



Wurmfeld in his studio at 105 Via Di Monteserrato, Rome, 1964.

BEAUTIFUL AMBIGUITY

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Sanford Wurmfeld may best be known for his interest in color, but before he began to paint or even draw, Wurmfeld learned to see like an architect. Wurmfeld first experienced the affective powers of art and architecture after his high school graduation in 1960 on a trip to Europe with his older brother Michael, then studying architecture at Princeton University. Guided by the consideration of how one walks through space—which he learned from Michael and a copy of Nikolaus Pevsner's *An Outline of European Architecture* (1943)—Wurmfeld learned how it feels to experience art and architecture both visually and bodily. Seen in retrospect, this experience of the possible duality of perceptual experience in one cohesive structure is the spark that ignited a passion.

In the years since that first trip to Europe, Wurmfeld has become an accomplished painter. At the heart of his art is the belief that every medium—painting, architecture, film, and so forth—is a unique visual language, each expressive of unique content untranslatable into other languages. As such, Wurmfeld's art must be seen to be understood, making perception—seeing—the core of its import. So-called “presentational art” expresses something of what the American philosopher Suzanne K. Langer called the “... verbally ineffable, yet not inexpressible law of vital experience ...”—an ambiguous yet real content, and exactly what Wurmfeld felt in the art and architecture of Europe.¹ The formative period between Wurmfeld's post-high school trip to Europe and the moment, in 1971, when he settled on painting as his medium of choice shows Wurmfeld working to find his own language that would come to express his particular understanding of the ambiguity of vital experience. Over that time, he engaged with a variety of ideas and artistic forms, creating works as diverse as small-scale watercolors, 4-foot relief paintings, and transparent acrylic sculptures large enough for a person to fit inside. He gradually

pushed the limits of what painting could convey—stimulating an experience of multiple, ambiguous realities—in what becomes clear when seen in the context of his career as an attempt to speak the language of the architect and the painter simultaneously. By 1971, Wurmfeld had found a way to best achieve this: with a grid and color on the two-dimensional plane. How he got there helps us see Wurmfeld as more than simply a painter, and appreciate the profundity of his unique hybrid visual language of color and space.

During his first three years at Dartmouth College, Wurmfeld developed his interest and aptitude in both architecture and painting in parallel. Formally, he was enrolled as a pre-architecture student with a major in art history; in preparation for his studies, he had learned to draw by drafting all of the buildings on campus. But painting became increasingly appealing for its expressive possibilities. In the fall of his junior year, a course on contemporary abstract painting taught by Professor Churchill Lathrop introduced Wurmfeld to the work of Franz Kline. Wurmfeld was already painting, but Kline's painting stimulated a new, directed interest:

I had no understanding of what he [Kline] was doing, but I was convinced it was something important. So I sort of set it as a problem for myself to try to understand, and that meant at the beginning painting like Kline until I understood viscerally exactly how he was making decisions and what he was doing. It's not so easy to explain in words because it isn't a verbal language; it's very much a visual language. But at a certain point, it becomes part of you.²

Notably, it was the structure and ambiguity of the spatial field that drew Wurmfeld to Kline, not color. In working like Kline, Wurmfeld began with a medium and scale with which he was

already comfortable—drawings, of which he did hundreds—limiting himself to black and white. He used egg tempera, the opaque matte appearance of which helped achieve an ambiguous relationship with the white background. That same fall of 1962, Wurmfeld took a trip to Washington, D.C. to see the Franz Kline Memorial Exhibition at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art. The exhibition made a strong impression on him; he still remembers being struck by the “beautiful ambiguity” of the figure-ground relationship in Kline’s *Black and White No. 2* (1960) [Fig. 2]. Wurmfeld recalls that the artist Wolf Kahn once told him that all Abstract-Expressionist paintings are based on an “H,” and this painting by Kline is a clear expression of that thought. Wurmfeld mimicked the same “H” form in an untitled work from ca. 1964 [Fig. 1], a painting that also bears strong resemblance to the particular structure of Kline’s *Orange Outline* (1955), also on view at the exhibition. Approaching painting with an architect’s eye, the complexity within clarity of such seemingly basic structural elements that Kline created in his paintings must have stood out. Also, the complexity is most deeply appreciated the longer one engages with the painting—another lesson Wurmfeld would take away from Kline.

In November 1962, Wurmfeld attended a lecture-demonstration by Hans Hofmann for the inauguration of the Hopkins Center at Dartmouth College that introduced ideas that had a lasting impact on Wurmfeld. In his lecture, Hofmann spoke of space as energy; how color creates light in painting; that art is based on the intuitive faculty of the subconscious mind; and that “... we must first learn to see.”³ Wurmfeld specifically remembers Hofmann discussing the concept of push and pull: “... push and pull are a visual sensation created by the mind either through the experience of tensions in nature or through the creation of tensions on the picture-surface ... push and pull control the surface in a two-dimensional way, and simultaneously produce in this two-dimensional projection the desired three-dimensional effect of controlled depth.”⁴ This tension of actual two-dimensional and apparent three-dimensional space is precisely what so impressed Wurmfeld in Kline’s paintings and in such places as Sant’Ignazio (which Wurmfeld would return to again and again when he later lived in Rome). The existence of ambigu-

ity between two- and three-dimensional space takes for granted that a viewer will perceive this phenomenon, and this is key. Wurmfeld, from the start, was concerned with the viewer and the possibilities of visual experience through perception. All of these ideas would become part of the theory upon which Wurmfeld would base his practice as he developed as a painter.

A year later, in the fall of 1963, a course on aesthetics with Professor T. S. K. Scott-Craig reinforced these ideas, and the notion that art could in fact be about ideas:

[Scott-Craig] really made me understand that each medium was a language of expression in and of itself. Painting was a language. Music was a language. Mathematics was a language. Writing was a language. And those different languages had different capabilities. He said contemporary life was about ambiguity, and he said the problem is that in the written language it’s very difficult to express the inherent ambiguity of contemporary life. He said, “you’ll be able to do it better in painting.” I remember his whole understanding; art was about pushing and pulling things into patterns—that was his phrase. The patterns could be sounds, the patterns could be colors, the patterns could be words. It was all about pushing and pulling things together. That was a very liberating and sophisticated understanding of art, so much so that it stuck with me to this day. He was certainly my introduction to that idea in philosophy: in other words, having the buttressing of a real integrated intellectual point of view, that this is what painting could be about.⁵

It bears mentioning that despite having found ideas in painting that resonated with what he wanted to express, Wurmfeld was not yet convinced that painting was the way to go. In the fall of 1963, Wurmfeld applied and would later be accepted to the Yale Graduate School of Architecture.

That plan changed in Rome, where Wurmfeld spent several months in the winter of 1964 with his brother Michael, who was studying there on a Fulbright. Being in Rome brought Wurmfeld back to the experience that sparked his interest in art: architecture and site-specific painting. “That first winter [in Rome] it was just the two of us [Wurmfeld and Michael], so we spent a lot of time



FIG. 1 Left: Sanford Wurmfeld. Untitled, ca. 1964, Oil on canvas, approx. 3 x 2 ft. (91.4 x 61 cm).



FIG. 2 Right: Franz Kline. *Black and White No. 2*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 80 ¼ x 61 in (203.8 x 154.9 cm). Collection of the Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Gift of Mari and James A. Michener, 1991.

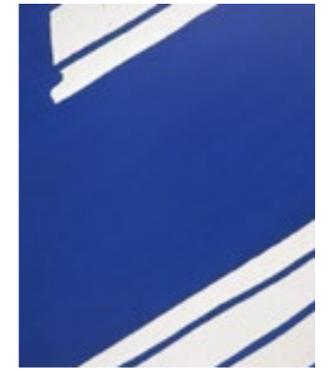


FIG. 3 Sanford Wurmfeld. Untitled, 1964, Oil on canvas, approx. 3 x 2 ft. (91.4 x 61 cm).

going around and looking at churches, looking at [Michelangelo Merisi da] Caravaggio in situ, looking at [Francesco] Borromini, looking at [Gian Lorenzo] Bernini; all of Baroque Rome. [Annibale] Caracci was right down the street from us. So it was all pretty exciting stuff.”⁶ On his earlier trip to Europe, Wurmfeld felt the impact of the art and architecture. Now, having studied architectural history and taught himself to draw and paint, Wurmfeld saw these same works with both an artist’s and an architecture student’s eye, looking for lessons he might incorporate in his own work:

When I looked at Caravaggio in San Luigi dei Francesi, I was looking at how he handled the figures in space, and how the abstract light-dark composition works in counterpoint to the actual figures in space, and how the depicted light in the painting relates to the actual light in the chapel you’re standing in. It was really that juxtaposition between painting, light, color, and the physical site that it’s specifically in. The impact was in making you aware of how you’re looking at a surface, a space, a painting, both in terms of its physical presence and the apparent space, or the possible illusion of space and light that might be there in juxtaposition, or in concert with the physical light and space that you’re in. It’s also the idea that you as a viewer organize the figure-ground image that you’re seeing. I was thinking of painting as having multiple experiences: close

up, middle distance, far away; long duration, short duration, middle duration. It does start out very much with thinking this way.⁷

Take out the reference to Caravaggio and this could very well be a description of Wurmfeld’s mature work. The ideas were there; now he needed to work through it in his art. During his stay in Rome, Wurmfeld painted daily—a first for him. He began to experiment with color beyond black, white, and gray for the first time, using a technique of wet over dry layering with watercolors that an instructor and friend, Lloyd McNeil, at Dartmouth had taught him. This technique and the intimate working scale proved to be an informative way for Wurmfeld to begin to learn and see how colors interact, and how their layering effects spatial perception—that is, to see the possibilities of structuring space through color.

A pivotal moment occurred in Rome. On a sunny winter afternoon in February 1964, Wurmfeld laid a canvas on the floor of Michael’s terrace, preparing to paint, and he noticed the sun shining through the balustrades onto the canvas: “It was kind of an epiphany ... the sun was casting shadows on the canvas and I looked at it and said, ‘that’s it.’ I could paint the light, or I could paint the shadow. The interchange was very clear to me. I literally just took the brush and painted the shadow.”⁸ [Fig. 3]. This painting is the first in which Wurmfeld achieved the same beautiful ambiguity and clarity



FIG. 4 Sanford Wurmfeld. Untitled, c.1965, Oil on canvas, 6 x 4 ft. (182.9 x 121.9 cm).



FIG. 5 Sanford Wurmfeld. Untitled, c.1965, Oil on canvas, 6 x 6 ft. (182.9 x 182.9 cm).

in expression that he so admired in Kline's paintings. Whether it was that epiphany, or the experience of painting regularly, or both, the language of painting had clicked. "I remember walking back to the place I was living with my brother across the Tiber and saying to him, 'You know, I think I could be a painter. That's what I want to be.' I remember that distinctly. And he said, 'good.' From then on, I was committed to the idea I was going to be a painter."⁹ Wurmfeld's first trip to Europe had sparked the interest, and now his second trip solidified the ambition.

When Wurmfeld returned to Dartmouth in the late spring of 1964, he continued to work with watercolor and within the restricted black-and-white palette on larger canvases. Late in the spring, he visited the artist Hyde Solomon for advice on graduate school in art: Yale had agreed to allow Wurmfeld to enter the Yale School of Art instead of the Graduate School of Architecture. Wurmfeld recalls Solomon asking him one question: "When you get up in the morning, do you feel like painting?" When Wurmfeld responded yes, Solomon replied that he did not need graduate school. Wurmfeld decided instead to go back to Rome after graduation and train himself as a painter.

From September 1964 through December 1965, Wurmfeld lived and worked in a studio space in Rome, working with intense dedication and discipline. He painted every day for hours at a time, often taking only one break during the day for lunch before stopping around seven o'clock in the evening. Wurmfeld says he realized "... that in two

years I had the kind of intensive self-training that it took most people eight or ten years to do because I was working all the time with no other obligations. It was a tremendous gift to have that kind of time."¹⁰ That his most intensive period of study took place in Rome is not insignificant; painting was his primary focus, but the language of painting integrated with architecture surrounded him and continued to be an inspiration: "... if I got strung out about working in the studio, I would go out and draw Rome. I was only a block and a half from the river and I would go sit on its banks and draw the view of San Pietro or the bridges across the Tiber. Or I'd go visit other sites or museums around Rome."¹¹

As he was looking at architecture outside the studio, Wurmfeld began to hone in on the possibilities of color while in the studio. "I was trying to figure out how to make the addition of a third or fourth color—how could I make them count so that each color would be just as important as the other? I didn't want one to just be the background and the other to just be the foreground. I wanted them to have the same kind of ambiguous relationship to each another that the blue and white had in the shadow painting."¹² As Wurmfeld recalls, conventional wisdom of the time held that Kline had never conquered color, but Wurmfeld found other inspiration: "Willem de Kooning seemed to be the artist who figured out how to get into color. Claude Monet was another way. De Kooning was a way in through monumental brushstrokes and Monet was a way in through smaller, detailed ones. They were two different scales and two

different challenges as to how one might handle color in an all-over composition, though at that time I was more influenced by trying to follow de Kooning and understand what he was doing with color."¹³ Wurmfeld was most taken with de Kooning's so-called abstract parkway landscapes of the late 1950s, which indeed seem to hold the key to what Wurmfeld hoped to achieve in his own painting. In paintings such as *Merritt Parkway* (1959) or *Bolton Landing* (1957), de Kooning achieved a Kline-like simultaneity of cohesiveness and ambiguity of space across the entire canvas and amongst the varying points of interaction of the different colors (at least five in each painting)—a rotating figure-ground relationship, so to speak, depending on where one focuses the eye. Wurmfeld was not yet familiar with the theory of Jean Piaget, but what Wurmfeld intuited in these works of de Kooning's was that the whole was more than the sum of its parts—a feat achieved through a structure made of color.¹⁴

Two paintings made around 1965 show Wurmfeld attempting the same effect on the same scale—roughly 6 by 6 feet—with three or more colors and large, gestural brushstrokes [Fig. 4 & 5]. While the first did not quite arrive at a structured whole that surpassed its individual parts, Wurmfeld gets much closer in the second painting. Notably, Wurmfeld applied the colors such that the space they create appears more as forms than lines—whereas de Kooning's paintings maintain the strong structural cross-current of lines—

giving Wurmfeld's painting less of an architectural appearance. Seen within the entirety of Wurmfeld's oeuvre, these two are rare in their lack of architectural structure. Wurmfeld sensed this approach was not achieving his desired result—"I didn't have any idea about how the brushstroke was functioning ..."¹⁵—so he moved away from the expressive brushstroke of his Abstract-Expressionist forebears toward a more specific application of color within more neatly defined spaces. "I figured out that I could integrate three different kinds of contrast to create three different kinds of figure-ground relationship simultaneously: one that was based on hue, one that was based on value, one that was based on saturation."¹⁶

Physically, this meant that Wurmfeld related the colors such that across three close hues, one pairing of two was of equal saturation and another pairing was of equal value. Many of these contrast paintings appear as his watercolors writ large, with strong lines demarcating the edges of interaction between colors (of which Wurmfeld used no more than five, but most often only three) [Fig. 6 & 7]. Importantly, these paintings bring back a sense of architectural structure. The shift in brushstroke is also indicative of a more general shift: one that aligned Wurmfeld more with the post-Abstract-Expressionist generation of artists that included Frank Stella, as well as with the structural color achievements seen in then-current work by Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis (all three of whose art Wurmfeld saw for



FIG. 6 Left: Sanford Wurmfeld. Untitled, 1965, Powder pigment mixed with Elmer's glue on canvas, 6 x 4 ft. (182.9 x 121.9 cm).



FIG. 7 Right: Sanford Wurmfeld. Untitled, 1966, Acrylic on canvas, approx. 5 x 4 ft. (152.4 x 121.9 cm).

the first time at the Venice Biennale in the fall of 1964). The Abstract Expressionist generation was known for their heroic self-expression through painting, but the new generation of artists—like Wurmfeld—believed more in ideas. Many art historians and critics would refer to this new art of the 1960s as searching for or communicating the real: that is, the perceptual facts.¹⁷ The content of the real—Langer’s ineffable vital experience—is precisely what Wurmfeld was expressing through his perceptual facts.

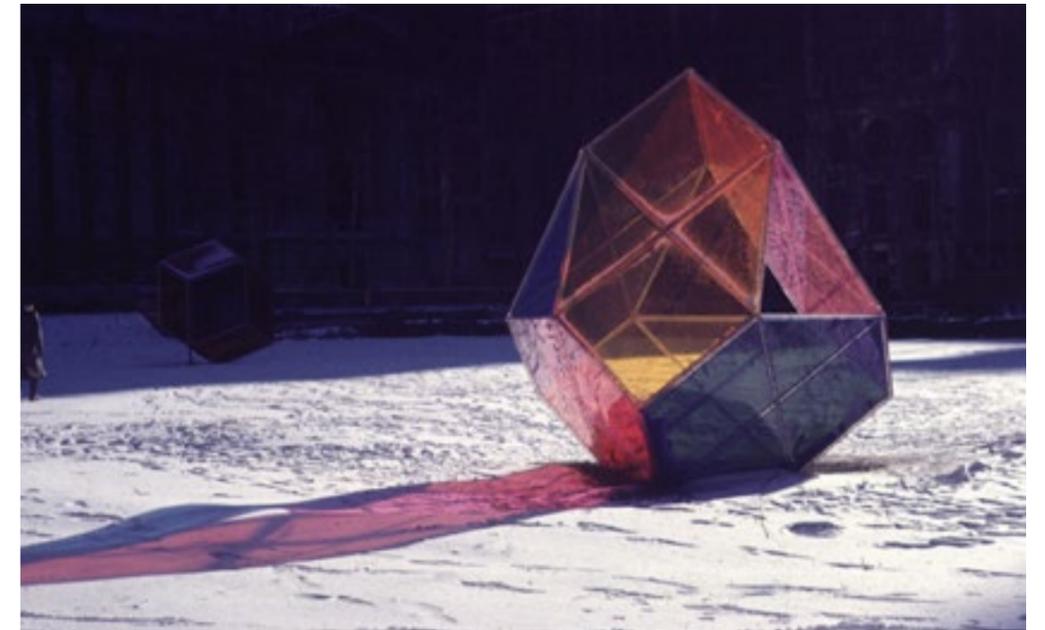
Wurmfeld’s return to New York in 1966 marked the end of his intensive period of self-education, but his focus and dedication only deepened. In his paintings from this period, Wurmfeld continues with value/hue/brightness combinations, but the division of space is even more clearly, and intentionally, architectural. This is also the first time he breaks the traditional mold of the rectangular canvas by turning square canvases on the diamond: “I was thinking of them as a kind of corner of space, and turning them on the diamond allowed them to be read that way more easily—as if you were looking at walls, or a corner of a room, or the outside of a box.”¹⁸ The placement and interaction of colors does in fact make these paintings appear three-dimensional—a manifestation of the push and pull effect [see II-3 Red (1966)]—and the combination of clear architectural structure and strong color interaction helped Wurmfeld finally achieve ambiguity between more than two colors. Here, Wurmfeld’s art began to manifest the intangible aspect of being more than just the sum of its parts.

At about the same time he was working on these corner-of-space paintings, Wurmfeld brought his art into real—rather than apparent—three dimensions in two column paintings, Red Hexagonal Twist and Blue Hexagonal Twist (both 1966). In essence, the columns are the contrast paintings, but in three-dimensions: “I was sort of unhappy being forced to decide which color would go on which side of the painting, so I decided to make paintings that were continuous. I twisted the hexagon so you could always see three sides and three colors at once, and they would change in their ordered relationship as you walked around it.”¹⁹ Even though they are seemingly sculptural in form, the columns do appear much as paintings—the surface, for example,

evidences the hand-application of paint—the notable difference, of course, being how the viewer interacts with the work: with the two-dimensional canvas, the viewer’s eyes do the moving; with the columns, the viewer’s body moves with the eyes. This type of interaction is similar—though on an entirely different, much more human scale (the columns are 90 inches tall)—to the experience of in situ paintings in Roman architecture in the way perception changes with the viewer’s movement. The physical object of the column, like an architectural structure, became the spatial modulator instead of the apparent three-dimensionality of the two-dimensional canvas, thereby inverting the relationship between color and space established in his paintings. The element of time also played a more obvious role in the perceptual experience, with the possibility of walking around the work.

Moving into the summer of 1966, and at this point enrolled in the MA program in Art at Hunter College as of January, Wurmfeld began experimenting with shaped canvases, in which he began to take grammatical elements, so to speak, from the language of architecture—time and three-dimensional space—and attempted to weave them into the language of painting. Wurmfeld made dozens of shaped paintings, ranging from basic trapezoids and close-hue combinations of color, to unique structures comprised of a variety of geometric shapes and four distinctly different colors, seeing how far he could push the limits of spatial ambiguity [see Plates 4-6, pp. 34-35].²⁰ Wurmfeld was aware of other artists’ use of the shaped canvas—he remembers, for example, seeing a show of rhomboid-shaped paintings by Kenneth Noland in early spring of 1966 at Andre Emmerich Gallery in New York—but not with orthogonal planes:

These paintings of mine were involved in the fact that you experience them differently over duration because they would flip-flop back and forth in space because the orthogonal perspective could be read either way (as two- or three-dimensional). I was also still dealing with the color in terms of ambiguous transparency, which would then take these planes that could be read either way and tend to flatten them out so that there was this tension between flatness of the transparent relationship of the colors and the natural orthogonal flip-flopping of the shapes.²¹



Sanford Wurmfeld. III-102, installation view at Bryant Park, New York City, December 1969.

Wurmfeld’s description of how these paintings were intended to function perceptually indicates that structure was their central concern. He was trying to make the viewer perceive three-dimensional structure despite apparent flatness, again reminiscent of in situ paintings, particularly Andrea Pozzo’s frescos on the vaulted ceiling of Sant’Ignazio, Wurmfeld’s favorite example of such painting.

It was also around this time, during the summer and fall of 1966, that Wurmfeld began two series of works that most outwardly resemble architecture. The first was a relief painting, rectangular in shape, that made use of a projecting box on the top third to cast a shadow over the middle third and thereby create the same triad of hue/value/saturation relationship he had been painting in two-dimensions—but here with only two physical colors. [see Plate 3, p. 33] While this piece measured only 40 inches wide, Wurmfeld had hoped to eventually realize an extended version that would span the width of an entire wall. Though this intention was never realized, one can easily imagine that it might have looked like a multi-colored cornice (not unlike, at least in shape, those he would have seen often on the buildings and courtyards of Rome).

The second series most resembling architecture was the series of new columns—larger in circumference than his first two columns, and some now in close-packing clusters.²² [see Plate 9, p. 38; see Plate 12, p. 41] The shapes of these columns are reminiscent of big city skyscrapers (one is in fact the same shape of the new Freedom Tower in New York City [see Plate 11, p. 40]), but on the scale of a man—each is only as tall as the reach of Wurmfeld’s arm. The ambiguity Wurmfeld achieved in these is truly remarkable. Single Octahedron at Full Sat. (1967), for example, looks flat where in fact there is an edge, and vice versa, and at the line where two shades of blue intersect the column appears to dip into itself when the physical fact is that the plane is flat. Moving around this display of changing color relationships, one feels as if space is moving forward, backward, and forward again.

Starting in 1968, he embarked on his last major three-dimensional experiment before he would return to painting: the creation of color environments through the use of transparent colored acrylic sheets.²³ Using these sheets of primary hues, Wurmfeld made a variety of sculptural pieces, mixing ideas from his previous works: the planes of color and orthogonal perspective seen

in his shaped paintings; the three-dimensionality and human scale of the columns; the layering of colors first developed in the watercolors; and the notion of a changing experience over time and through space that Wurmfeld was continually investigating and honing. Despite pulling ideas from nearly everything he had worked on until this point, these transparent works diverge in two important ways. For one, the particular ambiguity of figure-ground relationships and the tension of push and pull are not nearly as apparent in these works. And secondly, the transparent works take the concept of modulating space a step further than the columns, not only through their physical three dimensionality, but also by literally coloring their surrounding environment. These pieces come closest to the kinesthetic experience of architecture in that combination of tangible and intangible effects on the viewer's environment as he/she experiences the work. In fact, Wurmfeld even created a walk-through piece, *III-Walk Through* (1970), which quite literally shapes and shades space with color. Notably, despite their strong effect on the space around them, these works allow the viewer to be far more passive than any of the artist's earlier works. It was for precisely this reason that following these transparent works and a brief period of experimenting in silent color films with Michael, Wurmfeld decided to focus firmly on painting:

After doing these [transparent works], I had a very strong reaction to the idea of the object being the active part of the experience as opposed to the viewer. In reaction to this, I went back to painting with a renewed interest. I saw a redefining of painting as the most passive medium that would allow the viewer to be as active as possible. The beginnings of computer technology—all of this was heating up. Don't forget this is the moment of [Marshall] McLuhan's fame, too; so we're talking about hot and cool mediums, we're talking about "... the medium is the message." Well, if the medium is the message, do I want the medium to be hot, or do I want the medium to be cool; do I want the medium to be active or do I want the medium to be passive; do I want the viewer to be a couch potato or do I want the viewer to be a searching, active, involved person. Part of that meant that I was looking for a painting that had

multiple realities—that was experienced one way close up, one way from the middle distance, and another way from far away and each over varying viewing durations. So that there were all of these different structural ways of experiencing this single passive object.²⁴

By 1971, Wurmfeld had struck on a grid of small elements which would fuse in ways to make larger grids as the foundation for multiple viewing experiences in a single object [*II-4 (Full Sat.)*]. Seen in context with the type of art Wurmfeld had been creating up until this moment, his new grid can be understood as a fusion of architectural/spatial structure, apparent ambiguity, and the painter's language of color on canvas. In these colored grids, Wurmfeld found a way to challenge both himself and the viewer to experience the multiple realities of which the perceptual facts of the paintings were expressive. Those multiple realities, the experience of which is untranslatable into terms other than their expression through color and grid, harken back to the lessons Wurmfeld learned early on: that modern life is characterized by ambiguity, that art was the best way to express that ambiguity, and that above all, we must first learn to see. Structuring two-dimensional space through the formality of the grid and intangible interaction of colors, Wurmfeld set the path for the next forty years of painting, and more importantly, he succeeded in constructing a reality at once cohesive and beautifully ambiguous. Nikolaus Pevsner, author of the book on European architecture that Wurmfeld and Michael used as a guide in 1960, wrote in his introduction that, "... what distinguishes architecture from painting and sculpture is its spatial quality ... But ... the good architect requires the sculptor's and the painter's modes of vision in addition to his own spatial imagination."²⁵ Wurmfeld is decidedly a painter, but when we understand his visual language as also that of an architect, new perceptual possibilities are opened to us.

1. Suzanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957): 257.

2. Sanford Wurmfeld, interview by the author, October 24, 2012, New York.

3. Hans Hofmann, "New Hopkins Center at Dartmouth," *Art Journal* 22, no. 3 (1963): 180-182.

4. *Ibid.*, 182.

5. Wurmfeld, interview by the author, October 10, 2012, New York.

6. Wurmfeld, interview, October 24, 2012, New York.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Wurmfeld, interview, October 10, 2012, New York.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. Wurmfeld, interview, October 24, 2012, New York.

14. In the early 1970s, Wurmfeld would read Jean Piaget's *Structuralism*, first published in French in 1968 and translated to English in 1970. In the book, Piaget defined three characteristics of structuralism, one of which was that the "whole was more than the sum of its parts," an idea Wurmfeld understood as applicable to art. See *Structuralism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

15. Wurmfeld, interview, October 10, 2012, New York.

16. *Ibid.*

17. The art historian and Hunter professor E.C. Goossen gave wide currency to the notion of "the real" in contemporary art of the 1960s in his catalogue essay for the exhibition *The Art of the Real*, which he curated for The Museum of Modern Art in 1968. See *The Art of the Real: USA 1948-1968*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968): 7-11. See also, e.g., Irving Sandler, *American Art of the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988): 60, "... In this sense, art of the sixties was a quest for the real, for something tangible to hang on to."

18. Wurmfeld, interview, October 24, 2012, New York.

19. Wurmfeld, interview, October 10, 2012, New York.

20. In one shaped canvas series reminiscent of origami animals, Wurmfeld experimented with very close hues and close values, in part inspired by Ad Reinhardt, who was a professor at Hunter at the time. It was three of these paintings (including *II-4 (BV Series)* (1966) [PLATE]) that Tony Smith exhibited in room 1604 in the Hunter North building to convince the Hunter faculty that Wurmfeld should be asked to join the faculty as an adjunct assistant professor (despite not having finished his MA degree).

21. Wurmfeld, interview, October 10, 2012, New York.

22. One of these single columns was included in *The Art of the Real* exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, curated by E. C. Goossen, in 1968. Four of the clusters and one of the new single columns were exhibited together in Wurmfeld's first solo exhibition at Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York, also in 1968.

23. Wurmfeld had the acrylic sheets specially made by a cast-optics firm in New Jersey to achieve the desired saturation; his testing method was layering one sheet over another to see if the mix produced an accurate result.

24. Sanford Wurmfeld, conversation with student curators, September 13, 2012, New York.

25. Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1943): 15.



Caption TK