

# Victor Vasarely

French, born Hungary, 1906-1997

## *Algenib*, 1957-1962

Oil on board

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick R. Weisman,  
in honor of James W. Foster, 1971 (4023.1)

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A leading innovator in the development of Op Art, Victor Vasarely began his career as a commercial artist and graphic designer after moving to Paris as a young man. Vasarely was inspired by the Russian avant-garde's profound effect on the development of abstraction; the white square and black circle in the top half of the painting bring to mind Suprematist artist Kazimir Malevich's compositions featuring basic geometric forms. Vasarely's interest in optical illusions spurred his 1955 treatise *Yellow Manifesto*, which called for the employment of visual kinetics in art. *Algenib* features black and white stripes, arranged so as to create an optical illusion of concave and convex surfaces.

# Victor Vasarely

French, born Hungary, 1906-1997

## *Vega Per*, 1969

Oil on board

Gift of the Honorable Clare Boothe Luce, 1984 (5311.1)

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In works such as *Vega Per*, Victor Vasarely employed a grid-based system into which he applied his *Alphabet Plastique* system of visual composition. Vasarely created this “fine art alphabet” out of dozens of individual square units of colored shapes placed against a contrasting background. He intended for the alphabet to be used by anyone, including designers and architects, when forming visual compositions. By painting some of the squares larger or smaller, Vasarely generates surface tension through the illusion of spherical volume, which appears to push against the canvas from behind.

# Samia Halaby

Palestinian, born 1936

## *Red Trees, 1974*

Oil on canvas

Gift of Joseph Cantor Foundation, 1986 (5453.1)

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New York-based Palestinian artist and scholar Samia Halaby moved to the United States in 1951 after she was forced to flee Palestine after the Arab-Israeli war. Halaby taught at the Yale School of Art from 1972-1982 as their first full-time female associate professor. She cites the importance of social justice and equal rights as integral to her work and continues to look to the abstract symmetry of Islamic art and architecture for visual inspiration. In the 1970s, Halaby began studying the reflective quality of metal, and *Red Trees* features carefully painted straight edges in metallic silvers, reds, and blues, enclosed within organic curved areas. The fluidity of the organic lines give the impression of gentle, swaying movement. Halaby stated that “abstraction is about reality”; her pieces capture ways of seeing the built and natural environments that surround us. “Reality is not necessarily a photographic image. If you take ten seconds turning your head from left to right, all of the shapes and forms that you see cannot be captured in a photograph or a realistic image. When you walk down the street in New York, where it is so busy, to preserve your life you have learned to look in certain ways and your eyes jump from blocks of color, that is the rhythm you see in my paintings...”

# **Richard Anuszkiewicz**

American, born 1930

## *Sol V*, 1968

Acrylic on canvas

Gift of John Gregg Allerton, 1968 (3546.1)

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A leading American proponent of Op Art, Richard Anuszkiewicz was a student of Josef Albers, the German-American pioneer of geometric abstraction, whose paintings and graphic works systematically analyzed color relationships. Anuszkiewicz's paintings employ bright, vibrant color and jarring visual effects that play with the viewer's visual perception. In *Sol V*, a sense of depth is generated through a series of concentric squares. This pattern, along with the intense overall red hue, result in a surface that appears to shift, vibrate, and recede into space, producing a sensation of vertigo in some viewers.

**Peter Sedgley**  
British, born 1930

*Phantasmagoria*, 1966

Acrylic on linen

Gift of The Contemporary Museum, Honolulu, 2011,  
and gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward H. Nakamura (TCM.2002.26.2)

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Peter Sedgley's early training was as an architect, and in the late 1960s he became known for kinetic pieces that combined painted surfaces with light effects and rotating movement. At the time *Phantasmagoria* was painted, Sedgley's interest in the circular format had developed into a series of *Target* works. For Sedgley, the circle represents a neutral shape and his *Target* pieces emphasize the optical effects of hue over shape through the soft, blurred edges of the colored rings. Although each observer will respond to them somewhat differently, Op Art paintings often produce a physical response upon viewing, and *Phantasmagoria* succeeds on this level by inducing a loss of visual focus in the spectator.

# **Karl Benjamin**

## **American, 1925-2012**

### **#26, 1969**

Oil on canvas

Gift of Judy Cronin in memory of Rusty and Dick Cronin, 2013  
(2013-45-04)

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Working in Los Angeles in the 1950s and 1960s, Karl Benjamin was associated with the West Coast Hard-Edge Painting style, which fused the crispness of geometric abstraction with bold, intense color. Although Benjamin's paintings appear precise and carefully structured, he incorporated random associations such as numerical progressions into his practice and stated, "I am an intuitive painter, despite the ordered appearance of my paintings, and am fascinated by the infinite range of expression inherent in color relationships." #26 is from a 1966-1973 series of works featuring elaborate grids formed out of triangular shapes, with kaleidoscopic interconnecting patterns and colors.

# Howard Mehring

## American, 1931-1978

### *Chroma Double*, 1965

Acrylic on canvas

Gift of Stephen Meringoff, 2014 (2014-11-01)

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Howard Mehring has come to be regarded as an innovator and important figure in the Washington Color School of abstraction (also known as Post-painterly Abstraction). In the 1950s and early 1960s, Mehring created lyrical abstractions influenced by Helen Frankenthaler and other New York School artists such as Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko. By the mid-1960s, Mehring was making Hard-edge works on canvas, in compositions that are referred to as “Z’s,” “E’s,” and inverted “T’s,” as in the museum’s *Chroma Double*. In these works Mehring explored myriad combinations and juxtapositions of colors in ways similar to Josef Albers’s *Homage to the Square* paintings (one of which is on view in the museum’s second floor gallery of American art). Mehring’s explorations, however, focused on bold, vibrant colors in geometric compositions that dazzle the eye.