

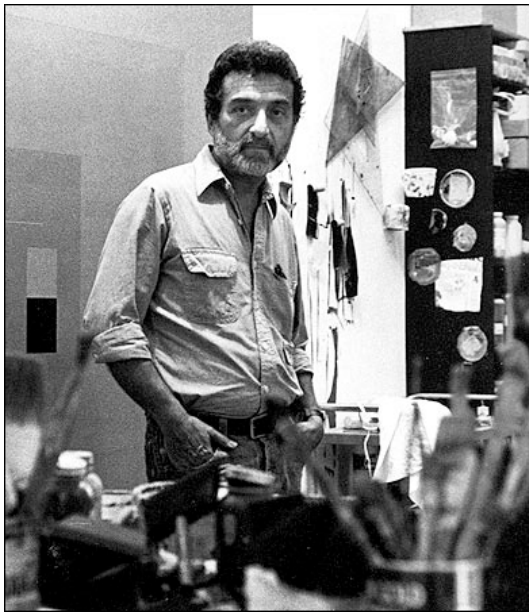
PEYTON WRIGHT

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Robert Slutzky

(American Painter, 1929-2005)



"...the longer you look, the more you find; the more you find, the longer you look. It's a nice reverse equation."

Painting is perceptual music. It has to do with the retina. In music you need an ear for sound. In painting you need an eye for color within geometry."

- Robert Slutzky

A painter, educator, and architectural theorist dedicated to exploring the connections between painting and architecture, Robert Slutzky focused on how space was created in architecture and implied in painting. He believed that to understand either discipline, you had to understand both.

Anthony Vidler, dean at Cooper Union, said: "Slutzky was a natural person to teach art and concepts of color and concepts of space to architects, because he could read them in painting."

Robert Slutzky was born on November 27, 1929, in Brooklyn and earned a certificate of art in 1951 from Cooper Union, subsequently studying with Josef Albers at Yale University, where he earned an M.F.A. in 1954. His first teaching job was at the University of Texas, where he co-authored a book of essays, *Transparency*, with Colin Rowe. The essays, published in 1997, were highly critical of the International Style because of its sterile, un-subtle qualities and challenged readers to incorporate elements of earlier styles such as Renaissance and Classical into modern architecture.

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He later taught at Cornell University and the Pratt Institute. From 1968 to 1990, he taught at his alma mater, Cooper Union, then taught in the department of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania from 1990 to 2005, where he served as the chair. He received the G. Holmes Perkins Award for Distinguished Teaching in 2001.

Keenly interested in questions of visual perception and poetics, Slutzky was intimately concerned with color and form, and with the contrapuntal, almost musical, relation between the two. He also focused on the relationship between proportion and placement.

"I regard painting as being as hermetic as music," he said in an interview with Emmanuel J. Petit.

"Just as music is governed by its own compositional rules and not beholden to representation, so painting should be able to enjoy an absolute dissociation from the representational world. The latter is expressed through the illusion of foreground, middle ground, and background, the world of perspectival space. By excluding representation, an illusion of another kind becomes possible, which is the illusion of color and shape. This is a unique freedom that painting can enjoy; it is painting's "musicality." Just as much as sound needs time to evolve into a musical structure, so painting needs time as well, 'aesthetic time.' Aesthetic time is the time that is needed to activate different spatial constructs, and that is extendable by the viewer. I want the viewer to unravel the complexity of a painterly structure, and at the same time I want to give a thematically pronounced meaning to that structure."

His abstract compositions of vividly colored squares, grids and lines arranged in perfect geometric balance were a kind of two-dimensional architecture, reflecting the influence of Mondrian and the Bauhaus painter Josef Albers.

Reviewing an exhibition of Mr. Slutzky's work in *The New York Times* in 1975, Hilton Kramer wrote: "Mr. Slutzky works within the strict pictorial conventions of geometrical abstraction, which, in his hands, is a medium of lyric improvisation. Everything here depends on proportion and placement, on the weight and intensity of color, and thus on delicacy of feeling."

His works have been exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and are in the collections of the Whitney Museum and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, among others.