

The New York Times

Larry Zox, 69, Abstract Painter of Dynamic, Geometric Works, Dies

BY GRACE GLUECK



"Scissors Jack 'For Jean,'" a 1965 painting in acrylic by Larry Zox

Larry Zox, a painter whose exuberant geometric abstractions made a strong contribution to the Color Field movement of the 1960s and '70s, died on Saturday. He was 69 and lived in Colchester, Conn. The cause was cancer, said his daughter, Melinda.

In Mr. Zox's signature works of the mid- to late 1960s, flatly painted diamonds, triangles and other hard-edged shapes were orchestrated into brilliant symmetrical and asymmetrical compositions of dynamically juxtaposed colors. Areas of raw canvas between the colors encouraged them to function harmoniously.

In 1973 the Whitney Museum of American Art recognized his importance in the field by organizing a solo show of his work. The next year he was represented in the inaugural exhibition of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, which owns 14 of his works. (The museum's founder, the collector Joseph Hirshhorn, was a major Larry Zox collector.)

But Mr. Zox's career languished for some years after the long illness and death of his first wife, Jean Glover. Out of tune with the changing tastes of the New York art world, he exhibited at galleries around the country and taught or served as guest artist at several schools, among them Yale and Syracuse universities.

A mini-retrospective in 2005 at the Stephen Haller Gallery in Chelsea reintroduced him to a New York audience, with new canvases that were much freer in execution and more emotive than his midcareer work.

(A show devoted to Mr. Zox's work is to open at the gallery on Jan. 20.) With nuanced brushwork, he painted loose, rough-edged vertical strips separated by streaky chalk white lines. Color, always important to him, had become more significant than structure.

Born in Des Moines on May 31, 1937, he studied art with, among other teachers, George Grosz. The raw tones of Mr. Zox's early work were informed by Abstract Expressionism; in collages from the early '60s, he stapled torn pieces of dark and light paper to a board. But by his "Diamond Drill" series of 1967, he had arrived at the sharp geometrics, imbalances and tensions of his mature canvases.

In New York of the '60s and '70s, he found his métier, holding forth in a studio on 20th Street where artists, jazz musicians, bikers and boxers were welcome. A powerful, muscular man, he kept up his energy by training with boxers. He was also an avid fisherman, working Long Island Sound and even renting a helicopter to study coastal waters. In 2004 he moved from New York to his fishing cottage in Colchester.

Besides his daughter, of Marathon, Fla., and his son, Alexander, of Hackettstown, N.J., he is survived by his second wife, Virginia King Zox, known as Sha; a sister, Susan Zox Smith, of Washington; a brother, Alan Zox of Prudence Island, R.I.; a stepson, Eric Knapp of Wethersfield, Conn.; and two step-grandchildren.