



**Charles Pollock, *Untitled #97*,
1968, acrylic on canvas,
94 x 50".**

CHARLES POLLOCK

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Charles Pollock, the older brother of Jackson Pollock, is now 85, living in Paris and reportedly ailing. Although his work was overshadowed by that of his revolutionary younger brother, there is more than a bit of the rebel about him as well. This was apparent in the group of paintings featured in this recent exhibition, which were done in 1968 and '69, years in which abstract painting was still dominated by geometric color-field painting. The older Pollock worked in much the same kind of reductive context as such big guns of the '60s as Barnett Newman, Kenneth Noland, and Frank Stella, but with results that critiqued the dry literalness of their paintings.

Untitled #97, 1968, is a striking example of the method that Pollock used to transcend the formalist limits that many critics and artists established for abstract painting during that period. At first glance Pollock's emphasis appears to be on the relationship of figure and ground, which was one of the chief preoccupations among abstract artists then. Here the figure, a wide, nearly vertical stripe made up of horizontal bands of different colors, runs the length of the painting and cuts the gray ground into two narrow trapezoidal sections. Both figure and ground appear to advance and recede, only to coalesce on the surface of the pic-

ture plane in a kind of dynamic harmony. But the rigid parameters set by his more celebrated peers are undermined by Pollock's subtle but significant modifications in figure and ground, expressive touches that literally blur the boundaries between the two. In generic terms, the figure is still a large vertical stripe, but set at a slightly oblique rather than a sharp angle, with soft instead of hard edges. Pollock also avoids the symmetry favored by some of his colleagues: none of the figure's horizontal bands are exactly parallel, and one of the trapezoidal shapes of the ground is just a bit wider than the other. And the colors are applied with a sensitive, gestural touch, not with the controlled, lifeless uniformity that was considered necessary to affirm Greenbergian flatness. In contrast to the work of Noland, Pollock's surfaces are positively hazy and atmospheric, as in *Untitled #21*, 1969. Even the colors themselves are different, in-between shades rather than the characteristic bold primaries of most '60s geometric abstraction.

Pollock's work is expressive not only in formal terms but also in its suggestion of symbolic, metaphorical content. For example, the figure in *Untitled #97*, with its monumental and tremulous qualities, brings to mind a large unbalanced object that is about to fall, and the painting as a whole presents the idea of universal, unceasing change. It is just such highly evocative treatments that sets Pollock's work apart from the more doctrinaire applications of abstraction during that era.

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