



Nassos Daphnis (1914–2010), Pixel Fields, installation view of a solo exhibition of unseen works by the Greek-American artist that featured 21 paintings from 1987–1992

Pixel Fields

The Fall 2015 Exhibition of Paintings by Greek-American Artist Nassos Daphnis at Richard Taittinger Gallery in New York City

by Christopher Hart Chambers

Wikipedia lists as geometric abstractionists: *Nadir Afonso, Josef Albers, Richard Anuszkiewicz, Mino Argento, Hans Arp, Rudolf Bauer, Willi Baumeister, Karl Benjamin, Max Bill, Ilya Bolotowsky, Patrick Henry Bruce, Kenneth Wayne Bushnell, Ilya Chashnik, Joseph Csaky, Nassos Daphnis, Ronald Davis, Robert Delaunay, Sonia Delaunay, Tony DeLap, Jean Dewasne, Burgoyne Diller, Theo van Doesburg, Thomas Downing, Lorser Feitelson,*

Günter Fruhtrunk, Albert Gleizes, Frederick Hammersley, Mary Henry, Bryce Hudson, Al Held, Auguste Herbin, Hans Hofmann, Budd Hopkins, Wassily Kandinsky, Ellsworth Kelly, Hilma af Klint, Ivan Kliun, František Kupka, Pat Lipsky, El Lissitzky, Michael Loew, Peter Lowe, Kazimir Malevich, Agnes Martin, John McLaughlin, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Piet Mondrian, Barnett Newman, Kenneth Noland, Alejandro Otero, Rinaldo Paluzzi, I. Rice

Pereira, Francis Picabia, Ad Reinhardt, Jack Reilly, Bridget Riley, Alexander Rodchenko, Morgan Russell, Sean Scully, Victor Servranckx, Leon Polk Smith, Henryk Stazewski, Jeffrey Steele, Frank Stella, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Leo Valledor, Georges Vantongerloo, Victor Vasarely, Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart, Charmion von Wiegand, Zanis Waldheims, Gordon Walters, Neil Williams, Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Larry Zox among others.

I can't say I know every one of these names, but, quite a few are familiar. And I can think of several others not included, perhaps because they fall into the category of "Neo Geo" such as Peter Halley and John Hiigli, who revisited and expanded on the established concepts thirty years later. Nassos Daphnis, the subject of

this writing, is hardly a household name, yet his influence is irrefutable among later generations of artists who may not even know his name, as well as with his peers during his tenure in Leo Castelli's "stable" for some forty years of biennial solo exhibitions with the legendary, visionary art dealer. Nassos passed away in 2010 at the age of 96, although he didn't look that old to me. I knew Nassos. He was a dignified though never haughty presence. I once told him he was my idol.

Al Held may hold the top spot in fame for massive, hard edge, architectonic – as in fantasy landscape – abstraction. Whereas Bridget Riley and Victor Vasarely share the top slot for fame in dizzying op art painting.

Some think Vasarely tacky; I dunno. But, Daphnis is more subtly thoughtful. He was not exactly a minimalist painter either, like his contemporary Frank Stella during the 1960s and 70s, also represented by Castelli (weren't they all at one time or another?), Daphnis encapsulates the best elements of all the above, yet does it with more heart (an admittedly odd comment regarding hard edge painting, wherein the artists "hand," or brushstroke is not evidentiary – also one of the hallmarks of Pop Art, by the way). Piet Mondrian Boogie Woogied on Broadway in the early 1940s, setting the precedent for everyone who ventured down this painted road, and we can trace the beginnings waaaay back if one wishes to be entirely exhaustive.

That said, Nassos ventured into digital art before laptops and home computers were in virtually (pun intended) every household in any prosperous country in the world. The first exhibition of these paintings, titled *Pixel Fields*, was held posthumously in October 2015 at the new Richard Taittinger Gallery, a beautifully designed and built space in the Lower East Side of Manhattan that surely raises the bar in the neighborhood from funky to elegant, even opulent. It is a fitting environment for the display of this meticulous work. A testament to Daphnis's masterful execution is the fact that these paintings are in absolutely pristine condition. They look like they were just finished yesterday. There isn't a crack or imperfection to



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be found anywhere among the 21 lightly varnished paintings on canvas in the exhibition. Some are oil paint, some enamel; for a theme that argues against the painter's individual touch it is interesting to note that no assistant ever touched brush to his canvases. Also fascinating is that he worked on canvas at all. Certainly other, mirror smooth substrates are more conducive to this sharp, precise manner of painting. Perhaps a nod to art history? His son Demitri can't answer that question and I never asked the man when I had a chance.

The exhibitions at Leo Castelli were always monumentally scaled canvases; sometimes diptychs or triptychs, rarely a canvas less than at least five feet square, usually larger. In this exhibition at Taittinger, the first time the digital works have been exhibited as a body, there are six and seven foot paintings, but there are also quite a few more modestly scaled pieces, the smallest, poster sized and framed in elegantly simple white wood frames. Daphnis worked with a limited palette of primary colors: light and dark blue, school bus yellow, stop sign red, and white and black. In the front part of the gallery a few large square pieces featured concentric linear white circles over straight lines and solid rectangles. The rest of the show concentrated on rectilinear schematics, like extremely overblown digital photographs, so outsized that any semblance of an image is lost and we see only the squares and rectangles of pure color. In this configuration they play optical tricks on one's eyes. The flat planes warble back and forth in intimated space; twinkle and undulate, skewing surface and the illusion or allusion of depth. They are attractive and stately paintings. The center piece of the exhibition, the one on the back wall of the gallery that can be seen all the way from the street through the storefront window is titled, *The Explosion*. Demitri, his son, recited a poem he wrote inspired by this painting at the closing party. He gesticulated and hollered about the red lines that either emanated from or receded into a



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central perspective point in the infinite distance: a pinpoint in cyberspace. This painting was his first utilizing his son's primitive Atari ST computer during the mid 1980s. And the explosive moment

depicted on that canvas painted when the artist was already in his seventies was only the beginning of yet another visionary blast into his, or actually all of our collective future visions.