



Procession One (1997, acrylic on canvas, 32 x 54")

The Art of the Circle

by Rebecca M. Alvin

Thinking of Budd Hopkins' work, one can't help but see circles. It is perhaps the most dominant element in his work over the past 50 years or so. But as visitors to the pair of exhibitions in town featuring Hopkins' work will see, there is much more to his style than an enduring fascination with circles. If there is one thing that is even more dominant than the circle throughout his body of work, it is the fluid interaction of abstract expressionism and hard-edged geometric shapes.

Grace Hopkins, Budd's daughter, is curator of *Full Circle*, the major exhibition now on view at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum (PAAM). That show is distinct from the concurrent show at Berta Walker Gallery that goes by the same name but was curated by Walker.

"The retrospective [at PAAM] is different. It's works that were important to him and to me, and so they are not for sale," explains Grace. "At Berta's... it's a different kind of a show. She likes to have different time periods next to different time periods, and mine is organized by time going around the room."

Born in Wheeling, West Virginia, in 1931, Budd Hopkins did not come from an artistic family. Rather, according to his daughter, he tricked his parents into sending him to Oberlin College by telling them it was a business school. Then, after attending a lecture by none other than Robert Motherwell, Hopkins made the decision to move to New York and become an artist. When he got there, it was as abstract expressionism was

in full swing and he met and befriended some of the key artists of this period, including Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, and Mark Rothko.

The exhibition at PAAM is organized chronologically, and we first see the circle emerge in *Source* (1957). It's the image that Grace Hopkins sees as evidence of what those circles really are: the sun. But for many who have encountered the work, the circles are reminiscent of something else. According to his autobiography *Art, Life and UFOs*, Budd Hopkins believed he saw a UFO in Truro in 1964. The revelations about his belief in UFOs have led some to believe the circles are crop circles, but in a 2011 interview in *Provincetown Magazine*, he dispels this idea, saying "The work is not separate from life experiences. But I don't think the UFO subject in a sense is a driving force in my art. It really isn't. There is more Franz Kline than UFOs in my work."

Hopkins was always a bit of an outsider and it seems that if his work is influenced by any personal experiences, it would be those he had in childhood. According to his niece, Betsy Mullett, "the biggest influence from his childhood is the period of time he was stricken with polio. He had a very protective mother who did everything she could to foster his nearly immobile and often lonely convalescence. Drawing, painting, and modelling clay were daily activities into which he poured his imagination. His creative instincts were permitted free reign."

The work in the show may come as a surprise even to those who are familiar with his work. Mullett, who traveled here to see the show open on July 21 at PAAM, says, "I was stunned when I

Dancing Square (1990, acrylic on canvas, 22 x 18")



walked into the gallery. The size of the room and the quality of light were especially enhancing for his larger pieces – allowing full appreciation. However, the most intriguing aspect of the show for me is that it was hung chronologically to highlight his development through the years. I have a few small works of his at home –from different time periods – and *Full Circle* puts them into the larger perspective of his career as an artist.”

Walking into the exhibit, you can’t help but fixate on the immense triptych on the far wall, *Arezzo’s Palace*, measuring 97” x 166” and made in 1970. Continuing around the room there are constructed canvases as he also created work in shapes that are not on the usual rectangular canvases, adding another layer of geometry to the otherwise softer abstractions.

The show’s title came about from its original curator, a friend of Budd’s who unfortunately passed away before beginning work on the show. When Grace stepped in, she kept the title, which went along perfectly with her own concept for the show.

“I had these works, and one was from 1960 and one was from 2010, and they were the same size and both were collages with paint, and I realized how similar they were. You know, I think artists are always trying to answer the same questions throughout their lives,” Grace says reflecting on her curating philosophy. “So I wanted to show that, where you go all the way around the room and the last two pieces are those two, so that you can see the connection between the two but you can also make the connection from painting to painting to see how he was thinking and how he changed from one style to the next very slowly, but watch the jumps happen as you go around the room.”

Budd Hopkins: *Full Circle* is on exhibit at PAAM, 460 Commercial St., Provincetown, through September 3. The companion show is at Berta Walker Gallery, Bradford St. through August 19. For information on the PAAM show call 508.487.1750 or visit paam.org. For information on the Berta Walker show call 508.487.6411 or visit bertawalkergallery.com.

Masteema (1970, oil on canvas, 52 x 36”)

