

Theodoros Stamos

Hollis Taggart

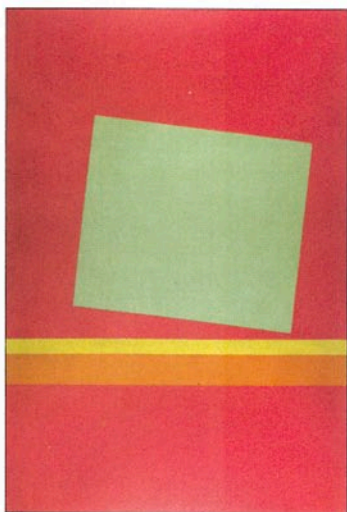
This intimate retrospective did for Theodoros Stamos (1922–97) what a full-scale museum exhibition very likely couldn't: it humanized the artist while celebrating his achievement. Out of a thoughtfully chosen selection of works, fleshed out with a tin of the artist's paintbrushes, objects from the sea, clippings, and photographs, a concentrated picture emerged.

Stamos's work, though rooted in Abstract Expressionism, is never derivative. He was present at the beginning of the movement and tried out various approaches before passing them all on to younger artists. His signature style—where fields of color are cleft by linear cuts or gashes in another color, as if ectoplasm were seeping through—appear in both gestural and hard-edged canvases.

The earliest works here, from the '40s, explored the biomorphic—that amorphous area between nature imagery and abstraction. In these, Stamos often used marine sources, as in *Undersea Fantasy* (1945), with its coral and seahorse. By the '50s, he was painting broad expanses of pure color in brushy strokes, in the manner of Clyfford Still and Philip Guston. Then, in the '60s, he began his "Sun-Box" paintings, of squares within rectangles, including the intriguing *Homage to Milton Avery: Sun-Box III* (1969), referring to Avery's bold hues and playfulness.

Much of the work here dated from the '70s, when Stamos began his "Infinity Fields," in which he came into his own, communicating his sort of panspirituality and sense of atmosphere. Light, earth, sky, and water are all suggested, with specific places lending particular shadings. Stamos had been spending summers on the Greek island of Lefkada, where his family came from, and some glorious paintings and works on paper from his "Infinity Field—Lefkada" series were on view.

A later interest in the Shroud of Turin led to the '80s "Infinity Field—Torino," to which his method of overlapping "shrouds," or paint stains, seemed especially suited. Stamos worked into the '90s, exploring nature and abstraction. But what turned out to be one of the greatest charms in this show was a 1935 painting of a child, seen from the back, dressed in green. —*Cynthia Nadelman*



Theodoros Stamos, *Homage to Milton Avery: Sun-Box III*, 1969, acrylic on canvas, 70" x 48".
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