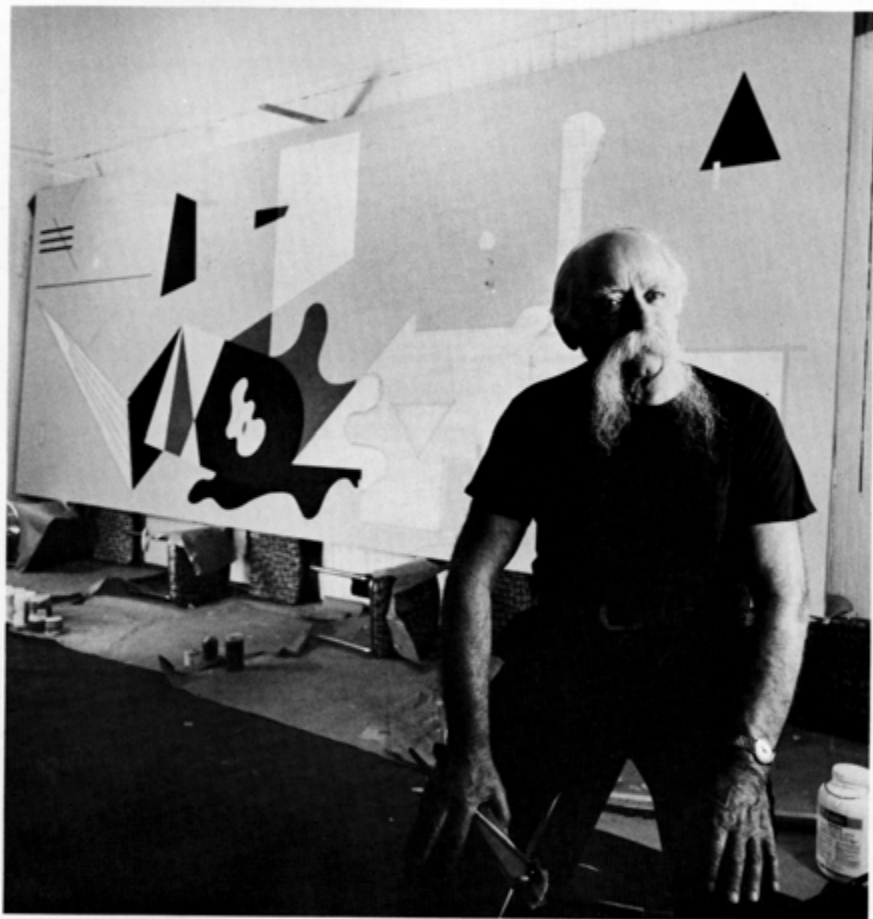


HOMAGE TO BOLOTOWSKY
1935 - 1981



June 17 — September 19, 1985

"I work in the neo-plastic style because for me it is the most meaningful and exciting direction in art. Neoplasticism can achieve unequaled tension, equilibrium, and harmony through the relationship of the vertical and horizontal elements. This effect may be likened to epiphany or metanoia. Neoplasticism is Neo-Platonic. As a neoplasticist, I strive after an ideal of harmony (a Neo-Platonic idea, an archetype that can have no existence but that has being). No artist can ever completely achieve this ideal in his work. Since an absolute archetype has being, a theoretical, absolute artist having painted one such archetype, would have to give up art. Luckily for us, in our Sisyphean existential predicament, we can go on painting and striving in our own imperfect ways, thus achieving the only sort of happiness allotted to us humans."

Ilya Bolotowsky, March 14, 1969

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Joan Washburn and her staff at the Washburn Gallery for helping to organize this exhibition.

I would also like to thank everyone who was involved in the installation of this exhibition, especially Pete Pantaleo; Gary Floyd, Technical Director of the Fine Arts Center; the Fine Arts Center Technical Staff; and the Art Gallery staff.

Most of all, I wish to thank Andrew Bolotowsky for editing the catalogue essay and for making his father's work available to the Stony Brook community.

Rhonda Cooper
Director

Photo credits: ●Geoffrey Clements	Complex Counter-Point Light Yellow Tondo Pre-Mural
●Dean Conger	Somber Key
●Robert E. Mates	Open Space Blue Tondo
●Francis McLaughlin-Gill	Cover Photograph

●1985 The Fine Arts Center Art Gallery, State University of New York at Stony Brook

Cover: Ilya Bolotowsky in his studio with WPA Mural,
Williamsburg Housing Project, summer, 1980

On Neoplasticism and My Own Work

A MEMOIR

by Ilya Bolotowsky

My generation of American artists began experimenting with abstraction around the thirties (with the exception of a few artists of the twenties, such as Jean Xceron, Stuart Davis, Paul Kelpé). The definition of abstract art has undergone some changes since then. Some of the abstract paintings of the thirties would now seem to us to be closer to either Cubism or semi-abstraction rather than to pure abstraction (which means, of course, not the purity of innocence but abstraction totally devoid of familiar images and associations). Very much like my contemporaries, I had gone through various stages of figurative art and semi-abstraction from 1924 to 1933, when I was first exposed to Neoplastic painting that gradually affected the direction of my own work for the next thirty-five years.

Most of the American rebel artists were then influenced by Cubism. When I first saw Mondrian's work in the Gallatin Collection at New York University, my immediate reaction was that of shock and even anger, but it soon turned to admiration.

My own work developed gradually, not in a completely straight path, from abstraction to Neoplasticism.

Soon after I had seen the first Mondrian one-man show in the Gallatin Collection at New York University on Washington Square, I saw the first Joan Miro show in New York at the Pierre Matisse Gallery. It attracted me immediately. Before long, I was combining the biomorphic forms with the rectilinear. My Williamsburg Housing Project Mural of 1937, one of the earliest abstract murals in the United States, and the mural in the Hall of Medical Science, New York World's Fair, 1938-39 are examples of this style. By the time I was designing the 50 foot mural for the Hospital for Chronic Diseases on Welfare Island, New York, in 1939-1940, the biomorphic elements were completely excluded from my work. This last mural was close to the Suprematist style. It took me a few more years to remove all diagonal lines and planes from my painting.

More and more, since the mid-forties, my work became my own version of Neoplasticism. Unlike Mondrian, I did not limit my palette to yellow, red, and blue. Unlike Mondrian and Vantongerloo, I generally assign the larger areas in a painting to red, blue, yellow, sometimes to violet and, sometimes, to black which I add to achieve a pseudo-vibration through clashing with the chromatic colors like reds or blues. White areas are most often reduced in size. At times, a juxtaposition of two closely related colors is used to create an ambivalent, now appearing, now disappearing contrast. I seldom find need for black lines.

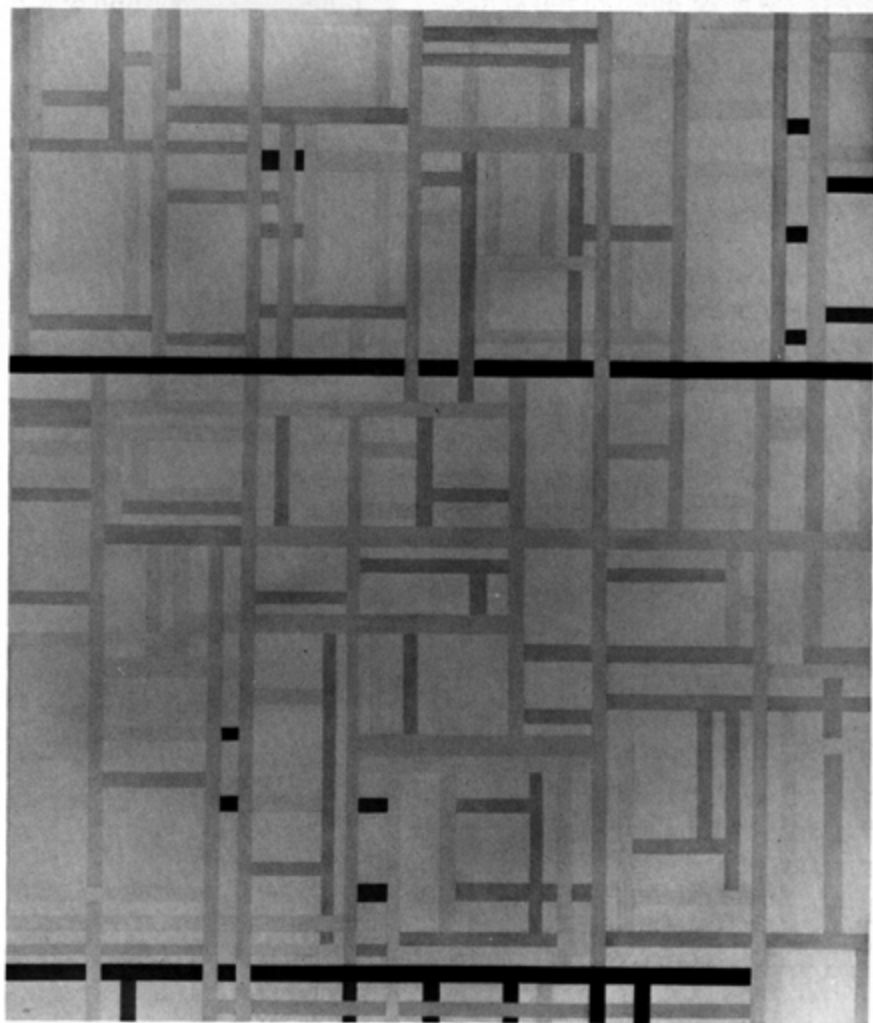
Why do I find it necessary to avoid the illusion of deep space, to give up all the interesting possibilities of contrasting geometric shapes? Why, I may be asked, is it necessary to impose such limitations on painting?

It is not always realized that Neoplastic style should not be confused with Geometric style and Op Art. Neoplasticism totally avoids the appearance of figurative images, whether straight or ambivalent.

Neoplasticism came out of Cubism. It is related to Geometric Art, but it is not properly speaking geometric like the work of the Constructivists. Truly, Geometric Art explores many possibilities offered by the variety of geometric figures. Neoplasticism limits itself to the right angle relationship, because it is based on what appears to me to be subtler relationships.

Neoplastic painting strives for simplicity but with great variety of balances and tensions.

In spite of its impersonal aim, de Stijl (or Neoplasticism), as practiced by Mondrian, Van Doesburg, Vantongerloo, and Domela, was different with each one of them. The same is true of work by Burgoyne Diller and of my work. Vantongerloo was not satisfied with his primary colors and used secondary ones, such as violet and green. Van Doesburg even made use of diagonals. All of them, however, had in common the use of pure colors ('pure color' was defined by Herbert Read as color used for its own sake, not for imitation); the 90 degree angle, use of neutral, nonassociative elements to achieve the universal (the universal, as used here, is best described as a Platonic idea or archetype of an ideal, harmonious relationship. Any association with a figurative image would interfere with this archetype of true reality). It may be said that when an artist does achieve the universal in a painting, he has nothing more to paint. Luckily, like Sisyphus, we can never quite achieve our goal. Accepting our human limitations, we may go on painting.

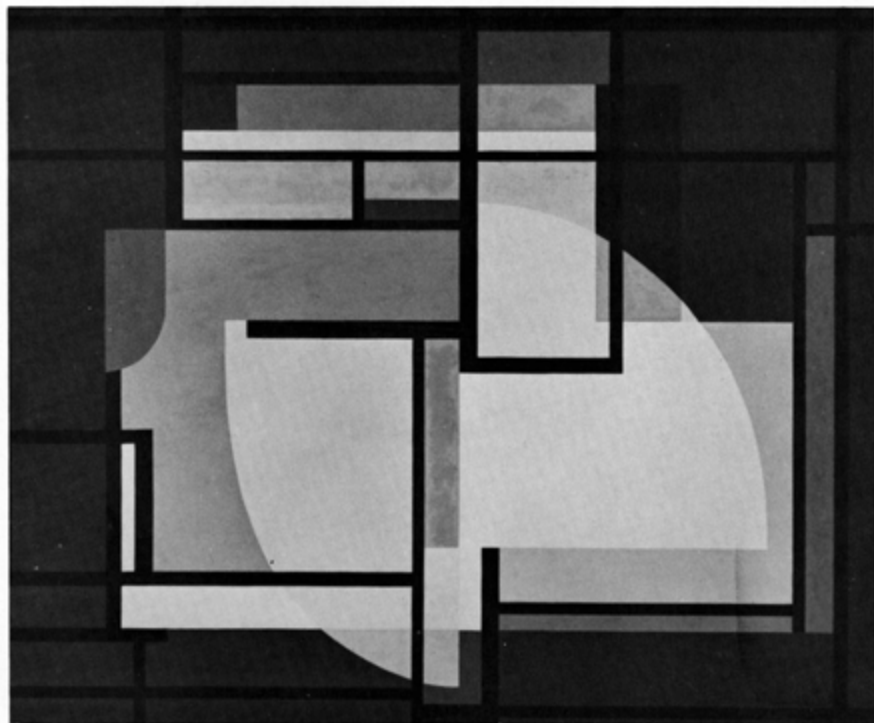


Complex Counter-Point, c. 1949, 52 x 43 3/4"
Courtesy Washburn Gallery

I was interested, however, in unusual formats in painting even before 1963. I liked to work on very narrow canvasses, on square ones and, since 1947, on diamond formats. A diamond format is obviously a square on one corner. The feeling of space, however, is much greater in a diamond area than in a square area of the same size. This is so because the vertical and horizontal measurements of such a diamond are larger than those of the square of the same size. One may object that vertical-horizontal Neoplastic painting on a diamond canvas creates triangular shapes. I do not think that this objection is important. Is it because the rectilinear tensions are more important than the resulting rectangles? For whatever reason, the viewer's eye seems to extend the triangles beyond the painting, without undermining the diamond format. The effect is still that of a rectangular relationship.

I also like to paint on tondos and ellipses. The tondo, or the area of a circle, creates special problems and advantages. A straight line or a straight edge of a color plane running across a tondo seems to be curving away from the edge of the tondo. As we look at the tondo with more concentration, the line appears straight again. As our eyes travel around a tondo painting, the straight edge again seems to be pushing away from the edge of the tondo. This effect may be either obvious or subtle, depending on the position of the edge or line in the tondo. I consider that this effect is useful in creating a feeling of a line or an edge under strong tension, like a bowstring. The effect in an ellipse is similar to the one in a tondo. This bowstring effect does not exist in Neoplastic painting of a rectangular format.

My work, since 1961, with the painted column came out of my easel paintings in which the thickness of the outer edge of the painting is also painted and is part of the painting. When these paintings are seen from the sides, the balance and composition undergo a change from the straight, frontal view because of the additional painting on the thickness of the outer edges. In my painted columns, each side is a self-contained unit. Any two adjacent sides, however, when seen together also form self-contained, complete compositions. The tops of the columns also compose with the sides, while still remaining complete compositions in themselves when seen alone. In addition to that, the columns should be seen either rotating on a stand or by a viewer walking around them. Then the sequence of design in motion may be read somewhat like an Oriental scroll, a sort of modern *kakemono*, or like an abstract motion picture.

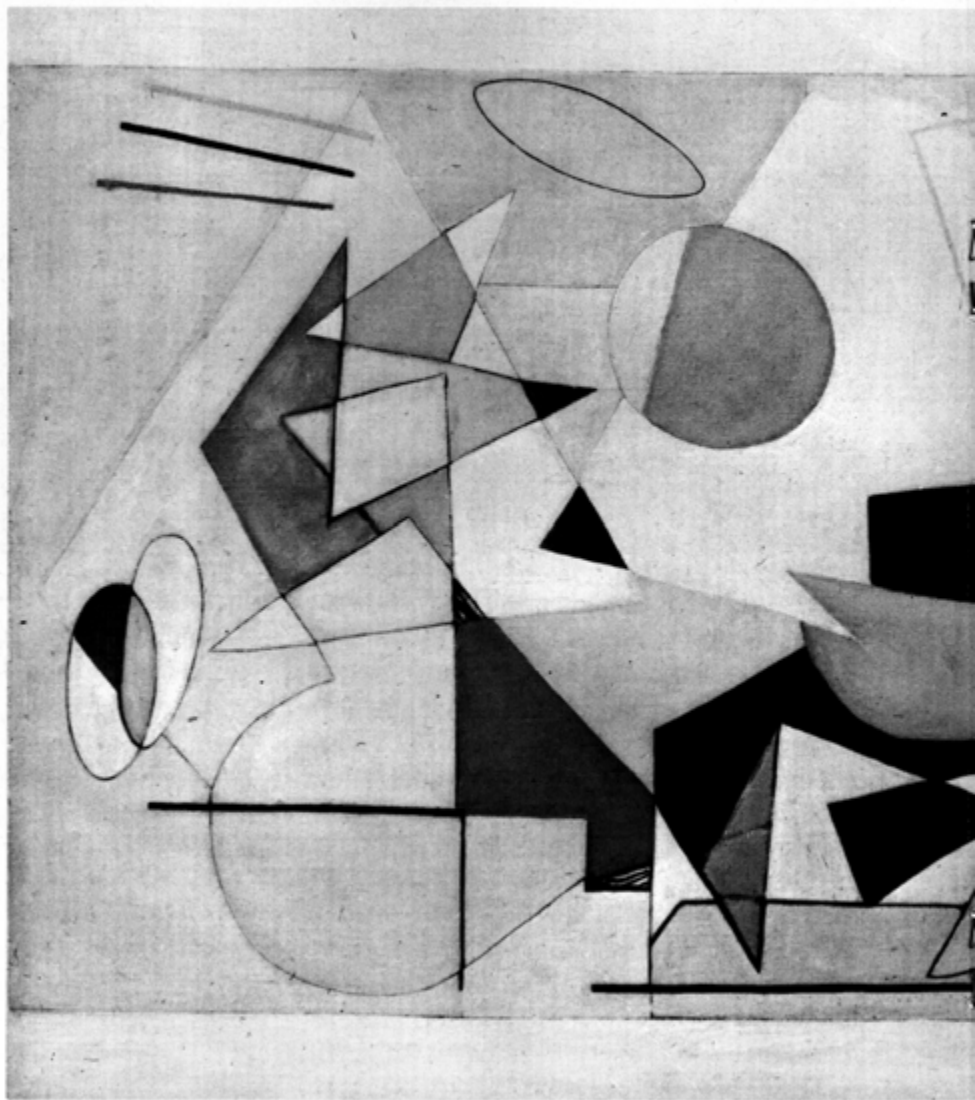


Somber Key, 1949, 34 x 42"

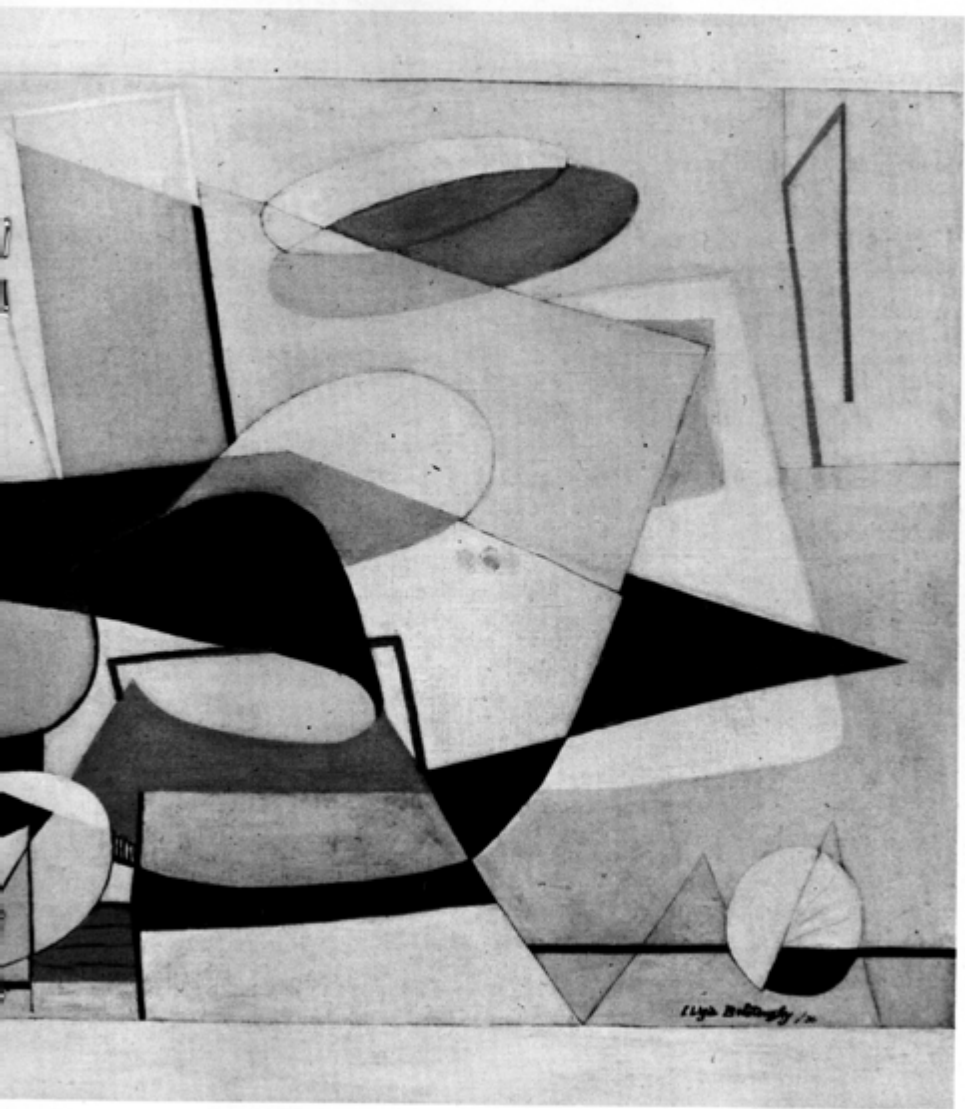
Courtesy Washburn Gallery

Neoplasticism is based on the idea of flat tensions; on a flat picture plane. Is it not then wrong to work in three dimensions and to introduce real motion? I do not think so. Neoplasticism is an architectural or, more properly, architectonic form of painting. The columns are an extension of painting into architecture, a natural development for the Neoplastic style. For me, the introduction of change with time enters just as naturally into Neoplasticism when the scale of the work is mural and architectural.

There are few artists using Neoplastic conceptions. It never was a popular style. The last quarter of a century has seen many well-publicized styles come and go. And obsolescence often sets in even before then. How very mild and decorative some of the recent, wild and dynamic paintings appear to us now. It is to the credit of the Neoplastic style that it is still developing, still shows vigor, and still does not show ravages of time that many styles show so often and so early. It takes a severe, self-imposed discipline to give up the familiar images, the associations, the impact, and the romanticism of other periods and styles.



Pre-Mural, 1936, 19½ x 34½"
Courtesy Washburn Gallery



Nowadays, when paintings torture the retina, when music gradually destroys the eardrum, there must, all the more, be a need for an art that searches for new ways to achieve harmony and equilibrium, for an art where, as Mondrian said: "inwardness is brought to its clearest definition, or externality is interiorized to the highest degree"; for an art that strives for the timelessness of the Platonic ideas.

To this art, I hope to continue making my contribution.

(Excerpts from: *On Neoplasticism and My Own Work: A Memoir* by Ilya Bolotowsky, *Leonardo*, Vol. 2, pp. 221-230, Pergamon Press, 1969. Printed in Great Britain. Edited for The Fine Arts Center, State University of New York at Stony Brook, by Andrew Bolotowsky, 4/5/85).

Mr. Bolotowsky urges all interested parties to read the complete memoir by Ilya Bolotowsky and the following books and articles:

Archives of American Art Journal, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1982

Current Biography, Vol. 36, No. 4, April, 1975, H.W. Wilson Co., NY

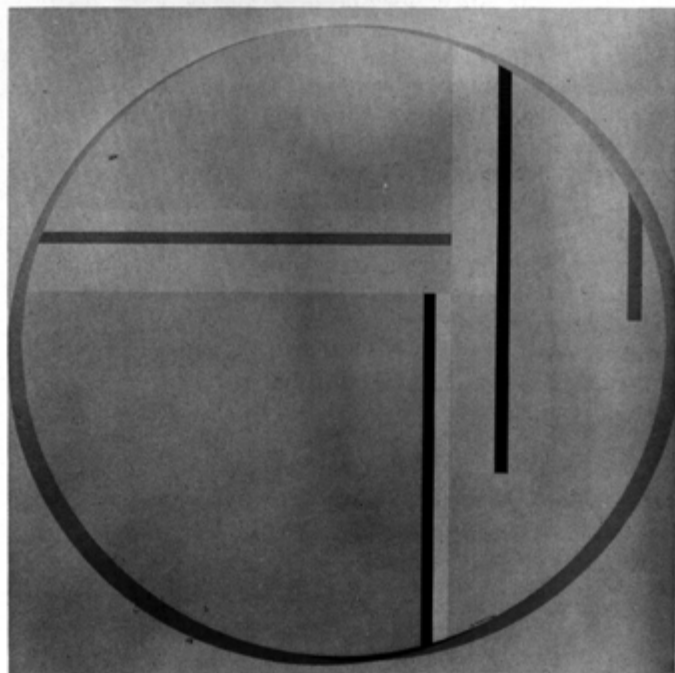
Squaring The Circle And Vice-Versa, by Lawrence Campbell, *Art News*, February, 1970

Going Abstract In The 30's by Susan C. Larsen, *Art in America*, Sept. - Oct., 1976

Abstraction And Empathy by Wilhelm Worringer, Meridian Books, 4th printing, 1980

Also recommended:

Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America 1927-1944, edited by John R. Lane and Susan C. Larsen; entry by Deborah M. Rosenthal, pp. 51-55; Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in association with Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, New York, 1983.



Light Yellow Tondo, 1981, 59" diameter

Courtesy Washburn Gallery

ILYA BOLOTOWSKY

Born Petrograd, Russia, 1907

Died New York City, 1981

SELECTED ONE-PERSON EXHIBITIONS

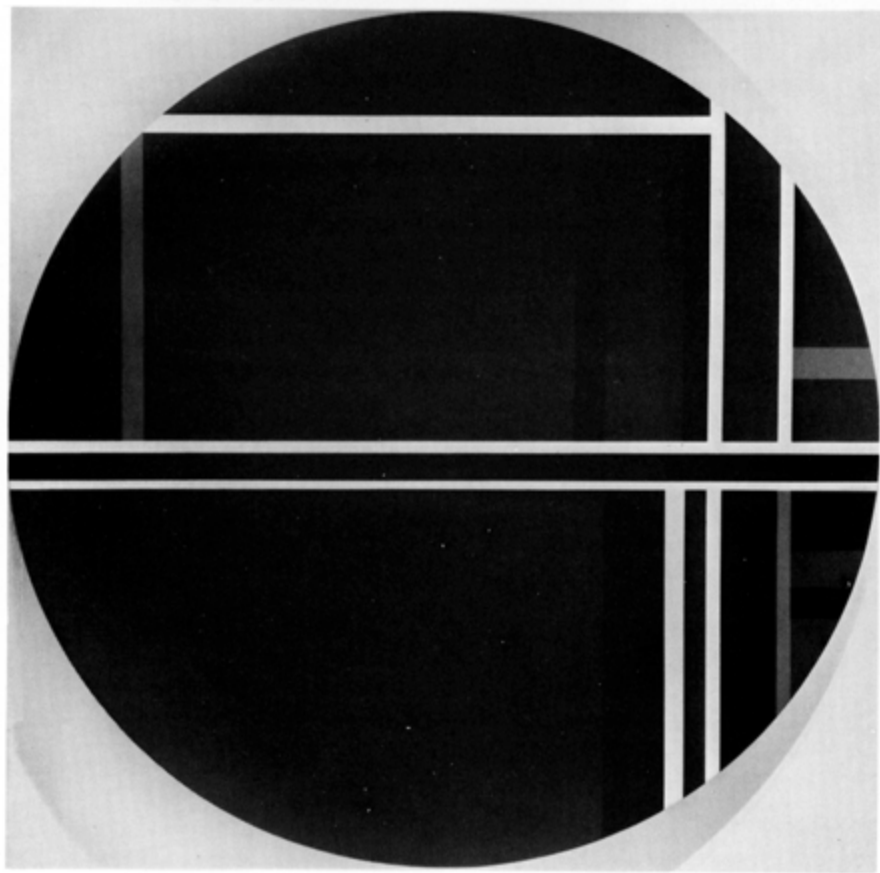
- 1930 G.R.D. Studios, New York
1946 New Art Circle, J.B. Neumann, New York
1949 Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York
1950 Rose Fried Gallery, New York
1952 New Art Circle, J.B. Neumann, New York
1954 Grace Borgenicht Gallery, New York (also 1956, 1958, 1959, 1961, 1963, 1966, 1968, 1970, 1974, 1976, 1978, 1980)
1960 State University College of Education, New Paltz, New York
1965 Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York
1970 *Ilya Bolotowsky Paintings and Columns*, travelling to Newport Harbor Art Museum, Balboa, California, University of Colorado, Boulder, University Art Museum of New Mexico, Albuquerque, The University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City
1973 *Recent Serigraphs*, Wichita Art Museum, Kansas
1974 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, *Ilya Bolotowsky*, travelled to the National Collection, Washington, D.C.
1980 *Ilya Bolotowsky, WPA Murals: Paintings From 1935 to 1945*, Washburn Gallery, New York
1981 Salt Lake Art Center, Utah
1982 Yares Gallery, Scottsdale, Arizona
1983 *Memorial*, Washburn Gallery, New York
1983 *Bolotowsky And His Circle*, New York University Grey Art Gallery
1984 *Five Decades*, Washburn Gallery, New York
1984 *Il Punto Blu* Gallery, Southampton, New York
1984 River Gallery, Irvington-on-Hudson, New York
1984 Pembroke Gallery, Houston, Texas

MURALS

- 1936 Williamsburg Housing Project, New York
1939 Hall of Medical Science, World's Fair, New York
1941 Hospital of Chronic Diseases, New York
1941 Theodore Roosevelt High School, New York (mosaic)
1946 Phillips Steel Co., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
1963 Cinema I, New York
1968 Southampton College, New York
1973 North Central Bronx Hospital, New York
1978 Social Securities Service Building, Chicago, Illinois
1979 Port Authority Ship Terminal, New York (tile)
1981 Houston Intercontinental Airport, Terminal C, Houston, Texas
(Reconstruction of World's Fair Mural)

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY; Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT; Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, PA; Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA; Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH; Robert Hull Fleming Museum, Burlington, VT; Gotheborg Museum, Gotheborg, Sweden; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN; University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City, IA; Jerusalem Museum, Jerusalem, Israel; Lyman Alyn Museum, New London, CT; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Michener Art Museum, University of Texas, Austin, TX; University of Minnesota, Duluth, MN; Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, NY; Musee d'Art Moderne, Ceret, France; Museum of Fine Arts, Calcutta, India; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.; Newark Museum Association, Newark, NJ; New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, NJ; University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, NC; Oklahoma Art Center, Oklahoma City, OK; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA; Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.; Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI; Edward Root Collection, Utica, NY; Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA; Salt Lake City Art Center, Salt Lake City, UT; San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, CA; Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, NB; Slater Memorial Museum, Norwich, CT; Societe Anonyme, Yale University, New Haven, CT; J.B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY; The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH; Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; and Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.



Open Space Blue Tondo, 1981, 59" diameter

Courtesy Washburn Gallery

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

1. *Pre-Mural*, 1936
Oil on canvas
19½" x 34½"
2. *WPA Mural, Williamsburg Housing Project*, 1936 & 1980
Liquitex on canvas
6' 10" x 17'
3. *Deep Green*, 1937
Oil on canvas
26" x 34"
4. *Cobalt Violet*, 1938
Oil on canvas
30" x 40"
5. *Abstraction in Pink*, 1939
Oil and gesso on masonite
30" x 27"
6. *Untitled*, c. 1945
Oil on canvas
28" x 38"
7. *Complex Counterpoint*, c. 1949
Oil on canvas mounted on honeycomb panel
52" x 43¾"
8. *Somber Key*, 1949
Oil on canvas
34" x 42"
9. *Architectural Counterpoint*, 1950
Oil on canvas
34" x 60"
10. *Vertical Blue*, 1976
Acrylic on canvas
96" x 48"
11. *Abstraction in Three Reds*, 1980
Acrylic on canvas
48" x 96"
12. *Blue Square with Red, Black and White*, 1980
Acrylic on canvas
8' x 8'
13. *Light Yellow Tondo*, 1981
Acrylic on canvas
Diameter: 59"
14. *Open Space Blue Tondo*, 1981
Acrylic on canvas
Diameter: 59"
15. *Rectangle with Red, Yellow and Blue*, 1981
Acrylic on canvas
64" x 48"
16. *Untitled Diamond (Neoplastic Diamond with Primary Colors)*, 1981
Acrylic on canvas
60" x 60", 86" x 86" point to point
17. *Unfinished Tondo*, 1981
Charcoal on primed linen
12' high
18. *Column 9A*, 1981-1984
Acrylic on stainless steel, edition of three
9' x 9½" x 9½"

All works courtesy Washburn Gallery, New York

PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS AT THE ART GALLERY

- 1975** FACULTY EXHIBITION
- 1976** MICHELLE STUART
RECENT DRAWINGS (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS EXHIBITION)
SALVATORE ROMANO
- 1977** MEL PEKARSKY
JUDITH BERNSTEIN
HERBERT BAYER (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS EXHIBITION)
- 1978** LEON GOLUB
WOMEN ARTISTS FROM NEW YORK
JANET FISH
ROSEMARY MAYER
THE SISTER CHAPEL
- 1979** SHIRLEY GORELICK
ALAN SONFIST
HOWARDENA PINDELL
ROY LICHTENSTEIN
- 1980** BENNY ANDREWS
ALEX KATZ
EIGHT FROM NEW YORK
ARTISTS FROM QUEENS
OTTO PIENE
STONY BROOK 11, THE STUDIO FACULTY
- 1981** ALICE NEEL
55 MERCER: 10 SCULPTORS
JOHN LITTLE
IRA JOEL HABER
LEON POLK SMITH
- 1982** FOUR SCULPTORS
CECILE ABISH
JACK YOUNGERMAN
ALAN SHIELDS
THE STONY BROOK ALUMNI INVITATIONAL
ANN McCOY
- 1983** THE WAR SHOW
CERAMIC DIRECTIONS: A CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW
CINDY SHERMAN
THE FACULTY SHOW
- 1984** BERNARD APTEKAR: ART AND POLITICS
ERIC STALLER: LIGHT YEARS
NORMAN BLUHM: SEVEN FROM THE SEVENTIES
EDWARD COUNTEY 1921-1984
CARL ANDRE: SCULPTURE
- 1985** LEWIS HINE IN EUROPE: 1918-1919
FRANCESC TORRES: PATHS OF GLORY

Director RHONDA COOPER

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK

THE FINE ARTS CENTER



art gallery

THE FINE ARTS CENTER ART GALLERY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK