

Noland Flares

March 6 – April 25, 2020

540 West 25th Street

New York

Opening Reception:

Thursday, March 5

6–8 PM

Kenneth Noland, *Flares: Away*, 1991, acrylic on canvas on panel,
86-1/4" x 31" (219.1 cm x 78.7 cm) © The Kenneth Noland
Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



New York — Pace Gallery is pleased to present *Noland Flares*, an exhibition of Kenneth Noland’s Flare series—paintings rarely seen together since their creation in the early 1990s. The exhibition encompasses approximately fifteen works and will take place on the third floor of Pace Gallery’s new building at 540 West 25th Street.

In the late 1950s, Noland broke with Abstract Expressionism’s gestural aesthetic. Staining unprimed canvas with acrylic, he produced paintings with stark geometric shapes and bold color contrasts, becoming one of the pioneers of Color Field painting and the Washington Color School. Groundbreaking series, such as his Circle or Chevron works, were systematic yet intuitive investigations of painting’s visual elements, especially color and shape. Eminent critics and artists soon lauded Noland’s work, with Donald Judd affirming in 1965, “by now Kenneth Noland’s salience isn’t debatable; he’s one of the best painters.”

Noland’s command over his medium only grew in the following decades. So did his ingenuity. “I believe in working and not . . . repeating that way of working as an image or as a style,” he stated, stressing, “It’s the learning, it’s the seeing something new evolve . . . out of various trial and error methods, fooling with stuff and taking chances on it not working.” Noland had adopted this hands-on, empirical approach from his close friend David Smith who in Noland’s eyes was relentlessly “involved in the nature of work.” The Flares are the outcome of this rigorous and daring lifelong exploration of painting’s many possibilities.

One of the Flares’ chief innovations resides in their colorful and translucent plexiglass strips. Wedged between the irregularly shaped panels of each work, these glossy bands activate a complex interplay among color, materials and form. To Noland, the Flares were “constructed pictures” with “separate component parts.” This assembling

makes them related to both collage and sculpture, generating new possibilities. Realizing that color was inherent to plexiglass, Noland stated, “I can now make up, find different kinds of materials to use that I can assimilate as color—pieces of color.” He, in fact, further enhanced the objecthood of the Flares by painting their sides in colors that do not match their frontal surfaces. These edges, in turn, require that the works be viewed as three-dimensional objects.

Noland was attracted to the transparency of plexiglass, which, according to him, amplified the emotional resonance and material presence of color. “The slight difference of transparency in colors can be the difference of a thousand pounds of actual material,” he observed, “a matte color and a shiny, transparent color are emotionally different. . . . there’s an expressive difference you can get [with transparency] that gives you more expressive range.” In *Grace Black* (1991/1995), for example, austere black panels are set ablaze by the glowing red of the work’s plexiglass strips. The work therefore oscillates between sobriety and vivacity—a capacious affective scale. Though Noland subsequently reworked some of his Flares in his Vermont studio, they were created while he resided in Santa Barbara, where nature, specifically the changing light and colors of the landscape, continuously inspired him, according to William Agee. In a horizontal work such as *Rise and Fall* (1991), predominantly warm hues, punctured by a vanishing sliver of blue plexiglass, evoke the atmospheric effects of the sky at sunset. With its title suggesting the arc of the sun, *Rise and Fall* thus delivers the full chromatic poignancy of the Pacific coast at dusk.

Noland’s interest in the triangulation between color, materials, and form can be traced back to his education at Black Mountain College, located in his hometown of Asheville, North Carolina. There his teacher Josef Albers experimented with glass and other nontraditional materials to examine what he called *matière*, that is, “how a substance looks” under different conditions. Noland’s collaboration with architect I.M. Pei was another important precedent. For the Weisner Building at MIT, they created in 1985 a mural integrating art and architecture. In this work as with the Flares, the recesses between flat planes are filled with color. Consequently, a dynamic, optical relationship links surface and edge. “The idea of using the interstices kind of jelled around that idea [of the MIT mural],” Noland recollected, “And I saw the possibility also of . . . hav[ing] the effect be that . . . the eye would be moved along by differences in color into various kinds of playful effects.” In this manner, the Flare series engages viewers in a prolonged game of looking—a journey into the artist’s radical reconfiguration of painting.

“[T]he Flares show Noland’s deliberative process at its zenith because of the rich physical particularity of each work in the series. Intriguing details abound—the precise point where two parallel curves come together, the way that a Plexiglas strip uses that point to jump from one panel to another, Noland’s ever-fascinating combinations of color encompassing both paint and Plexiglas, and much more.”—Jeffrey Katzin

Kenneth Noland (b. 1924, Asheville, North Carolina; d. 2010, Port Clyde, Maine) attended Black Mountain College in the mid-1940s after serving in the US Air Force during World War II. There he learned about Neoplasticism, Bauhaus theories, and the work of Paul Klee, thus developing an early interest in the emotional effects of color

and geometric forms. In the 1950s, while living in Washington, D.C., Noland frequently traveled to New York to meet with Clement Greenberg, who introduced him to Abstract Expressionism as well as the stained paintings of Helen Frankenthaler. These encounters sparked an experimental period, during which Noland developed a new genre of abstraction known as Color-field. His exploration of line, color and shape unfolds across discrete series, from his Circle and Chevron paintings to his horizontal bands and shaped canvases. In 1977, a major traveling retrospective of the artist's work was presented by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Memorial retrospectives of his work were presented in 2010 by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Pace is a leading contemporary art gallery representing many of the most significant international artists and estates of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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Pace advances this mission through its dynamic global program, comprising ambitious exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, performances and interdisciplinary projects through Pace Live, and curatorial research and writing. Today, Pace has seven locations worldwide: two galleries in New York—including its newly opened headquarters at 540 West 25th Street, and an adjacent 8,000 sq. ft. exhibition space at 510 West 25th Street—as well as galleries in Palo Alto, London, Geneva, Hong Kong, and Seoul.

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