

Pasatiempo

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ON THE COVER The fire this time

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Black History Month gets a bolt of lightning from the great 20th-century writer James Baldwin, whose words, along with a trove of film and television clips, have been culled by the documentary filmmaker Raoul Peck to create a portrait of America's racist history through Baldwin's eyes. In the film, *I Am Not Your Negro*, Peck takes as his starting point the notes and opening pages of a book Baldwin never finished: *Remember This House*, about his murdered friends Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr. The powerful narration, read by Samuel L. Jackson, is taken entirely from Baldwin's writings. On the cover is a photo of Baldwin from the film, ©Bob Adelman, courtesy Magnolia Pictures.

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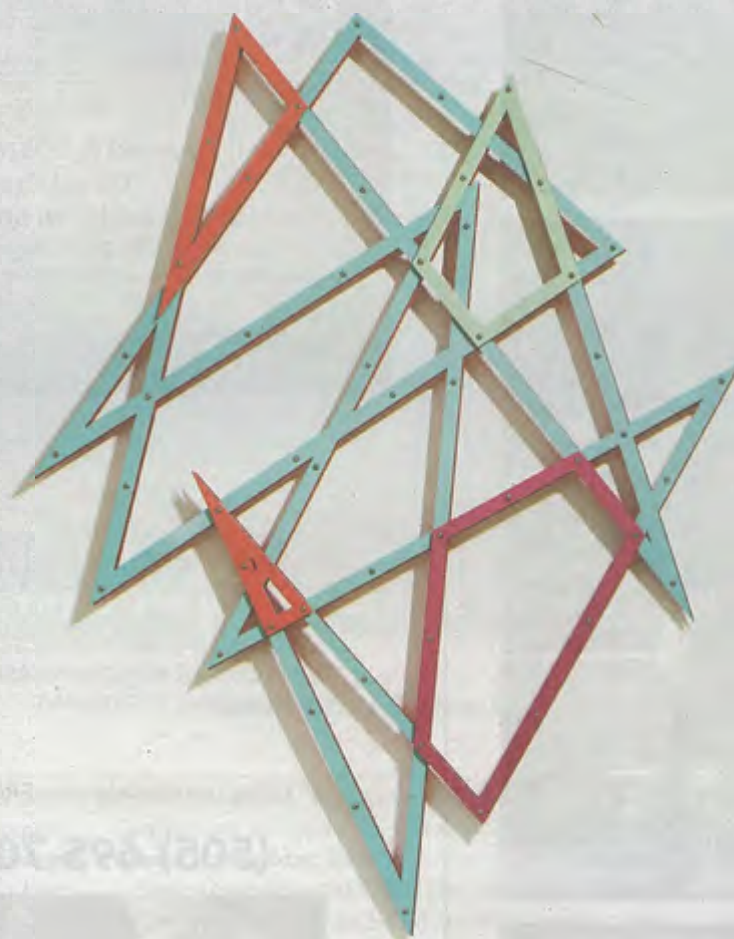
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A MOMENT IN THE SUN

THE INFLUENCE OF PARK PLACE GALLERY



New York City's historic Tribeca neighborhood wasn't always the upscale residential area full of swanky bars and restaurants that it is today. From the mid-19th century on, the neighborhood was a center for the textile and cotton trade, but by the mid-20th century, the factories in this lower Manhattan district had all but closed. The area became an industrial wasteland, earning it the moniker Hell's Hundred Acres. A 1960 census listed just 382 permanent residents living in Tribeca, less than half of the population from a decade before. If you lived there at that time, chances are you knew most of your neighbors. Here, artists sometimes established their own venues and, as was the case with Park Place Gallery, these were grassroots efforts. Surrounding them was a buzz and energy that gets mentioned frequently when art critics, artists, and art historians discuss the 1960s New York art scene.

"To be young and to be there at that time was really great," artist Patsy Krebs told the audience at a recent gallery talk at David Richard Gallery. "For one thing, it was such a small community that somebody like me — and there were many people like me; I hadn't even gone to school yet, really, to study art — I could just walk up and knock on somebody's door, and you could say, 'I just wanted to see what you were doing. What are you working on now?' — and you were welcome." Krebs is one of the artists who showed at Park Place and is included in David Richard's current exhibition *Park Place Gallery: Founders and Friends, Then and Now*.

Park Place Gallery was established in 1963 at 79 Park Place in downtown Manhattan. According to Krebs, the gallery had an informal start as a gathering place for artists. "Park Place was in a very funky loft building," Krebs told the audience. "I think there

were three floors occupied by artists and there was a top floor that was empty. At some point, people in the building just started putting work up there. That was really the beginning of the Park Place Gallery." David Richard is showing works from the time of the gallery's existence, along with later career works from the founding members and their contemporaries.

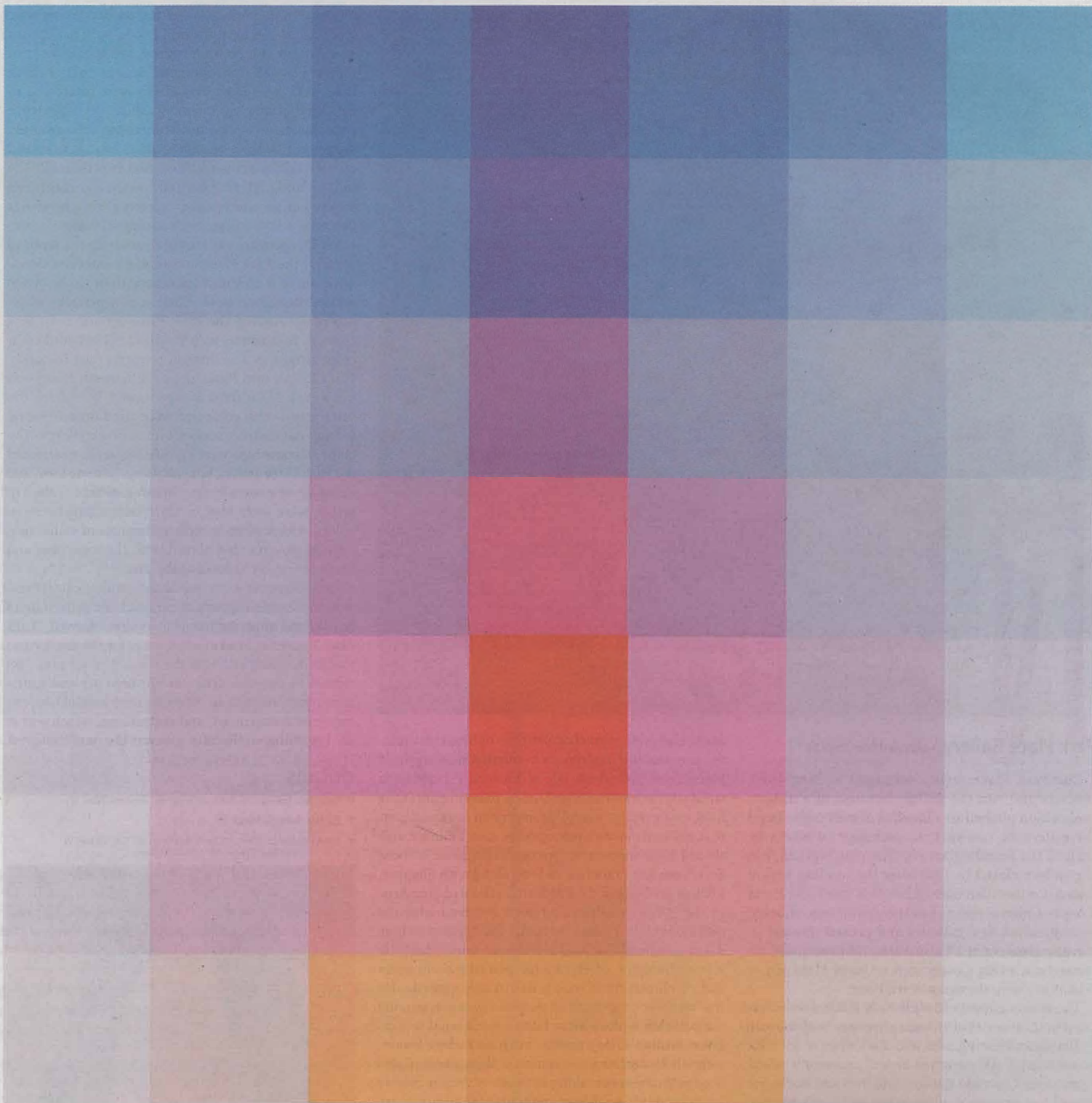
When Park Place's lease expired after just a couple of years, several of the artists who had been showing there moved to a new, permanent location at 542 West Broadway, rechristening the space as Park Place, The Gallery of Art Research, Inc. Paula Cooper, who served as president of the corporation, became its second and last director in 1966. The name change is significant because it reflects the experimental

concerns of the group, whose founding members included five painters (Dean Fleming, Tamara Melcher, David Novros, Edwin Ruda, and Leo Valledor) and five sculptors (Mark di Suvero, Peter Forakis, Robert Grosvenor, Anthony Magar, and Forrest Myers). David Richard is showing works by three of the Park Place founding members (Fleming, Ruda, and Valledor), and friends and co-exhibitors at Park Place: Patsy Krebs, Linda Fleming, Ronnie Landfield, Robert Swain, Neil Williams, and Mario Yrisarry.

Krebs was a friend and sometime exhibitor at the space. "I was twenty-two, and I came from California," she said. "It was a unique time for us because Abstract Expressionism had been the mode. [Willem] de Kooning and [Mark] Rothko and all that group were really the mainstream of abstract painting. What happened in the '60s is that that sort of cracked open into three threads. One was Minimalism, geometric abstract painting. One was Pop Art, and the third was participatory, or performance art."

The first of these threads appears to have influenced many of the artists who showed at Park Place. The artists were interested in non-figurative and geometric abstraction, Hard-edge painting, and large-scale works. Much of their art was rooted in concepts related to perception and spatial relationships. The group, as a whole, was interested in science and took a more clinical, empirical approach to art-making as opposed to the spontaneity and gestural emphases of their Abstract Expressionist predecessors. "The thing I think really defined Park Place was everyone had this shared interest in space and exploring space in the third or fourth dimension," said gallery co-director and curator David Eichholtz. "That's what coalesced everybody, in a way. When you look at everybody's work from back then, you realize it wasn't Op Art, but it was clearly about visual perception and clearly creating these illusions in the two-dimensional picture plane."

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Robert Swain: *Untitled*, 2015, acrylic on canvas
 Opposite page, Linda Fleming: *Streak*, 2016, powder-coated steel

IT WAS SUCH A SMALL COMMUNITY THAT SOMEBODY LIKE ME — AND THERE WERE MANY PEOPLE LIKE ME; I HADN'T EVEN GONE TO SCHOOL YET, REALLY, TO STUDY ART — I COULD JUST WALK UP AND KNOCK ON SOMEBODY'S DOOR, AND SAY, 'I JUST WANTED TO SEE WHAT YOU WERE DOING. WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON NOW?' — AND YOU WERE WELCOME. — ARTIST PATSY KREBS



Park Place Gallery, continued from Page 24

The Park Place artists managed to fund their projects and run the gallery because of a unique proposition pitched to a handful of collectors: Fund the gallery for two years in exchange for works by each of the founding artists. The plan worked, but the gallery closed in 1967 after the funding period ended. Cooper then opened her own space, the Paula Cooper Gallery, which has the distinction of being among SoHo's first galleries and proved seminal in the development of Minimalism and conceptual art through the 1970s. Cooper took on many of the artists who previously showed at Park Place.

The artists connected with Park Place were interested in the theories of visionary inventor Buckminster Fuller. Dean Fleming, who with his former wife Linda co-founded a self-governed artist community called Libre in the Colorado Rockies, still lives and works out of a 40-foot geodesic dome inspired by Fuller's designs. He introduced Linda to Park Gallery and its roster of artists in 1965; they married three years later. The gallery is showing some of her works on paper, as well as *Streak*, an example of her linear geometric sculpture.

Dean Fleming's 1964 painting *Papagos, Greece* is being shown along with several paintings from throughout his career. *Papagos, Greece* is a symmetrical, multicolored design that shows the influence

of the elaborate geometric patterns of Moorish architecture; the title references a journey he took from Morocco to the Greek isle of Lesbos. Edwin Ruda similarly worked in Hard-edge painting, making bold and graphic use of geometry in compositions that toy with viewer perceptions. Leo Valledor also shared their interest in geometry. He came to New York from San Francisco in 1961 along with Fleming, a fellow graduate of the California School of Fine Arts. In the 1950s, Valledor had been involved with the influential San Francisco venue Six Gallery, where Allen Ginsberg first read his famous poem *Howl*. He was a champion of Hard-edge painting techniques and combined them with a muted color palette. He was an early proponent of shaped canvases, moving the painting surface away from a traditional rectangular format. Other artists, such as Robert Swain, were also interested in geometric abstraction. Color is of primary concern in the work of Swain, whose practice deals with how psyche and emotion are affected by colors when they're experienced in pure form, without the cultural associations we ascribe to them. He catalogued thousands of colors in his career, arranging many of them in different combinations in studies composed using grids of shifting tones.

Krebs, too, works with gradations of light and dark hues in spatial relationships, often using combinations of rectangles, squares, and ellipses methodically

plotted out in works that border on optical illusion. Her early works from the mid-1960s, such as *Papados* and *Tunisia*, which are on view, are reminiscent of Fleming's work from the same time period. "I think that many people in that group were interested in this kind of magical moment, when you experience the illusion of space but something immediately snaps you back to the flat plane, and there's kind of a freefall in between those two experiences," she told Eichholtz during her talk. Krebs has continued exploring geometric abstraction throughout her career as a Postminimalist conceptual artist.

While there are aspects of illusion in the work of some of the Park Place artists, their interests developed along a different trajectory than those of Op artists, in whose work illusion is a primary characteristic. Among the Park Place artists, color was treated, in a sense, as a medium. "They looked at color almost as a sculptural property," art historian Peter Frank told *Pasatiempo*. "Ellsworth Kelly was not a Park Place artist by any means, but he felt the same way — that color should be used to define area, to map out distinct sections, to articulate form. The color relationships were significant in the practice of the Park Place artists, but color was defining form and defining or contradicting volume, whereas the Op artists were interested in the relationships between colors, which often stimulated aspects of visual perception in ways that played with the weakness and easily trackable aspects of the eye."

Park Place set a precedent for artist cooperatives, several of which sprung up around the gallery in its heyday and impacted movements that followed. "Park Place figures as kind of a key locus for the energy and thinking among artists of the 1960s," Frank said. "It's related to the emergence of Minimal art and to the cooperative movement. After the explosion of happenings, environment art, and assemblage, which was at the beginning of the '60s, this was the next thing." ◀

details

▼ Park Place Gallery: Founders and Friends, Then and Now

▼ Exhibit through March 25

▼ David Richard Gallery, 1570-A1 Pacheco St., 505-983-9555



Mario Yrisarry: *Omega*, 1964, acrylic on canvas; above left, Patsy Krebs: *Tunisia*, 1966, gouache on paper