

Ray Parker
Paintings 1958-1971
Color into Drawing

HAGGERTY MUSEUM OF ART
MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

Ray Parker Paintings 1958-1971: Color into Drawing
July 20 - October 8, 2006
Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art
Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

© 2006 Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. All rights reserved in all countries. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without the prior written permission of the author and publisher.

Catalogue design and layout: Jerome Fortier

Catalogue printing: Special Editions Inc., Hartland, Wisconsin

Cover Image: *Untitled*, 1970, oil on canvas, 70 x 90 in., courtesy of

Washburn Gallery 24(R)-12(a)8(y)-2ined th6red or trrata224(ofion ofsess24(ofu)02(W)16(ir)-28:sDer)o3iF(a)kv

W6 4(msd la)8(y)10(out: Jer)10(6)4(talogu)-4(1-12a .273 TD(P))14(ouis S.)36(W)164 g and rWir:(e Hagob E12(s))-4(ick and B)-4-1236 .273 TD(P))14(ouis S.)36(W)16

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Haggerty Museum of Art is pleased to present the exhibition *Ray Parker Paintings 1958-1971: Color into Drawing*. This exhibition will serve to renew interest in the works of Ray Parker, a seminal figure among the abstract artists of the mid-twentieth century. His explorations with color and shape augment the efforts of color field and abstract expressionist artists.

This exhibition is made possible with the generous cooperation of the family of Ray Parker, and Joan and Brian Washburn of the Joan Washburn Gallery, New York. The Washburns and Parkers played an integral role in developing the exhibition by providing information on the artist, and on individual paintings and drawings. The planning of the exhibition and production of the catalogue were greatly aided by the expertise of William Agee, Professor of Art History at Hunter College, New York who contributed a scholarly essay to the catalogue.

The exhibition and related programming received the support of funding from the Martha and Ray Smith, Jr. Endowment Fund, the Family of Ray Parker, Louis S. Winter and the Joan Washburn Gallery.

Tab → C ↵ ↵

2

I. d. c.

*Curtis L. Carter, Director of the Haggerty Museum of Art,
Marquette University*

5

R. Pa → Pa ↵ 1958 1971: C . . . D a ↵
*William C. Agee, Evelyn Kranes Kossak Professor of Art History,
Hunter College, New York*

9

W. . . . b.

10

P a ↵

31

A . . . B. ↵ a . .



Ray Parker, 1974

1958-1971: C

W a C.A. E K a K a P. A H H C N Y

From 1958 to 1965 Ray Parker (1922-1990) made some of the best paintings done by any artist after 1950. He called them the Simple Paintings. Seen now, they rearm Parker as one of the most important artists of the period. Composed of but a few shapes—sometimes only one, sometimes as many as five—they are “simple” in name only, for neither their formation, their arrangement, their mood and feel, nor their effect is simple. The more we engage them, the more we open ourselves to their magical presence, the more complex and evocative they become.

The Simple Paintings were widely acclaimed when Parker first showed them, but for years afterward they were largely invisible, part of a hidden history of painting in the later 1950s, one that we are recovering only now, through a process more like classical archaeology than modern art history. The recovery of these lost treasures of American art began with the memorial show held in 1990 at Hunter College, where Parker had taught for many years. More recent exhibitions at the Joan Washburn Gallery in New York have explored the depth and variety that he developed in both larger and smaller formats. The current exhibition at the Haggerty Art Museum allows us to see these glorious paintings once more, now in the context of his later paintings of the 1960s and 1970s. In these works Parker moved from a process of formation of color shapes to fields of intense color activated by pure and free drawing.

The Simple Paintings are truly monumental: weighty, dense, literal, almost human in the presence of their shapes. As Parker later recalled, “I found shapes that floated, rested heavily, hung, nudged, bumped, touched, hovered in vast voids of separation, were many, were few, isolated, single, alone.” He further described them as “quiescent, bound by the gravity that makes bodies in orbit hang in a stillness where the slowest movement marks the space from one to another.”¹ They recall Mark Rothko’s declaration that his shapes were like actors in a drama, but while

there are clear analogies, the Simple Paintings are of this world, here, with us, earthy, more like Robert Motherwell’s works than Rothko’s ethereal paintings. This is why the dimensions of even the largest paintings do not exceed six or seven feet, the space defined by the outstretched arms of a man—the oldest, dating to Leonardo’s Vitruvian man, and the most human measurement. It is why Parker could once remark that he felt “you could go up and put your arms around one of them.”

These paintings have a hard-won singularity, for they emerged from Parker’s earlier art only after he had been an accomplished painter for more than ten years. (It is worth noting that his earlier work had been recognized in 1950, when he was included in a new talent exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.) Parker had developed his gift for color—the true medium of his art—in the “Stroke” paintings, which consisted of multiple painterly patches of abstract color related to the eliding color passages in Paul Cézanne’s late landscapes, and to the open touches of brilliant color in Henri Matisse’s Fauve works. Parker recalled that in front of one of these works his friend the painter Rollin Crampton held up fingers and thumbs to frame just two strokes, commenting, “Wouldn’t this be a beautiful painting?” The path was in fact more complex, for the shapes of Motherwell, as well as those of Rothko, hinted at Parker’s direction, but the artist felt that Crampton had predicted the course of his art, as well as that of much art of the later 1950s and the 1960s.

There is much truth in this, for in the later 1950s a generation of artists that included Parker, Kenneth Noland, Al Held, Jack Youngerman, and Frank Stella pushed toward a more distilled and clarified type of painting, moving beyond what they had felt had become the overworked surfaces and dulled color of much later Abstract Expressionism. The Simple Paintings were at the forefront of this drive. These younger artists retained the scale, immediacy, and power of Abstract Expressionism, which they held

in high esteem, but they sought to reinvigorate it, feeling that it had become too predictable, rhetorical, and even academic. The Simple Paintings have the brushed surfaces and rough edges associated with Abstract Expressionism, but in more focused, clearly defined, and articulated forms that look forward to the lean geometries and minimalist impulses of much art of the 1960s. This new drive dictated a greater reliance on color, which was restored to its full primacy after years in a lesser role in gestural abstraction. Parker later recalled that the impetus for the Simple Paintings had been the desire “to cut out everything else but pigment on ground and let color tell the whole story.” From there his forms “grew and spread, gradually becoming bigger or smaller, rounder or more square, more ragged or else exact and regular in their edges, all according to the need of the color surface to make itself dense enough and real,” as he described it.² Thus, the Simple Paintings both announced and participated in what we know as the color field painting of the 1960s, which had actually come to fruition in the later 1950s.

Parker’s working method, steeped in Abstract Expressionist practice, was improvisational and confrontational. He tacked bare canvas to the wall, keeping the ground neutral with only a priming coat to maintain and heighten the clarity of the color shapes. There was no preconceived plan or preliminary sketch. He often used rags to apply the paint, allowing the color to spread to its “fullness of volume,” as he termed it, letting it respond to the pressure of his hand, recording the nuances of touch and feeling, change and movement, like a psychic seismograph. He let the materials dictate his moves, exploring and discovering as he went, working out of the beauty of the picture as you see it, a method with a long tradition in American art that can be traced as far back as Alfred Stieglitz in the first years of the twentieth century as the basis for a truly modern process of making art. The choice of color was wide open and unpremeditated; almost any color would do. Hues range from light grays to deep, rich blues to brilliant, luminous reds. The distinctiveness of a color—its unique identity, not its interaction with other colors—was the important factor. Fairchild Porter’s description of de Kooning’s art—“Colors are not bright, but intensely themselves, as if each color

explosive effect on countless artists. Here too color told the whole story, with Matisse virtually inventing a new medium for its application. He cut directly into colored paper with scissors, making pure, discrete color shapes, which he then arranged over a pure field, a simple and direct process with a new and unmatched expressive and emotive intensity. Matisse's cutouts offered a potent way out of what was increasingly seen as the overworked surfaces and clogged colors of later Abstract Expressionism, a way to a new clarity and directness of the picture.

Also of the greatest importance to American painting was the acquisition by the Museum of Modern Art in 1949 of Matisse's seminal *Red Studio*, of 1911, one of the most influential paintings of the twentieth century. Its large-scale field of color, the intense red enveloping and carrying the entire surface, demonstrated the means by which artists could move into new and abstract realms of color in a previously unknown size and scale. It was the painting that enabled Rothko, for example, to complete the final move into the floating rectangles of color that marked his mature style. Thereafter, the challenge of making a large-scale, all-red painting became a signal call to artists, answered by, among others, Barnett Newman in *Vir Heroicus Sublimus*



B

All works courtesy of Washburn Gallery, New York unless otherwise noted.

1. *Untitled*, 1958
Oil on canvas
36 x 33 in.
2. *For Denise*, 1959
Oil on canvas
69 x 50 in.
3. *Love Denise, Glad you like it*, 1960
Oil on canvas
81 x 79 in.
4. *Untitled*, 1961
Oil on canvas
69 x 64 in.
5. *Untitled*, n.d. ca 1962
Oil on canvas
69 x 64 in.
6. *Untitled*, 1962
Oil on canvas
49 x 46 in.
7. *For Kate / Kate for your Birthday*, 1963
Oil on canvas
71 x 87 in.
8. *Untitled*, 1965
Oil on canvas
69 x 68 in.
9. *Untitled*, 1968
Oil on canvas
90 x 110 in.
10. *Untitled*, 1968
Oil on canvas
94 x 108 in.
11. *Untitled*, 1968
Oil on canvas
108 x 95 in.
12. *Untitled*, 1969
Oil on canvas
84 x 60 in.
Courtesy of Norma and Marvin S. Rappaport
13. *Untitled*, 1968
Oil on canvas
94 x 108 in.
14. *Untitled*, 1970
Oil on canvas
91 x 115 in.
15. *Untitled*, 1970
Oil on canvas
89 x 60 in.
16. *Untitled*, 1970
Oil on canvas
70 x 90 in.
17. *Untitled*, 1971
Oil on canvas
60 x 84 in.
18. *Student Notebook Page*, c. 1945
Graphite on paper
11 x 8 ½ in.
19. *Untitled*, c. 1955
Ink on paper
8 ½ x 11 in.
20. *Untitled*, c. 1955
Graphite on paper
11 x 8 ½ in.
21. *Untitled*, c. 1955
Graphite on paper
8 ½ x 11 in.
22. *Untitled*, c. 1955
Graphite on paper
11 x 8 ½ in.
23. *Untitled*, c. 1955
Graphite on paper
11 x 8 ½ in.
24. *Untitled*, c. 1968
Graphite on paper
8 x 9 in.
25. *Untitled*, c. 1968
Graphite on paper
8 x 9 in.

1. *Untitled*, 1958
Oil on canvas
36 x 33 in.

-
2. *For Denise*, 1959
Oil on canvas
69 x 50 in.

3. *Love Denise, Glad you like it*, 1960
Oil on canvas
81 x 79 in.

4. *Untitled*, 1961
Oil on canvas
69 x 64 in.

6. *Untitled*, 1962
Oil on canvas
49 x 46 in.

7. *For Kate / Kate for your Birthday*, 1963
Oil on canvas
71 x 87 in.

8. *Untitled*, 1965
Oil on canvas
69 x 68 in.

9. *Untitled*, 1968
Oil on canvas
90 x 110 in.

10. *Untitled*, 1968
Oil on canvas
94 x 108 in.

11. *Untitled*, 1968
Oil on canvas
108 x 95 in.

12. *Untitled*, 1969
Oil on canvas
84 x 60 in.
Courtesy of Norma and Marvin S. Rappaport

13. *Untitled*, 1968
Oil on canvas
94 x 108 in.

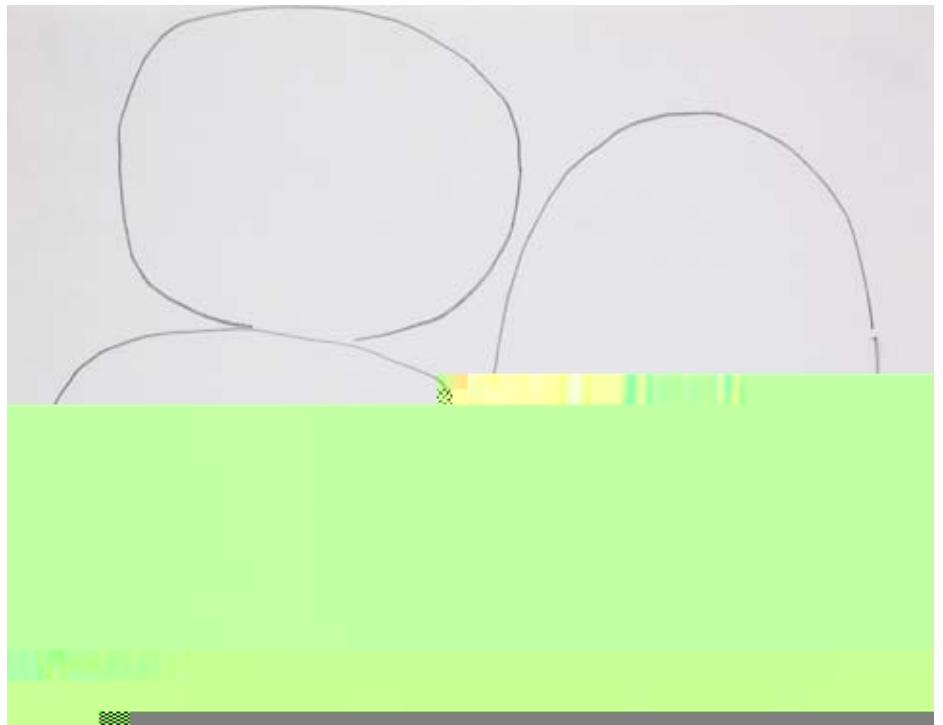
14. *Untitled*, 1970
Oil on canvas
91 x 115 in.

15. *Untitled*, 1970
Oil on canvas
89 x 60 in.

16. *Untitled*, 1970
Oil on canvas
70 x 90 in.

17. *Untitled*, 1971
Oil on canvas
60 x 84 in.

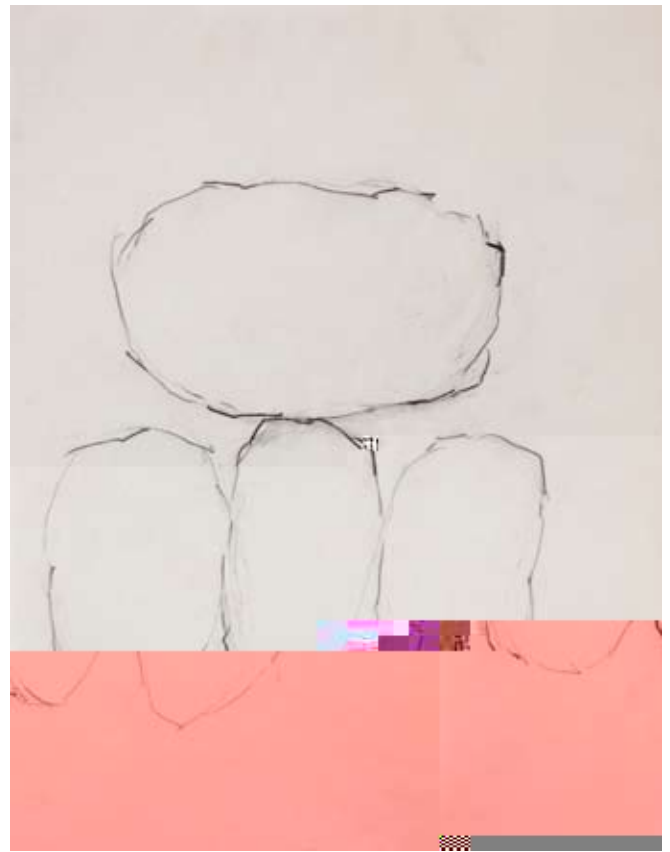
18. *Student Notebook Page*, c. 1945
Graphite on paper
11 x 8 1/2 in.



21. *Untitled*, c. 1955
Ink on paper
8 1/2 x 11 in.



22. *Untitled*, c. 1955
Graphite on paper
11 x 8 1/2 in.



23. *Untitled*, c. 1955
Graphite on paper
11 x 8 1/2 in.



24. *Untitled*, c. 1968
Graphite on paper
8 x 9 in.



25. *Untitled*, c. 1968
Graphite on paper
8 x 9 in.

A A I

B August 22, 1922, Beresford, South Dakota

D d April 14, 1990, New York, New York

Ed ca. BA, 1946 University of Iowa;
MFA, 1948, University of Iowa

A A I

1949 Rochester Art Center, Rochester

1950

Colombia; Museo de Arte de Sao Paulo, Brazil; Museo de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas, Venezuela; Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City, Mexico

1976 "Abstract Expressionists and Imagists: A Retrospective View," The University of Texas, Austin, TX

"Drawing Today in New York," sponsored by Rice University, Houston, TX

"Artists and East Hampton, A 100-Year Perspective," Guild Hall, East Hampton

1977 "New in the '70s," University Art Museum, Austin, TX

"A Miscellany of the 1960s," Susan Caldwell Gallery, New York

1978 "New York, The State of Art, The New York School," State Museum, Albany

1979 "Art in America After World War II, " The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

1984 "Artists at Hunter 1950-1965," Hunter College Art Galleries, New York

"Then and Now," Elaine Benson Gallery, Bridgehampton

1986 "After Matisse," The Queens Museum, Flushing
Other venues: Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA; ~~Southampton~~

P E M C 4 0 T d

Gerald Nordland, "Show at the Dwan Gallery," *Kunstwerk*, Vol. 6, November, 1962, p. 67.

Thomas B. Hess, "Phony Crisis in American Art," *Art News*, Vol. 62, Summer, 1963, p. 59.

Max Kozlo , "Exhibition at Kootz," *Arts Magazine*, Vol. 39, January, 1965, p. 48.

"Neue Abstraktions" *Kunstwerk*, Vol. 18, April, 1965, p. 121.

L. Picard, "Interview mit Raymond Parker," *Kunstwerk*, Vol. 18/7, January, 1965.

Barbara Rose (K10(unst T)3(he E)5(ast Hamp)113(")86())JJ/T11 1 Tf(A) Die New York Times, 1997.

of retrospective exhibition at the Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery, Hunter College, New York City. *The New York Times*, September 28, 1990.

William C. Agee , "Ray Parker, Color and Modern Painting in America," *The Journal of Art*, Vol. 3, no. 1, October 1990.

Ken Johnson, "Ray Parker: Painterly Sensualist," *Art in America*, March 1991, p. 124.

Michael Klein, "Ray Parker at Joan T. Washburn," *Art in America*, 1997.

Holland Cotter, "Paintings 1958-1965" Joan T. Washburn Gallery, *The New York Times*, 1997.

Vincent Katz, "Ray Parker on West 57th Street," *The East Hampton Star*, 1997.

Grace Glueck, "Ray Parker, Joan T. Washburn," *The New York Times*, April 30, 1999.

Mario Naves, "Artistic Freedom," review. Joan T. Washburn Gallery, *The New York Observer*, April 5, 2004.

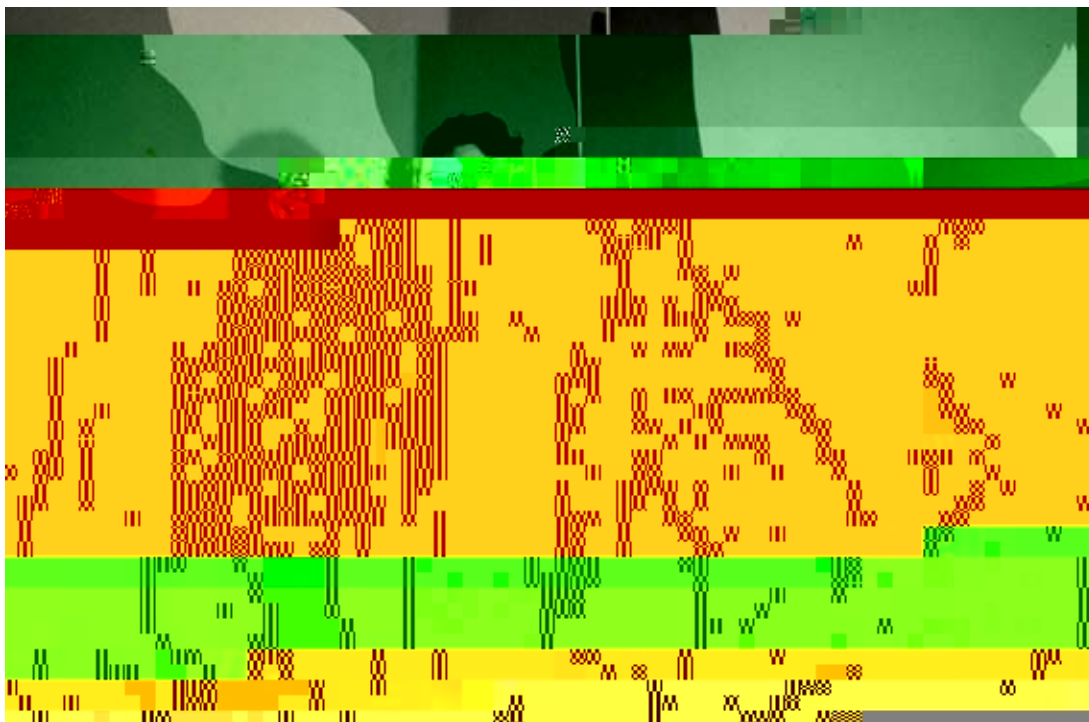
Robert Long, "Ray Parker's Paintings Have Staying Power," *East Hampton Star*, April 15, 2004.

Grace Glueck, "Ray Parker and George Sugarman," Washburn Gallery, *The New York Times*, April 2, 2004.

Jim Long, "Ray Parker, Washburn Gallery," *The Brooklyn Rail*, May 2004.



Ray Parker, circa 1960



Ray Parker, circa 1970