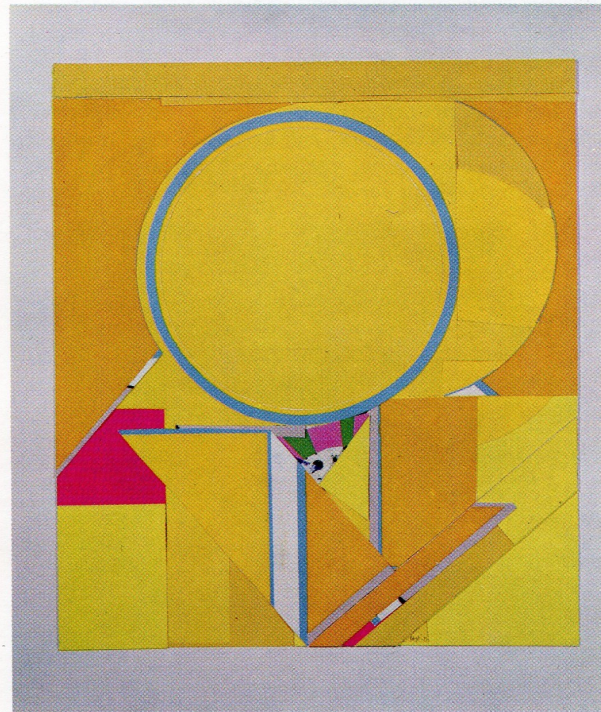


**Kresge Art Center
Bulletin**

**Michigan State University
April 1974, Vol.VII, No.7**



Budd Hopkins
(American, b. 1931)
73-C-2
(Collage, 1973)

Special Article:
Budd Hopkins

Budd Hopkins: The Works on Paper March 31 - April 21

The work of Budd Hopkins is governed by a system of contrasting, counterweighted elements. Actually to call Hopkins' visual method a "system" is misleading; while there is a reiteration of certain forms from picture to picture in any given period of his career, and while these forms are carefully ordered within each picture, the spontaneity of Hopkins' eye — the vibrancy of his color, the energy of his formal relationships — is paramount, and in great evidence, in all his works.

Better, then, to call Hopkins' *modus operandi* a philosophy of form rather than a system. Indeed, the spontaneity as well as the exquisite order of his art is generated by this philosophy. Hopkins sees this philosophy of pictorial/conceptual dynamics as consistent with the dominant tendency, perhaps the quintessential theme, of art in the twentieth century: the collage aesthetic. That is, the truly modern work in art — in all the arts — has been formulated from the simultaneous or sequential occurrence of disjunct, even seemingly contradictory elements; the artwork gains its vital tension from the coincidence of these opposed elements, and at the same time demonstrates the possibility of thinking and seeing pluralistically without being inconsistent.

Hopkins' philosophy of contrast and conjunction can be seen at work in his large paintings. These oils on canvas, however, are finished — highly finished — products of arduous experiments in juxtaposition, and it is in the "sketches" for the large works, the oils and collages on paper, that Hopkins' attitudes and working methods are most apparent. Texture is most extreme; color is rawest; the articulation of forms is most vigorous, while hardly less clean and definite than in the final canvases.

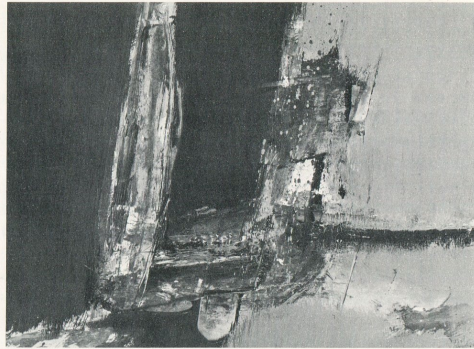
Because they state Hopkins' ideas (with the exception of heroic size) most emphatically, the smaller works represent the evolution of Hopkins' style with particular accuracy. They can be seen as miniaturizations of the paintings on canvas — the greater proportion are studies for larger works, and all are stylistically congruent with the canvases in any

given chronological period — and as informal, diaristic notations on, rather than the refined result of, Hopkins' thinking.

This exhibition traces Hopkins' work on paper back as far as 1958. In the preceding years, since his arrival in New York in 1953, Hopkins had been working in a lushly-painted style whose attenuated, amorphic forms begin to disintegrate in fluid sprays but are usually anchored by static, central shapes. The works on paper from this early period are mostly watercolors. In 1958 Hopkins began doing studies for his paintings in oil on paper. Fluidity was abandoned for the broad, jagged slashes introduced by deKooning and Kline and adopted by many second generation Abstract Expressionists, of which Hopkins was certainly one. Hopkins, however, had seized upon certain aspects of his mentor's art, disregarding others: the vigorous, quasi-geometric organization implicit, sometimes even explicit, in deKooning's and especially Kline's painting inspired Hopkins, while the tendency to all-over composition — in the cases of deKooning and Kline, a diffusion of structure — he rejected. Rather, Hopkins established a kinetic energy, with static devices to counterbalance it, by employing pow-

Untitled, oil on paper, 1960





Study for Bordeaux, oil on paper, 1961. Lent by Constance Kane.

erful strokes of relatively vivid color in almost architectural formats — horizontal slashes which make abrupt 90-degree turns, vertical swaths crossing horizontal ones, looser areas of painterly forms confined to definite regions, all working together contrapuntally, and in contrast to larger, monochromatic areas. These areas occasionally work as fields against which the smaller strokes engage in their drama, but more often the areas do not underlie the strokes so much as they stand beside them, locking them into their arrangements and contrasting these arrangements with their own openness.

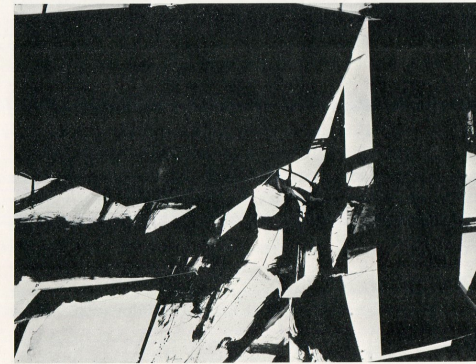
It was logical for Hopkins to turn to collage, considering the basic pattern of loosely geometrical forms set in side-by-side counterbalancing that had emerged in his work in the late 1950s. He did not turn to collage until 1962, however, and among his first works in the medium were a good number of collage-drawings, dating from 1963-64, which were done exclusively in black and white. These can be seen as transitional works, experiments in form that helped lay the groundwork for the distinctly collage-derived style Hopkins was later to practice. In the black and white works, forms are articulated in white by black lines, or are obscured by seas of black wash. The use of linear formations

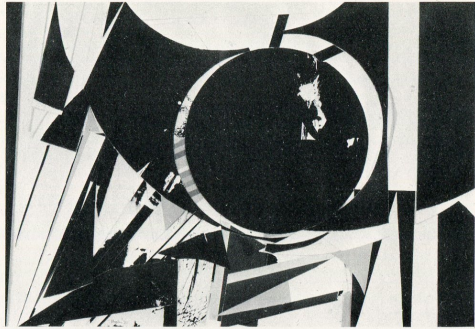
expressed in black could be considered a final explicit reference to attitudes Hopkins had assimilated from Kline, but again Hopkins orchestrated his bold calligraphy not into grand sweeping gestures but into shorter, suddenly interrupted strokes. This occurs especially in those 1963-64 works which utilize collage most extensively; Hopkins' approach here was to draw on a page of paper, then tear or cut apart that paper and reassemble some or all of the sections on another sheet, sometimes drawing on the second paper so that the collaged segments are worked more subtly into the composition — an Arp-like idea, but not subject to chance arrangement.

The simplification of opposing shapes and planes begins with these collages and continues with Hopkins' current work. In fact, in certain black and white works Hopkins restates earlier formats — such as that of the "Brandenburg" series, with its large squarish monochromatic area resting above a region of agitated activity — to endow them with this new-found clarity.

Further breakthroughs in the testing ground of collage were made by Hopkins in 1965, specifically in the "Study for Cape Wall Painting". This work began as a tondo, similar to other circular collages of the same time, but Hop-

64-C-39, collage, 1964. Lent by the Whitney Museum, New York.





70-C-16, collage, 1970

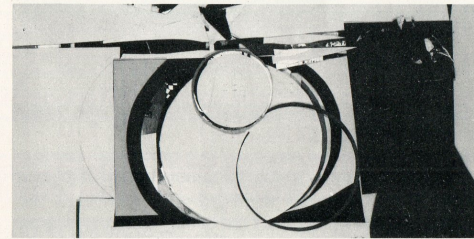
kins subsequently worked the not-quite-satisfactory composition into a rectangular collage, allowing the tondo to maintain its visual integrity while acting as a focal point for the whole picture. Circular forms had been present in previous works, even those predating 1958 (including Cézanne-influenced still lifes of apples), but no picture had incorporated the cycle quite like this. Before, round forms had interrupted not only the composition, but the whole gesture of the work; they appeared out of nowhere, like the Red Spot on the planet Jupiter, and pinned down the pictures in contradiction to the flow of all the other forms. In "Study for Cape Wall Painting", the circular form is coordinate with the structure of the picture, incorporated deftly into its syncopated rhythms. Later works include more simplified, unified circles, designed more consciously as dependent elements of the overall composition, but the method of involving an extreme curvilinear form into the network of active straight lines was established in this study.

In the past few years Hopkins has gradually come to think of the collages as self-sufficient entities wherein possibilities of contrast to, as well as presagement of, the large oils on canvas can be explored. Hopkins consciously maintains an informality in the collages' technique, if not in their composition, and the resulting relief-like surface — the edges of the pasted elements left slightly unglued and

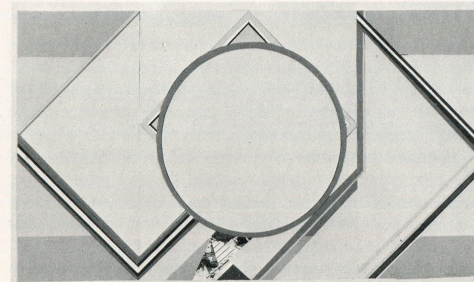
raised above the picture plane, the brushstrokes left more in evidence — is quite different from the flatness and precision of his recent paintings on canvas (despite their own areas of Action painting).

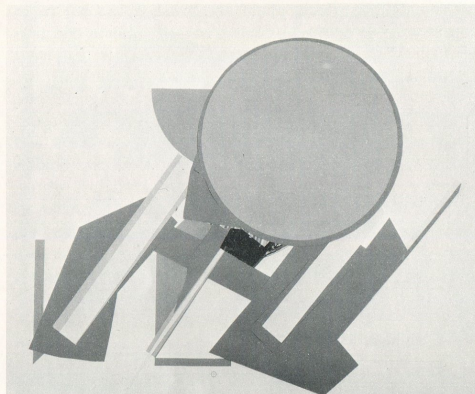
The group of oils on paper done between 1965 and 1968, although least like Hopkins' collages of any of his non-collage work, share a common aspect with the black and white collages of 1963-64: few of them are direct studies for larger paintings. They were all, in Hopkins' words, "grist for the mill", but rarely did they lend themselves to direct physical expansion. Hopkins claims that this was purely circumstantial, but the fact that the preponderance of the small oils were suited to that scale would indicate a

70-C-4, collage, 1970



Study for Yellow Saturnus, collage, 1973





73-C-18, collage, 1973

particular comfort and satisfaction at that time with working small.

Of the recent works on paper, one group, the acrylics, serve almost entirely as studies for another group, the lithographs. This explains the simplified color schemes in the former group, accommodating the limited color possibilities of the latter. The acrylics are also identical in size to the lithographs; these, with certain collages of the last couple of years, include the largest works on paper Hopkins has yet realized.

These recent lithographs are not the only prints Hopkins has ever done. In 1965 he executed several black and white lithographs, extensions of the 1963-64 collages and the last primarily informal, non-geometric works in his career. One lithograph incorporates a "found" stone of printed words. It is ironic that this one overt occasion in Hopkins' *oeuvre* of a haphazardly discovered external image finding its way into a picture happens not in a collage, but in a print. Some of the collages of the middle and later 1960s do incorporate forms that strongly suggest letters, and in fact such alphabetic forms appear distinctly in some large paintings as well. But Hopkins saw those letters as a certain species

of abstract shape which could activate his compositions in different manners, not as Schwittersian images carrying with them the implications of everyday life.

Hopkins' actual realization of his own philosophy of form excludes the "real world" because the careful balance of opposed elements creates a sufficient amount of tension on one level — the pictorial — without needing to extend into other, contextual dimensions. Other dimensions of a picture's physical reality — the nature of its visual and material organization — however, do enhance the manner in which Hopkins expresses his allegiance to the collage aesthetic. It can therefore be said that his smaller, less polished artworks, which offer an intimate version of Hopkins' pictorial energy, realize this aesthetic attitude more complexly and, finally, more fully than his larger work.

Peter Frank
New York City

Editor's Note: We are very grateful to Peter Frank for writing the above article for us on the work of Budd Hopkins. Mr. Frank writes for *Art News*, *Art in America*, and other periodicals in New York. . . . Mr. Hopkins' work appears in such public collections as the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the San Francisco Museum of Art, the Washington Gallery of Modern Art, the Reading Museum, the Chrysler Art Museum, the Norfolk Museum, the Joseph Hirshhorn Collection, and others. A small work of his was added to our collection in 1965. . . . The exhibition will move to the Weatherspoon Art Gallery at the University of North Carolina when it leaves here. By coincidence, our previous CIBA-GEIGY exhibition of work of women artists is being shown in North Carolina at the present time.

