



# SANTA FE

## Oli Sihvonen: "In Motion" at David Richard Gallery

Oli Sihvonen's work and life are so well associated with the East Coast that few of us recall the many prolific years the geometric abstractionist spent in New Mexico. In fact, Sihvonen resided in Taos in the early 1960s when his work arrived on East Coast scene, appearing at the Whitney, the Washington Museum of Contemporary Art, and MoMA. Previous to that, in 1949, he was among the first of the former Black Mountain College students drawn to the landscapes of Northern New Mexico, but among the last to stay loyal to Joseph Albers' vision for abstraction, flat and unaffected.

New Mexicans remember Sihvonen often. His work has been widely represented in Santa Fe— at SITE Santa Fe in 2000, for instance, and James Kelly Contemporary in 2007. And, in 2011, the Harwood Museum of Art in Taos exhibited "Oli Sihvonen: The Final Years" in conjunction with a collection of works from other Black Mountain College alumni. Four of the paintings that appeared in "The Final Years" now hang in David Richard Gallery in Santa Fe's Railyard District, along with six others, all from the 1980s. The show, titled "In Motion," focuses on oil-and-acrylic works performed with the support of grants from the Pollack-Krasner Foundation and the Gottlieb Foundation. As the title suggests, the collection demonstrates Sihvonen's attempts to creating motion in painting. He did so by applying the mathematical principal of Set Theory, essentially repeating contrasting patterns to

create an allusion of motion, which bring to mind early motion graphics for computers and video games. The effect is amplified by the size of the works: *Elegy* (017) is 60-by-68 inches; *Untitled* (076), 72-by-82 inches; *Mobius Mode* (071), 96-by-68 inches. To stand in front of these works is to test one's motion sensitivity. The most unsettling work is *Untitled* (019), 68-by-72 inches, which reverses the sense one gets looking through a porthole, the stillness appearing within the hole while the wall containing it appears to spiral outward, also shifting back and forth.

Any way one places his works together, an Oli Sihvonen show is an exciting event, but this collection very succinctly demonstrates the point where the artist's training meets his ambition and imagination. We see here why he's one of New Mexico's favorite modernists.

—MATTHEW IRWIN

"UNTITLED (003)," 1991, **Oli Sihvonen**  
OIL ON CANVAS, 90" x 72"  
PHOTO: COURTESY DAVID RICHARD GALLERY