

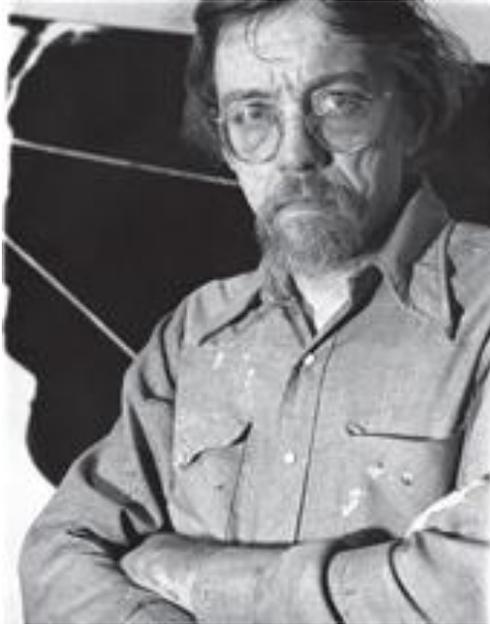
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Jack Roth

(American Painter, 1924-2004)



Although he was fully two decades younger than some of the elder statesmen of the Abstract Expressionist movement, Jack Roth exhibited alongside Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Philip Guston, William Bazotes and others while still in his twenties. Roth was a true polymath, pursuing interests in chemistry, literature, music, mathematics and Zen Buddhism in addition to painting. Despite the rarified company he kept and his many accomplishments, Jack Roth's contributions to 20th century modernist painting have been largely overlooked until fairly recently. Rachel Roth, his wife of fifty years, remembered him this way: "Jack was the hardest working person I've ever known. I've never said this before, but I think he was a genius, and I don't say that lightly!"

Rodney Jack Roth was born in Brockway, Pennsylvania, in 1927. He was a good student and at the age of 16 won a scholarship to attend Penn State University. His studies were initially centered on chemistry but he eventually began to expand his focus to encompass philosophy, literature, history and art. Roth entered the army towards the end of World War II and served stateside in a variety of capacities that took him from Japanese language school in Minnesota to the Adjutant General's office at the Pentagon. Following his discharge in 1948 he moved to Big Sur where he began to explore his interests in painting and sculpture and played chess with his friend Henry Miller.

Roth moved to San Francisco in 1949 and enrolled in the California School of Fine Arts where he studied under Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, and Richard Diebenkorn. He re-enrolled at Penn State in 1951 and earned his Bachelor's in chemistry, an achievement later followed by a Master of Fine Arts from the State University of Iowa in 1952, and a PhD in mathematics from Duke University in 1962.

In 1954, shortly after he relocated to New York, Roth's paintings were included in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's exhibition "Younger American Painters" alongside many of the leading artists of the Abstract Expressionist group. This important exhibition traveled to major art

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museums throughout the US, serving as the nation's primary introduction to this new American-born movement.

Roth's work continued to evolve concurrent with the vanguard of postwar American art, from Abstract Expressionism through Pop, and ultimately into Color Field abstraction. His paintings of the 1970's and 80's are crisp and boldly graphic, emphasizing expanses of saturated color over the more dense and calligraphic compositions of his earlier period. In 1978 Knoedler and Co. in New York began their representation of Roth's work, placing him in a prestigious stable of artists that included Alexander Calder, Frank Stella, David Smith and Robert Motherwell. Roth was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for painting the following year and continued on with his academic career, teaching mathematics at colleges in Kentucky, Florida and New Jersey. Of his unique career path Roth stated, "I am looking for a mathematical explanation of such art, an explanation which I hope will clarify the 'subject of the artist'... The subject of art is reality and the act of painting is a search for reality; a search for understanding." His works are held in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, Duke University, the North Carolina Museum of Art, and the University of Kentucky.