurative extraction»

Franco Fanelli



Exhibition view: *Kenneth Noland*, Galleria Fumagalli, Bergamo, 2008. Courtesy Galleria Fumagalli

FOLLOWING BODY OF WORKS

Although this overview of Kenneth Noland's work only takes into account the body of works made between the end of 1950s and the late 1970s, it is worth mentioning that the activity of the American master continued in the following decades, often resuming layout already tested, but deepening the study of colour and improving the use of acrylic paint and acrylic gel.

In the 80s he made a new series of **Chevrons** which showed the overlapping of the colour backgrounds, as made in the previous *Plaids*. In this case, he used transparent glass-like gels often containing pearlescent and metallic pigments.

The following series of **Doors** and **Flares** once again presented asymmetrical shapes made up of different assembled panels to create a physically constructed image.

In the 90s Kenneth Noland returned to its original forms, that is concentric rings, with the **New Circles**. These small square canvases recalled the sense of intimacy of some works by Paul Klee (one of the first models of Noland), as well as the early paintings made in the late 1950s. However, the technique was totally new as he introduced plastic collages, opaque and translucent paints, modern iridescent pigments... so as to provide unprecedented effects of light and colour evanescence.

This sense of evanescence was even more emphasised in the **Mysteries** series, where the concentric rings became blurred and hazy, fading as they expanded, to conclude such a research on the unrestrainable latent energy of things, which began with the first *Circles*.

To learn more about the artist's work, browse [Galleria Fumagalli's website](#).

Texts partially drawn from *Abstract Art as Frontier Painting* by Franco Fanelli included in the catalog *Kenneth Noland*, published on the occasion of the artist's solo show held at Galleria Fumagalli in Bergamo in 2005 (Silvana Editoriale, 2005).
