

HOLLIS TAGGART

William Scharf: Elemental Color, Works from the 50s and 60s

Online Viewing Room | March 16-30, 2020

This exhibition brings together work by New York School painter William Scharf, focusing on a formative period for the artist between 1953 and 1969, during which he developed a friendship with Mark Rothko. Scharf first met Rothko in 1953 and in the 1960s assisted Rothko with his renowned commission for the De Menil Chapel in Houston. They remained close until Rothko's death in 1970. Both artists shared an interest in the expressive, emotive and symbolic properties of color as well as a fascination with mythology, philosophy, and the concept of the primordial.

Coming of age in the heyday of New York's Surrealist and Abstract-Expressionist movements, Scharf's style developed into something immediately recognizable, a unique combination of visual transcendence and quiet moments of beauty. Potent symbols - the egg, the eye, the cross - recur throughout his oeuvre, teaching viewers to see his paintings as part of a larger fabric of universal mythos, even as a conduit to an understanding of those omnipresent ideas.

Along with symbols, color was Scharf's most powerful tool to convey ideas using the language of abstraction. In *Top Sphinx*, crimson, fiery orange, black, cobalt blue, and turquoise color fields evoke sentiments of tension and cohesion and appear laden with allusive, enigmatic meanings. In *Untitled*, 1962, pink, egglike forms at the center of the composition glow against a field of black, earthy brown, and dark blue, evoking notions of fertility, creation, and the eternal lifecycle.

Scharf's style crystalized during this period, as evidenced in a series of small canvases from the mid-1960s first shown at Betty Parsons Gallery in New York. Works such as *Lid's Night*, 1964 distill free-flowing brushwork into discrete vignettes of glowing form, each emerging from the shadowed plane like a luminescent creature from the quiet depths. These forms coalesce into compositions that function like contained ecosystems, small aquarium glimpses into a larger, grander and more wonderful world.

For more information on this online presentation please contact us at 212.628.4000 or info@hollistaggart.com.