

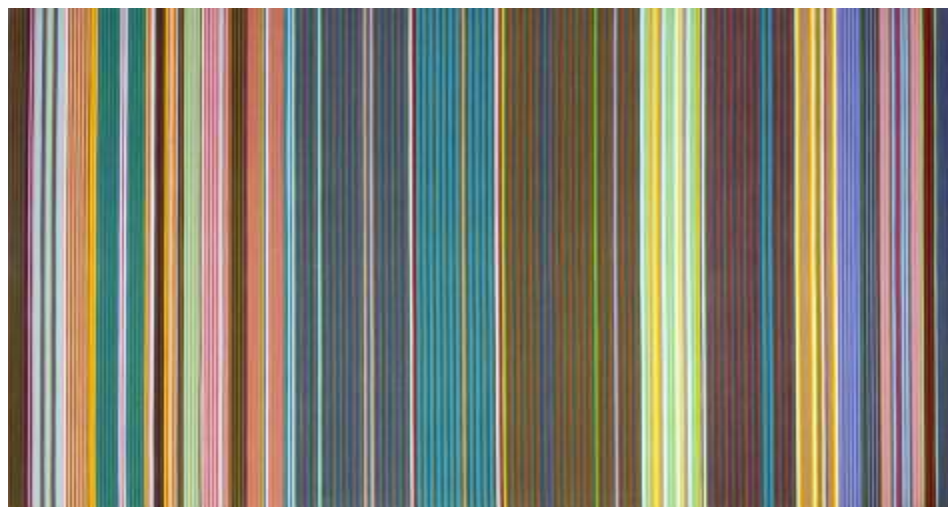
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THE CORCORAN PRESENTS WASHINGTON COLOR AND LIGHT
November 20, 2010 – March 6, 2011



Gene Davis, *Junkie's Curtain*, 1967. Acrylic on canvas. 115 x 225 inches. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.
Gift of the artist. 1970.17 © Estate of Gene Davis.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – This fall, the Corcoran Gallery of Art will present *Washington Color and Light*, an exhibition of major works by artists associated with the Washington Color School and their contemporaries. *Washington Color and Light* will showcase highlights from the Corcoran's extensive collection of Color School painting and sculpture, **including a number of works never-before exhibited**. In addition, the Corcoran will present *Gypsy Switch*, 2010, an installation by California artist Robert Irwin.

Living and working in Washington, D.C., Gene Davis, Thomas Downing, Morris Louis, Howard Mehring, Kenneth Noland, and Paul Reed first showed their work together in a 1965 exhibition at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art called *The Washington Color Painters*. While these six artists never thought of themselves as a group, the Washington Color School title became synonymous with local abstract art and artists, coming to include artists Jacob Kainen, Alma Thomas, and Anne Truitt. The energy around this group promoted Washington as a center for innovative abstraction and gave rise to a younger set that included Sam Gilliam, Rockne Krebs, and Ed McGowin.

Spanning six galleries – including galleries dedicated to monumental paintings by Gene Davis and Thomas Downing – *Washington Color and Light* explores the inspirations and artistic innovations that defined this group of Washington artists.

“One of the great strengths of the Corcoran’s collection exists in this body of work,” said Beatrice Gralton, associate curator of contemporary art at the Corcoran and curator of the show, along with Curator of Contemporary Art Sarah Newman. “The Washington artists sought to conceive their art almost exclusively in terms of color and scale. They explored abstraction, experimented with new techniques and materials, and pursued color and light as the most relevant of expressive elements. In addition to this, a number of these works were shown for the first time in the Corcoran’s galleries, and we are delighted to present them again, some four decades later.”

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

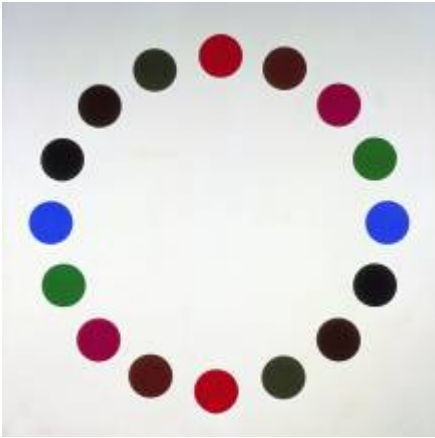
Drawn exclusively from the collection of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, four galleries are dedicated to Washington artists. The exhibition begins with paintings by Morris Louis, Howard Mehring, and Sam Gilliam that investigate the soak and stain technique developed in the early 1950s.

In 1953, Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland visited the New York studio of artist Helen Frankenthaler. It was there that they saw her seminal painting *Mountains*



and the Sea, made with thin washes of oil paints poured onto unprimed canvas. Back in Washington, Louis and Noland experimented with Magna - a fast-drying acrylic paint invented in 1947 – to develop their own style of staining unprimed, unsized canvases. Louis’s *2-69*, on view in the exhibition’s first gallery, is from the artist’s stripe series, his last project. With its asymmetrical composition and harmonious colors soaked into the canvas, the work reflects the major elements of the artist’s work. Sam Gilliam’s 75-foot draped canvas work, *Light Depth*, 1969, also explores stained painting techniques and blurs the line between painting and sculpture.

Along with Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland is considered a founding member of the Washington Color School. It was during his studies at Black Mountain College in North Carolina that he met Josef Albers, Ilya Bolotowsky, Helen Frankenthaler and art critic Clement Greenberg, who fostered his interest in radical painting. Signature shape motifs came to define Noland’s work, including the circle or target, the chevron, and stripe. *Brown Stretched*, 1966, located in the second gallery, is one of the few diamond paintings by the artist. The show’s second gallery is devoted to artists who, like Noland, were exploring expression through



color, shape and scale through “hard-edged” abstraction. Three works by Anne Truitt – *Essex*, 1962, *Arundel XI*, 1974, and *Flower*, 1969 – showcase the artist’s interest in color, while Rockne Krebs’ plexiglass structure *Ice Flower* combines his concerns with transparency and opacity, lightness and solidity, and the intersection of science and natural phenomena.

The third gallery is devoted to ten paintings by Gene Davis, a self-taught artist is best-known for his vibrant, monumental stripe paintings. At almost 19 feet long, *Junkie’s Curtain*, 1967, is shown alongside rarely exhibited paintings including *Red Rectangle*, 1958, and *Fire Chief*, 1978. An adjacent gallery is devoted to the work of Thomas Downing, whose work– including *Ring Three*, 1969, reflect the artist’s longstanding interest in music, notably jazz. Downing was a central link between older and younger artists in Washington. He shared a studio in the 1950s with Mehring, and was a professor at what was then called the Corcoran School of Art.

The fifth gallery, *Color Connections*, features eight paintings that reflect artistic innovations occurring concurrently to the Washington Color School by artists living on the east coast of the United States, as well as California. Artists including Frank Stella, Helen Frankenthaler, Larry Poons, and Sam Francis made bold, gestural paintings informed by concerns of Abstract Expressionism, Color Field painting, and Minimalism.

The exhibition’s final gallery is devoted to an installation by the pioneering artist Robert Irwin, a central figure of the California Light and Space movement of the 1960s. Artists associated with this group, including James Turrell and Maria Nordman, created site-responsive installations inspired by the potential of sensory perception experienced through engagement with a work of art. *Gypsy Switch*, 2010, a new work by the 82 year-old artist, is composed of 33 fluorescent lights arranged to create an environment that reverberates with light and color.

Washington Color and Light reflects the Corcoran's long-established position as a unique center for education and presentation of the visual arts. Leon Berkowitz, Downing, Davis, and Gilliam all taught at the Corcoran School of Art (now the Corcoran College of Art + Design), and many of these artists were represented in groundbreaking exhibitions at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. The museum’s collection reflects the Corcoran's ongoing role as a vital place for dialogue and collaboration between



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artists, students, curators, educators, and visitors.

Support for the installation of Washington Color and Light is made possible in part by the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The Corcoran's hours of operation are as follows: Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; closed Monday and Tuesday. Admission to *Washington Color and Light* costs \$10 for adults, \$8 for students/seniors/military, and children under 12 enter for free. Members receive free admission year-round. To purchase tickets, visit www.ticketmaster.com.

MEMBERSHIP

Corcoran Gallery of Art Membership offers special access to the Corcoran's renowned permanent collection, traveling exhibitions, lectures, films, concerts and an array of social events. Members also receive valuable discounts at the Corcoran Shop and the Corcoran College of Art + Design. Corcoran Members may visit *Washington Color and Light* an unlimited number of times for free.

ABOUT THE CORCORAN

The Corcoran Gallery of Art, a privately funded institution, was founded in 1869 as Washington's first and largest nonfederal museum of art. It is known internationally for its distinguished collection of historical and modern American art as well as contemporary art, photography, European painting, sculpture and the decorative arts. Founded in 1890, the Corcoran College of Art + Design is Washington's only four-year college of art and design offering BFA degrees in Digital Media Design, Fine Art, Fine Art Photography, Graphic Design, Interior Design, and Photojournalism; a five-year Bachelor of Fine Arts/ Master of Arts in Teaching (BFA/MAT); and two-year Master of Arts (MA) programs in Interior Design, Exhibition Design, Art Education, and at the Book, and New Media Photojournalism. The College's Continuing Education program offers part-time credit and non-credit classes for children and adults and draws more than 2,500 participants each year. For more information about the Corcoran Gallery of Art and College of Art + Design, visit www.corcoran.org.

Images:

Page two: Sam Gilliam, *Light Depth*, 1969. Acrylic on canvas, 120 x 900 inches. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Museum Purchase, 1970.9. © Sam Gilliam.

Page three: Thomas Downing, *Ring Three*, 1969. Acrylic on canvas. 109 3/4 x 109 3/8 inches. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Gift of Vincent Melzac, 1969.41.2. © The Estate of Thomas Downing, Courtesy of GARY SNYDER Project Space, New York.

Page three: Robert Irwin, *Gypsy Switch*, 2010. Light, shadow, reflection, color. 72 x 211 1/4 x 4 1/4 inches. © Robert Irwin. Photo credit: Philipp Scholtz Rittermann. Photo courtesy Quint Contemporary Art.