

**BUDD
HOPKINS
ASSEMBLED
PAINTINGS**

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by Carter Ratcliff

Budd Hopkins' multi-paneled paintings are unified in their disparity, but not in any of the usual ways. New measures are required because he allows disparity to be so great. The colors that dominate a work are always offset by dissonant hues. Sometimes the dissonants harmonize among themselves. Often they don't. Rectangularity dominates thanks in part to the fact that Hopkins insists on joining together only traditionally-shaped canvas panels. This maintains a contact with the history of Western form, not only in painting but in architecture. On the other hand, the squared fields, the smaller rectangles and the stripes contained by these panels often seem to originate in large, segmented circles. Curved lines appear to posit an opposition with a generative force. Yet the circles and the rings that surround them in some works owe that force, the eye concludes, to the way they are segmented by straight lines. These round shapes buoy the panels they occupy, yet they often need the support of pictorial vectors originating in the distant reaches of a painting. Further, they are often just off-center in their own panels, and their centers are often just missed by the focal points of their internal patterns.

So the circles seem as much conclusions as opening premises, as much pictorial results as causes—or perhaps it's impossible to decide one way or the other, just as it's very often impossible to say what is figure and what is ground, what is overlaid and what recedes, what is a dissonant hue and what isn't. As color appears, disappears and reappears, it joins and breaks off from prevailing harmonies. Complexities of this sort suggest formal connections the eye would never expect and deny connections that seem inevitable. Forms collaborate with colors sometimes, and sometimes seem to be at odds. Hopkins' paintings are not so much composed as negotiated under the pressure of his willingness to let competing resolutions co-exist.

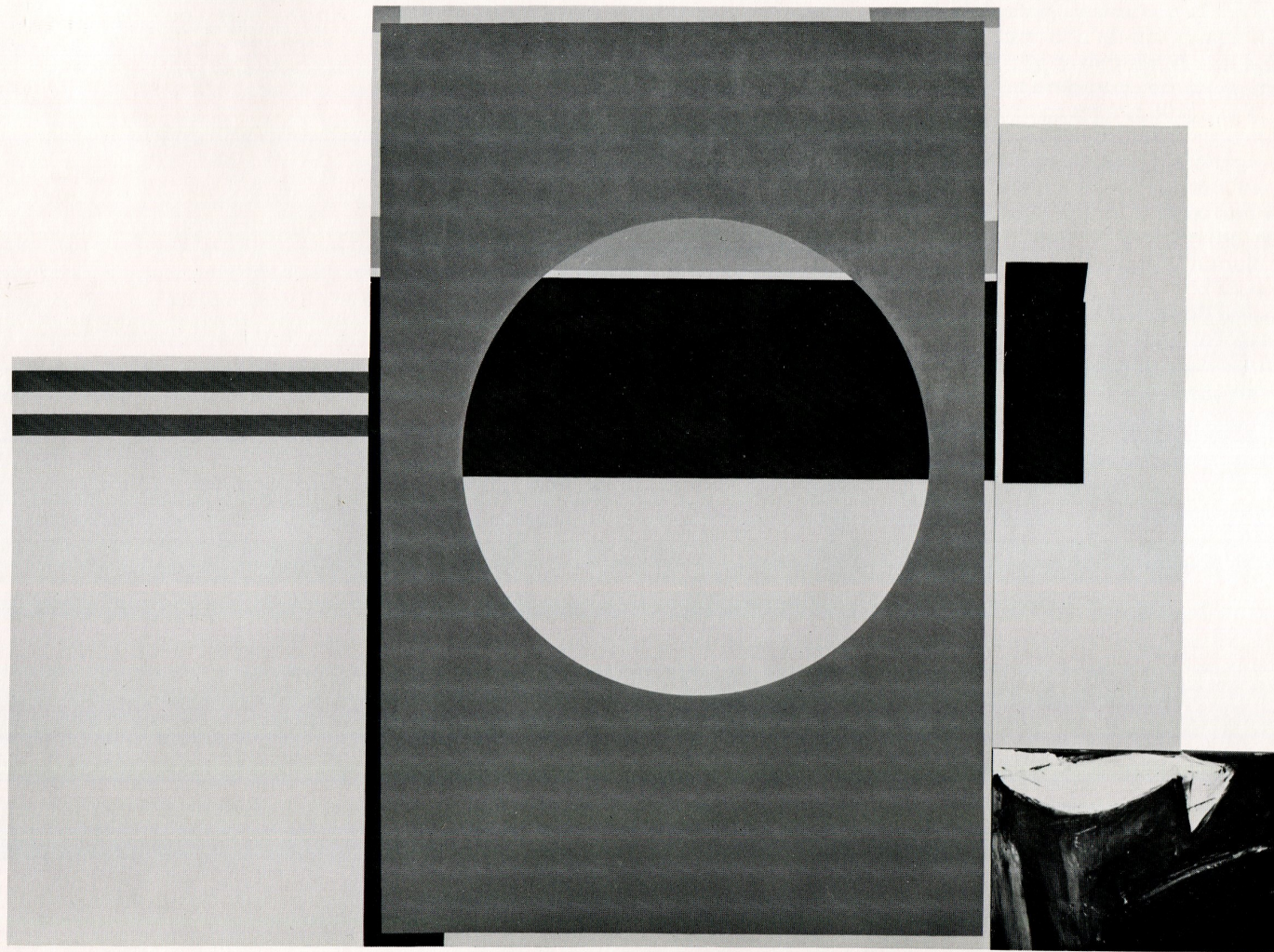
All this variation—all this leaping head-first into multiplicity—is dazzling. And multiplicities are multiplied. Each of Hopkins' works presents itself to the eye in a state of constant re-invention. Unity here is built from patterns of possibility that reverberate through and beyond their realizations, creating boundaries and leaping them, generating form and echoing it, compacting pictorial space and opening it onto immensities.

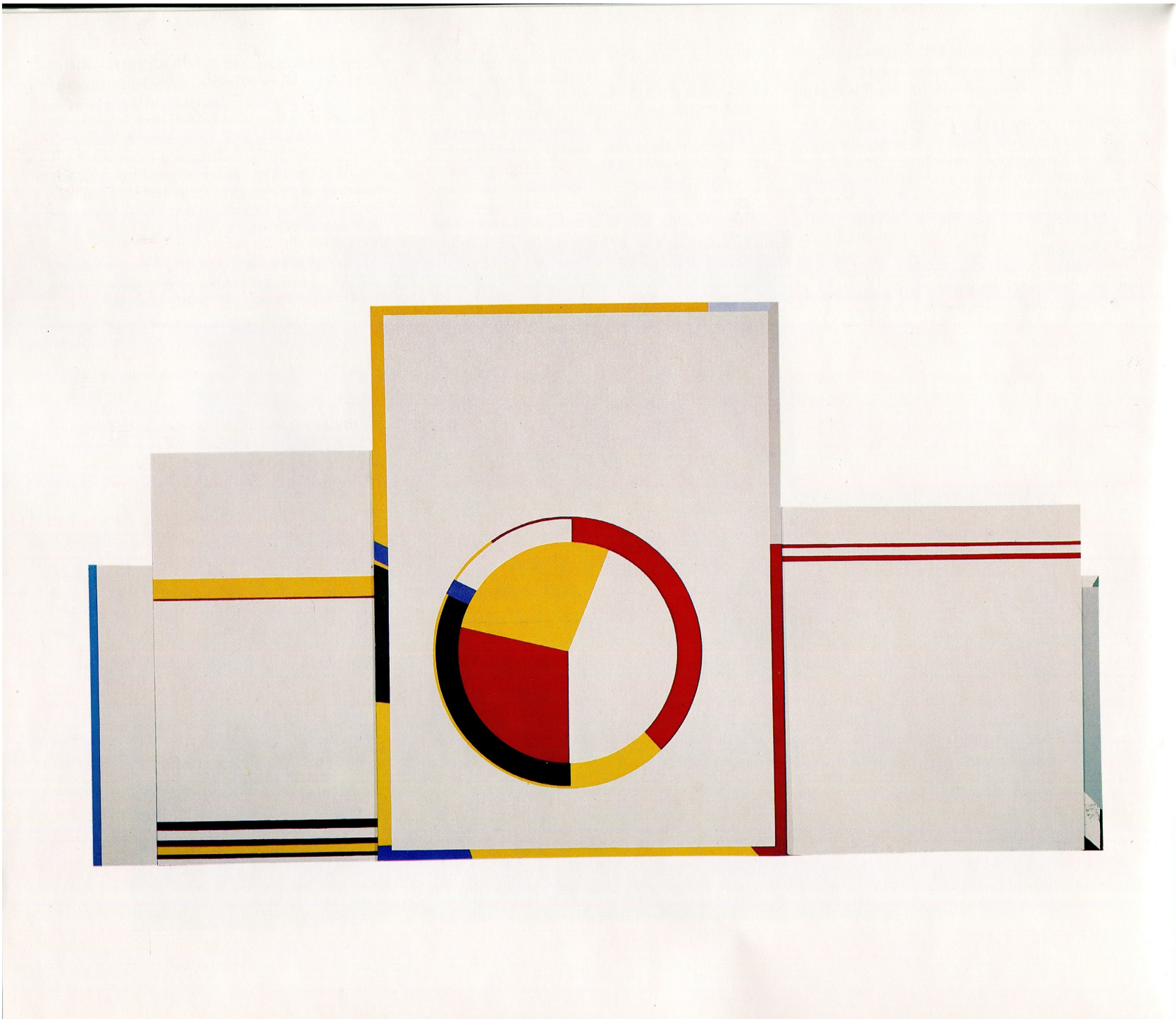
Hopkins' works occupy the territory reserved for painting the way architecture occupies urban space—panel by panel, building by building, in sudden leaps. They are envisioned in advance with the help of

colored-paper collages. The step up to full scale—the translation into paint and canvas—is deliberate, of course. But it has a quality of suddenness to it. A proposal which was subject to consideration, reconsideration and amendment is made, irrevocably, into a painting which cannot be changed without becoming a different, unintended object. Hopkins runs risks. He can make minor adjustments at full scale, but any serious difficulty means starting over again from scratch. If a painting doesn't work, it must, so to speak, be torn down. The surprise, then, is that his paintings so often turn out to be so rich, both pictorially and in their allusions. Each establishes a horizon of its own—rather, a skyline. Now that Hopkins has evened out the bottom line of his works, all

the variation in their angular silhouettes is along the top and the reference to the modern city is strong.

Urban space is defined for us by the right-angled forms most amenable to modern construction methods. Indoors and out, city-dwellers make their way through space which is always striving for an ideal condition—that of a three-dimensional grid. Hopkins' art is not a recapitulation of this modernist idealism, but a reflection on it. He engages its energies, its contradictions. His paintings go beyond the strictly architectural to work out a contemporary sense of place.

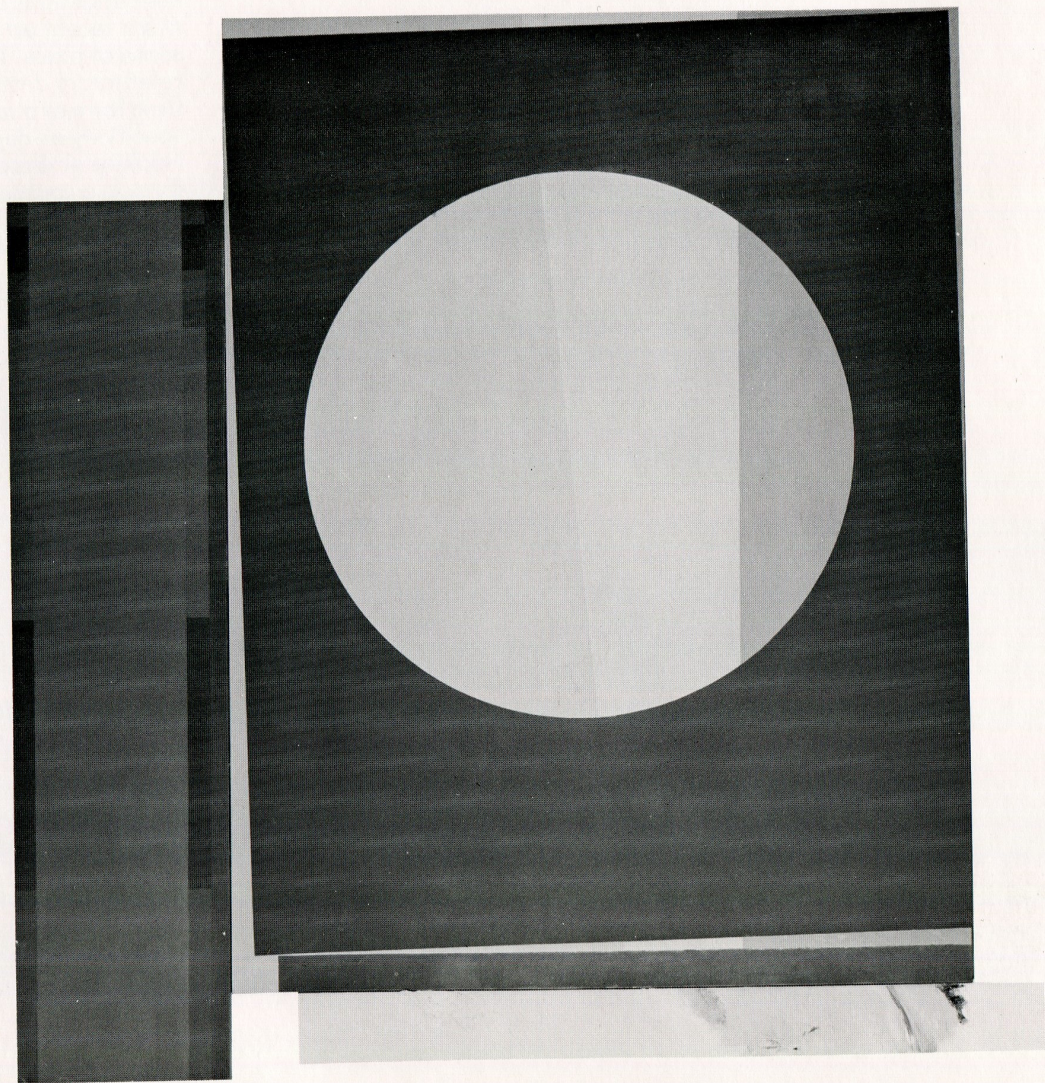


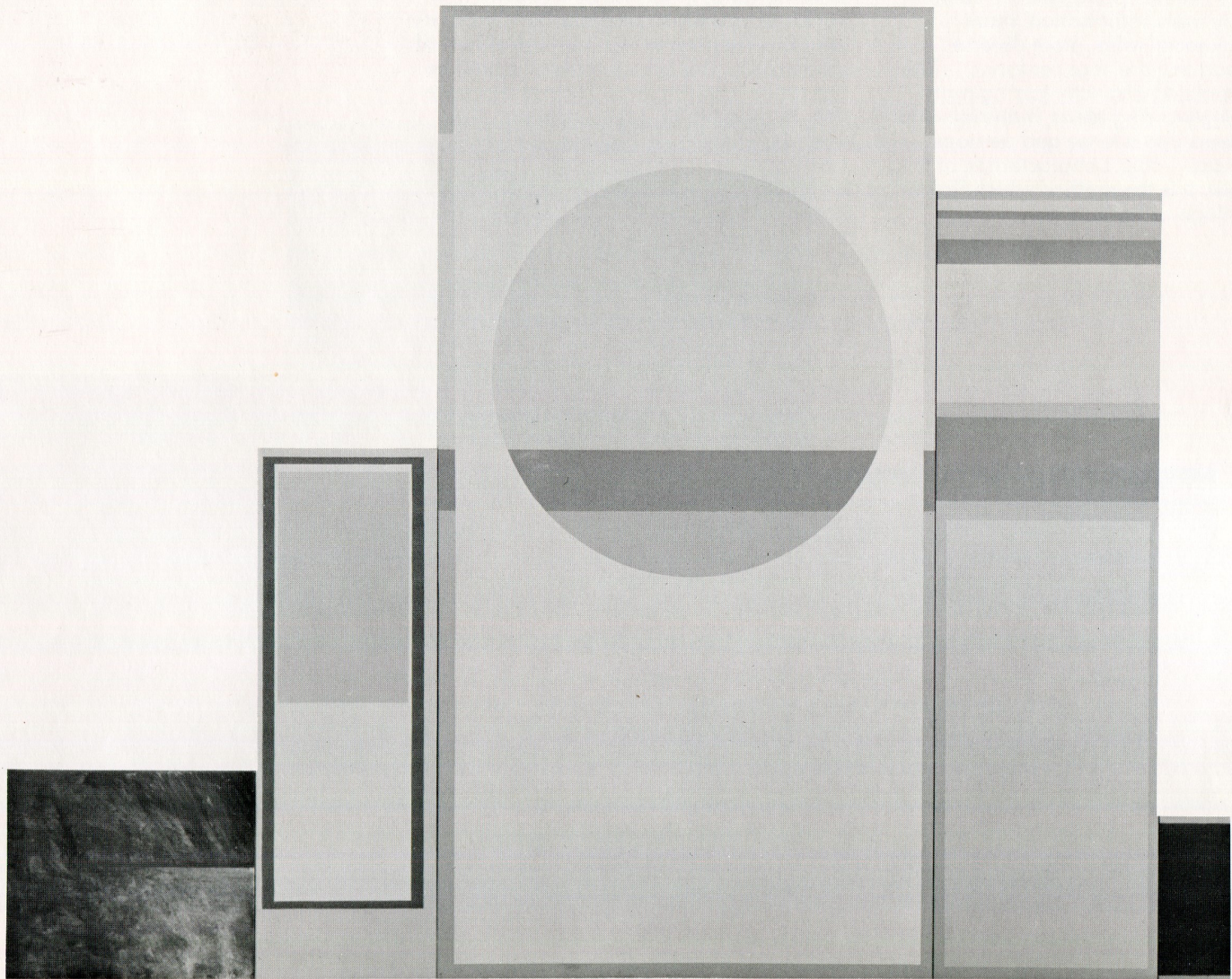


This is remarkable in light of the pessimistic tendency to assume that contemporary life destroys the particularity of particular places. Standardization, reductionism, entropy and more are invoked and employed to support claims that our world is becoming uniform, that any preference for one place over another is arbitrary and self-indulgent. Much recent art has celebrated the loss of a sense of place. This has entailed either a celebratory destruction of the specific in artistic form or a retreat to repetitiousness—a specificity as depressed as it is depressing. Hopkins embraces reductive, modernist form in a countervailing spirit.

He respects variety, hierarchy—not standardization. As we've seen, his paintings have focal points, themes and variations, areas of quiet to sharpen the impact of geometric and coloristic tumult. The implication is that, yes, the world shows signs of tending toward a neutral, valueless state, but we can still find value if we remember what it looks like—if we remember that it is different from its opposite, and that, among values, some are greater and some are smaller. Hopkins' art is one of insisting that differences must be recognized, displayed, even cherished, if they are to be reconciled. He brings most of his repertoire to every painting. Possibilities proliferate, clash and find ways of surviving—usually by integrating themselves into a network of pictorial comment. In his paintings, everything remarks on everything else. He articulates an "architecture" which is functional because its self-consciousness provides it with an internal source of energy.

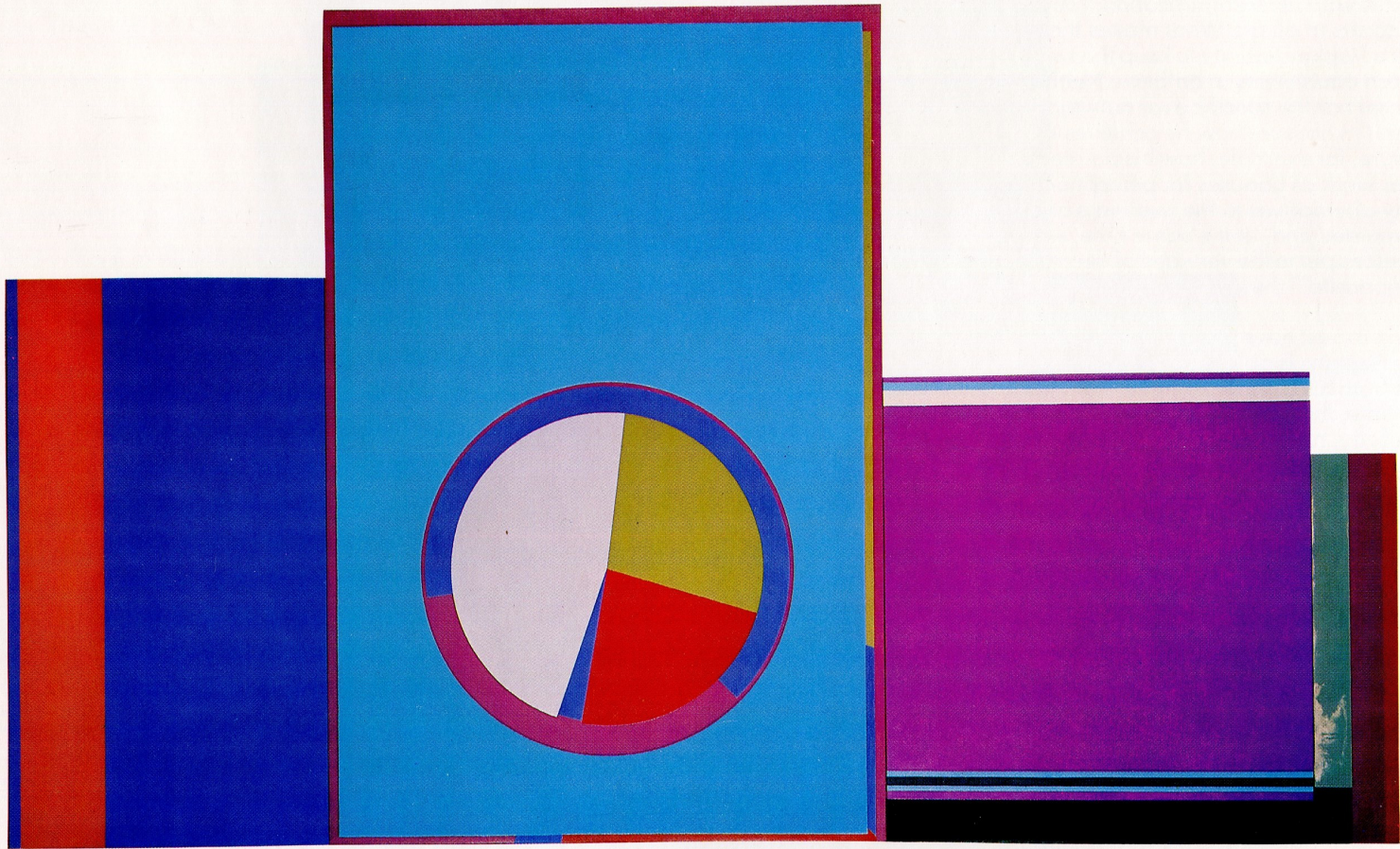
Hopkins' style is both clear and ambiguous. Rather, it is clear about ambiguity, about disjunction, dissonance, discontinuity, con-





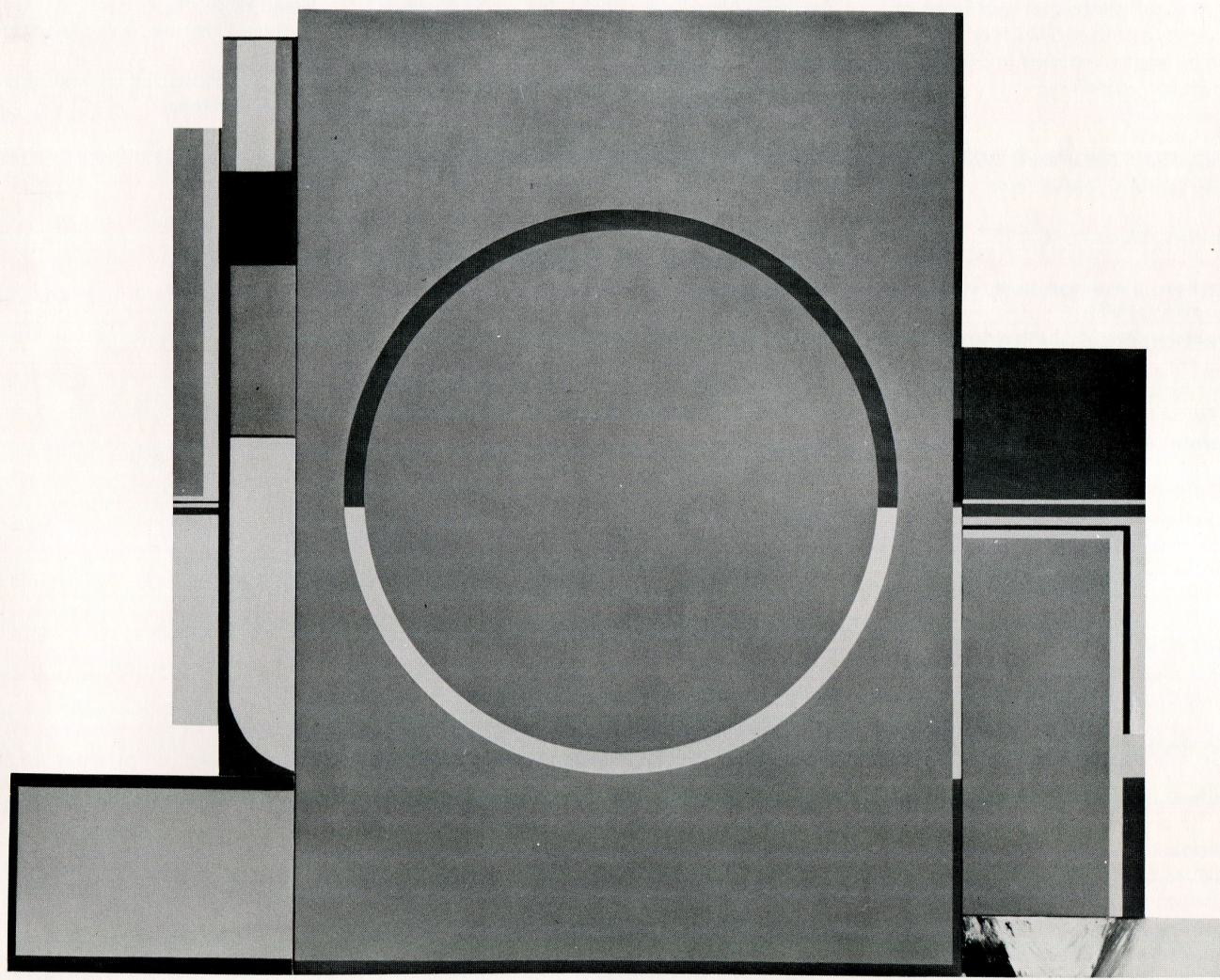
tradition . . . and this clarity brings unity. It gives coherence to the metaphorical meaning of his work. The reference beyond painting to a contemporary sense of place is so well-focused that a sense of place becomes, in all its complexity, a symbol of modern experience. Hopkins feels that life in this century is by nature "pluralistic . . . containing infinitely more information, more contradictory social roles, more diverse 'realities' than any previous century. . . . The act of harmonizing distinctly jarring material, of forcing warring ideas, materials and spatial systems into a tense and perhaps arbitrary peace—this is characteristic of the modern artist. It is the method which flows from the collage esthetic."

He permits himself to be affected by all the difficulties, the disparities, of his period—rather, he insists on being so affected. Yet he refuses to take up a position, a style, whose justification, whose pertinence, depends on a passive willingness to be immersed in his own times. He takes a self-conscious hand in focusing form, in sorting out pictorial relationships, in intensifying energy—in clarifying his reflections on the "collage effect" of modern life. This brings order of a kind he has made familiar, and it brings a doubleness into his works. Taken together, they offer a sweeping suggestion of the possibilities for value in painting and beyond it in the world at large. Considered separately, each painting exemplifies some aspect of that large suggestion, that mode of optimistic modernism.



Hopkins started out, in the 1950s, doing painterly paintings, and that style is still available to him. Loosely-brushed passages occur in almost all his recent work. They both indicate a non-geometric possibility and actualize it. In other words, the range of pictorial experience is enlarged in the course of perception, while the *question* of such enlargement is raised, is made an issue. This is a specific instance of the doubled-up meaning characteristic of Hopkins' work. A clear indication of a broad possibility is made to co-exist with its exemplification. I suppose this occurs in all art. What makes it notable here is Hopkins' ability to keep the two terms of each doubleness in balance. Neither the general nor the specific ever outweighs the other. I'm not sure how he achieves this. I'm not sure, for example, how his painterly passages work as bonuses for perception, as lively alternatives to the liveliness of his geometries, *and*, at the same time, work as questions put to the very *idea* of geometry by its "opposite," the *idea* of painterliness.

I think it must have something to do with the way Hopkins is able to get two distinct effects from his clarities. They lock the eye into real time, the time of perception, and, just as forcefully, his clarities encourage the physical eye to give way to what might be called the speculative eye. Real time becomes the somewhat different time in which concepts and insights unfold. Naturally, real and speculative time are aspects of one another, just as the actualities of Hopkins' works are ultimately inseparable from the possibilities they exemplify—possibilities for self-consciousness, for the reconciliation of disparities, for the preservation of specific, localized, values. Hopkins argues for such things through his paintings, and his arguments have force because the paintings themselves provide him with the best possible back-up.



Biography

General information:

Budd Hopkins was born June 15, 1931, in Wheeling, W. Va. He studied at Oberlin College and graduated in 1953. He has lived in New York since that time, and currently maintains a summer studio in Wellfleet, Mass. He is married to critic April Kingsley. His daughter, Grace Francesca, was born in 1973. Hopkins has exhibited widely since 1955. In 1976 he was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship for painting.

One-man exhibitions:

Lerner-Heller Gallery, New York, 1977.
William Zierler Gallery, New York, yearly-1972-1975.
Landmark Gallery, New York, 1975, Collages.
Tirca Karlis Gallery, Provincetown, 1958, 1960, yearly-1962-1975.
Galerie Liatowitsch, Basel, Switzerland, 1974.
Weatherspoon Art Gallery, Univ. of North Carolina, 1974.
Kresge Art Center, Michigan State Univ., 1974.
Huntington Galleries, Huntington, W. Va., 1973, Retrospective.
Hurlbutt Gallery, Greenwich, Conn., 1971.
Poindexter Gallery, New York, 1956, 1962, 1963, 1966, 1967, 1969, 1971.
Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, N. H., 1968.
Reed College, Portland, Ore., 1967.
Obelisk Gallery, Boston, 1964, 1966.
Bradford Junior College, Bradford, Mass., 1965.
Kasha Heman Gallery, Chicago, 1962, 1963.
Zabriskie Gallery, New York, 1959.

Public collections:

Whitney Museum of American Art, San Francisco Museum of Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, Brooklyn Museum, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Norfolk Museum, Joseph Hirshhorn Museum, Reading Museum, Delaware Art Museum, Ackland Art Museum, Kresge Art Center, Oklahoma Art Center, Williams College Museum, Bradford Junior College, Univ. of Massachusetts, Reed College, Sim-

Bibliography

Statements by the artist:

Artforum, Sept. 1975, "Remarks on Their Medium by Four Painters."
Art in America, July-Aug. 1973, "Budd Hopkins on Budd Hopkins."
Art Gallery, April 1972, Statement, "First Person Singular."
Art Now: New York, Vol. 4, No. 2, Statement.
Arts Magazine, April 1972, "Concept vs. Art Object," with Douglas Huebler.
Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin, Vol. XIV, No. 3, Statement.
Baur, John I. H., and Lloyd Goodrich, *Young America 1960*, Praeger, N.Y., 1960, Statement.

Articles by the artist:

Artforum, March, 1977, "Richard Diebenkorn Reconsidered."
Artforum, Dec. 1976, "The New Works by Frank Stella: A Personal Note."
Artforum, Summer 1976, "An Ad for Ad as Ad: The Collected Writings of Ad Reinhardt."
Communiculture, Summer, 1976, "Modernism and the Collage Esthetic."
Artforum, April, 1976, "A Note on Composite Imagery—The Photographs of Barbara Jo Revelle."
Artforum, Jan. 1976, Reviews: Samaras, Ferrer, Lichtenstein, Ashbough, Grillo.
Artforum, April, 1975, "A Proposal for the Museum of Modern Art."
Artforum, March, 1975, Letter on Mondrian.

Selected articles about the artist:

Derfner, Phyllis, *Art International*, Summer, 1974, Review.
Frank, Peter, *Kresge Art Center Bulletin*, April, 1974, "Budd Hopkins—The Works on Paper."
Hirshhorn, Joseph, *Whitney Review*, 1961-62, Statement on the artist.
Kingsley, April, *Art International*, April, 1973, "Energy and Order—The Paintings of Budd Hopkins."
O'Doherty, Brian, *Object and Idea: An Art Critic's Journal 1961-67*. Simon and Schuster, N.Y., 1967, "Budd Hopkins: Master of a Movement Manque."

Perreault, John, *Soho Weekly News*, April 17, 1975, Review.
Ratcliff, Carter, *Art International*, May 1975, Review.
Ratcliff, Carter, Exhibition Catalogue, 1977, "The Assembled Paintings of Budd Hopkins."
Robins, Corinne, *Arts Magazine*, May, 1977, "Painting in the Present—An Interview With Budd Hopkins."
Robins, Corinne, *Arts Magazine*, June 1974, Review.
Rose, Barbara, *Art International*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1964, Review.

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