

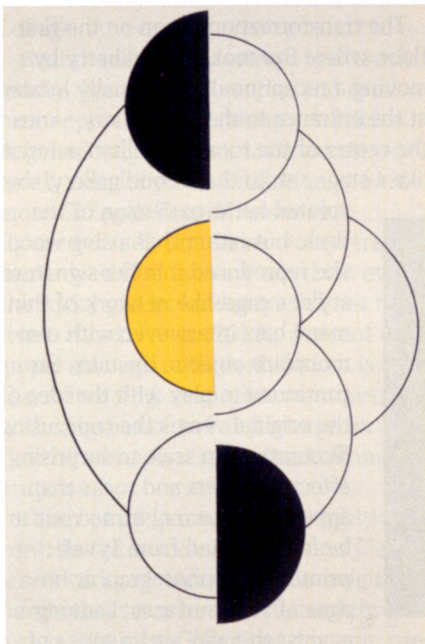
## Leon Polk Smith

Louis Stern Fine Arts  
West Hollywood, California

Leon Polk Smith, a nonobjective painter who was born in 1906 in Indian Territory (now Oklahoma), spent his long and distinguished career exploring the endless sense of space that seeped into his consciousness as a youth. Although he eventually moved to New York, where he was influenced by the works of Piet Mondrian and other modernists, he never lost his connection to big skies and open vistas.

The 14 works included in this spirited exhibition grew from a more specific subject—illustrations of baseballs, tennis balls, and footballs in a sporting-goods catalogue—but the artist's handling of space was the main point of interest. In these paintings and works on paper from the 1960s, assembled under the title "Linear Curves," Smith set up provocative relationships between negative and positive space, voids and solids.

The show got off to a powerful start in the first gallery, where *Correspondence-White, Black* (1966), an oval-shaped oil-on-canvas painting, was flanked by two relatively airy works on paper from 1961. The central painting appears to be set in motion by a white form that pushes into, or is embraced by, a larger expanse of blackness. In the other works, space is activated by an interplay of half circles organized along a vertical spine.



Leon Polk Smith, *Untitled*, 1961, marker and paint on artist paper, 38 1/4" x 25". Louis Stern Fine Arts.

Throughout the show, buoyant balls of strong, contrasting colors joined forces in striking combinations. Whether lined up, paired, or loosely grouped, Smith's invented forms seemed to be airborne.

*Leon Polk Smith: Full Circle*, a 2001 documentary film produced and directed by Jerry Gambone, was continuously screened in the gallery, providing an illuminating context for these works. Interviewed in the film, the artist tracks his journey from figurative art to abstraction to nonobjectivity. Midway in his career, he says, he wanted to create "a feeling of space without any gimmicks." As this show made clear, he more than succeeded.

—Suzanne Muchnic

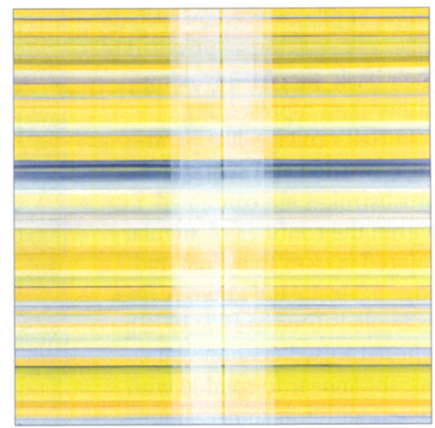
## Abby Leigh

Meridian  
San Francisco

This exhibition of Abby Leigh's large-format oil paintings and small works on paper—the largest show of the New York artist's works on the West Coast—offered an extended meditation on the relationships between gesture and composition, structure and surface. Curated by Jarrett Earnest and featuring pieces Leigh made between 2011 and 2013, this expansive show filled all of the gallery's three floors.

The large oils, with titles such as *Taxi Lane* (2013), *Sixth Avenue* (2012), and *Bridge 3* (2013), take compositional inspiration from cityscapes seen in passing—the blurred outlines of structures glimpsed from a subway car or speeding cab—and evoke the underlying rumbles and rhythms of New York City life. These cool blue or green color-field grids have variously sized stripes with edges that appear to pulse between hard and hazy. In *Bridge 3*, Leigh delicately bled a central column of horizontal stripes into soft fields of translucent blue that flanked it on either side. The edges of the column are crisply delineated at some points and left undefined at others, recalling passage over a gently rippling body of water.

Interspersed with the paintings were examples from Leigh's "Target Series," an astonishing suite of works on paper made by masking off and saturating areas with wood smoke. Immaculately applied and as luminous as encaustic, these tonal fields of soot manage to be both formless and restrained, concretely suggestive



Abby Leigh, *Sixth Avenue*, 2012, oil, pigment, and wax on Dibond, 72" x 72". Meridian.

while remaining ambiguous and nonrepresentational. Where the paintings utilize linear grids to suggest architecture, these works repeat concentric smoke rings in hypnotic compositions that recall both solar coronas and human irises—and the smoke leaves behind a surface that is surprisingly smooth. Each of Leigh's otherwise rigid compositions is softened by the unpredictable impressions of materials, and, shaped by precise acts of subtle balance, yields increasing complexity over time.

—Matt Fisher

## Lee Hall

Jerald Melberg  
Charlotte, North Carolina

This survey of works by Lee Hall, her first retrospective since 1981, afforded viewers an intimate look at the North Carolina native's explorations of color and composition, largely through the lens of landscape paintings and collages. Installed throughout all three rooms of the gallery, the show featured scenes of



Lee Hall, *Rhode Island Sea Dawn*, 1978, acrylic on canvas, 59 1/4" x 59 1/4". Jerald Melberg.