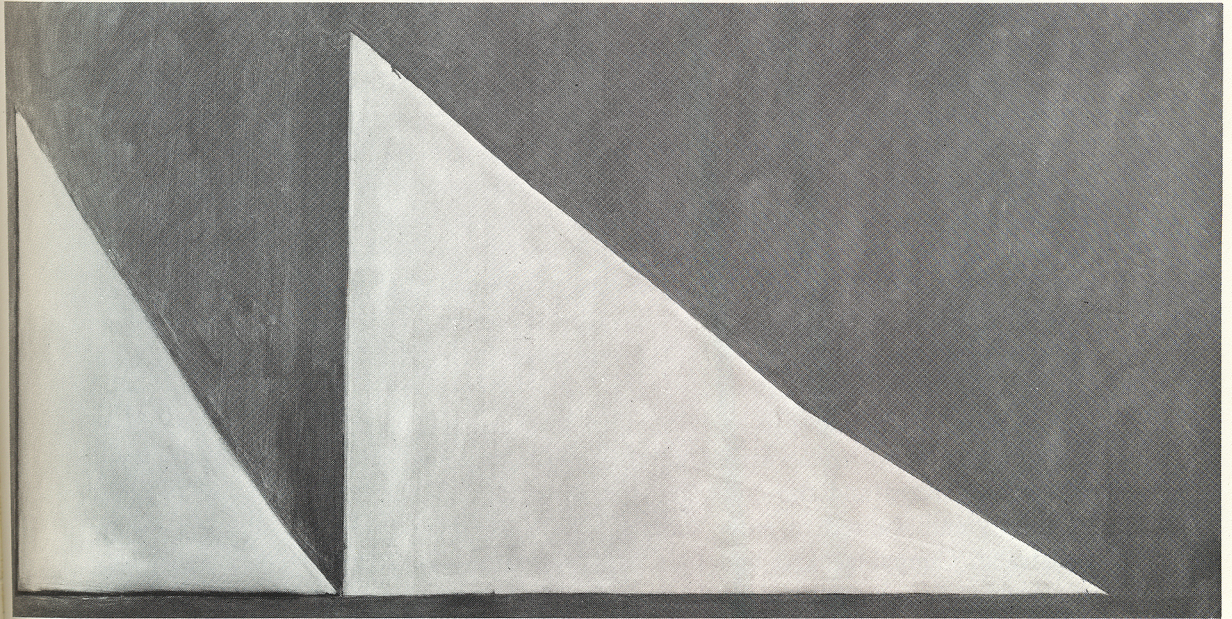


put on the brush, and changed his painting technique because he didn't mean to go back to Abstract Expressionism, but to move forward. "And I guess working thinly was a kind of relief," he said.

The *Ocean Park* series was named after the Los Angeles suburb which Diebenkorn moved to in 1967, and where the artist has lived ever since. In the 1977 Whitney exhibition, the early tall *Ocean Park* paintings were vertical compositions whose 8-foot scale was something of a measure of their ambition. These paintings, dealing with the movement of light seen through sky and space, introduced a new kind of luminosity into abstraction. In the 1973 and 1975 series, the record of the artist's tentative gestures, the record of his decisions about representing inner and outer vistas, of distant and closed-up space, can be seen. The works contain no flat or wholly opaque color areas. Behind their few black and heavily painted blue color areas is always the suggestion of other forms, other moves. In the Whitney, these paintings were hung close together rather than spread out as they had been in the Marlborough Gallery shows of 1973 and 1975, where they came as a shock, an opening up, or a revelation again, to a generation of younger artists, of the possibilities of what could be done with color and form.

Matisse's influence seems omnipresent in Diebenkorn's paintings from the early to the mid-sixties. Many correspondences in fact exist between Diebenkorn's *Ocean Park* series and Matisse's 1914 *Interior with Goldfish* and his 1916 *The Piano Lesson* paintings, among them that both artists are working with frontal, shifting vertical rectangular forms moving forward and back. And Matisse's influence, together with the idea of making a personal language from geometric shapes, support the idea of a connection between Diebenkorn's aims and those of such younger artists as Frances Barth, Virginia Cuppidge, and Elizabeth Murray. The differences between Diebenkorn and them, especially when it comes to color, are equally apparent. Whereas Diebenkorn's palette, his blues and yellows and greens, are sun-bleached California colors, Frances Barth's first one-person show included New York grays, mustards, browns, and rusted purples. These paintings, at the Susan Caldwell Gallery in 1974, represented the artist's first four years of work, in the form of 10- to 16-foot-long horizontal paintings. "Since 1969, my paintings have evolved from a set of common shapes, the triangle, the trapezoid and the circle. . . . I have been trying to make a personal language where the shape or forms can hold color and space in such a way as to transcend itself, where a space exists that's delicately indeterminable, but conveys a sense of interior rightness," Barth explained in 1978.¹³

Born in New York City, Frances Barth attended Hunter College, earning her M.F.A. degree in painting while performing as a modern dancer with the Yvonne Rainer Dance Company at both the Judson Church and Hunter College. Her interest in movement, music, and sculpture led her to spend six months making three-dimensional forms while she studied painting with the sculptor Tony Smith at Hunter College. "In the beginning, my art wasn't coming out of art, it was coming out of



[79] Frances Barth. *Vermillion So. D.* 1973.

poetry and confusion. I started making interlocking figures, then shaped paintings. . . . There was a certain kind of time in Yvonne Rainer's dance piece 'The Mind is a Muscle,' something magical and simple that I wanted to get in my paintings," Barth has said.¹⁴

The movement, expressed by the artist's use of paint layers and scumbled surfaces, in Barth's first show was slow. *Gadara*, a long painting done in 1974, contained only two medium-size triangles afloat within its 16-foot length; one was a soft aqua triangle whose softness of color and outline suggested two sets of picture planes gently shifting, changing places, while making no effort to draw attention to itself against the scumbled red background. Her *Vermillion So. D.* [79] painting, also made in 1973, achieves a similar effect. Four years later, in her third one-person show in SoHo, at the Susan Caldwell Gallery, Barth's array of forms had become increasingly complex, occupying all of the painting ground. In the 1977 painting *Mariner*, an off-center gray polygon acts like a shaft of light to set off the solidity of a dark circle, deep-brown trapezoid, and shadowy, rust-colored adjacent forms. These works, from 1976 and 1977, became like geometric painted walls. Interlocking triangles, trapezoids, and half circles became a friezelike bar as opposed to Barth's earlier single and paired triangles floating up from the bottom of the canvas. In all her best work, Frances Barth succeeds in doing two contradictory things: in the early paintings, she managed to project intimate shapes across a large canvas to suggest a feeling of isolation; in the later works, her interlocking forms assume the stance of a closed-off mural but

nevertheless, in terms of their highly individualized color surfaces, they make the public mural form convey the intimate dimensions of a personal painting statement.

Australian-born Virginia Cuppaige is an artist whose color range is much closer to that of Richard Diebenkorn than that of Frances Barth. But Cuppaige, like Barth, is an artist who employs her own personal geometry to make room-long horizontal paintings. Cuppaige's exhibition at the Susan Caldwell Gallery in 1975, her second solo show in New York, consisted of very simple geometric works made of horizontal bars defining space in terms of color. The painting *Second Transition*, for example, was made up of painted bars of aqua, yellow, diaphanous gray-pink, and mustard; her *Mauve Breaker*, also done on acrylic on canvas and measuring 78 × 120", had two different shades of pale blue against a strong green so that the rectilinear forms floated like waves out into the gallery.

Virginia Cuppaige came to New York from Australia in 1969, bringing with her a knowledge of American art gained from art magazines. "I was very influenced by Kenneth Noland and the color painters from reproductions I saw when I was a teenager, and wanted to enter some day into the New York art dialogue."¹⁵ In Australia, Cuppaige had had four years of formal art training, after which she worked for three years in textile design. A tall woman, Virginia Cuppaige has always been involved with space because "in Australia," she has explained, "you can walk out in any place and just grab it. You have to harness the energy of space."¹⁶

Soon after her arrival in New York, Cuppaige began making paintings that were very much influenced by Hans Hofmann. These works consisted of complex arrangements of horizontal and vertical geometric forms set off by contrasting ribbons of color. After a first show at the A.M. Sachs Gallery, Virginia Cuppaige began to play off hard-edge rectilinear forms against softly painted areas in such a way as to introduce a kind of landscape-horizon space peculiarly her own. In 1977, the sharply defined rectilinear forms disappeared. Instead, the entire 10- to 20-foot canvas became one field into which the artist launched a handful of small, quirky shapes. A ruffle of three lines, a silver arc, a blue bar—the playful nature of these elements in itself became a form of risk-taking. But, on a technical level, it is in the placement of her eccentric shapes that Cuppaige achieves her aim "not just to paint a beautiful field, but to take the field and turn and twist it around" and forces us to locate ourselves in a point-to-point way that sets at odds our personal equilibrium and visual perception.¹⁷ "In paintings such as *Nizana*, from the late 1970s, Cuppaige begins with a basic color such as a very pale blue and then uses as many as twenty or thirty layers of acrylic paint applied with a sponge. Ten feet long, the opalescent *Nizana* seems just large enough to contain the play of its set of elements—the fading circle, crossed baton lines, floating triangle and square—so that one is caught in the space between them, in the movement of the moment, even in the act of asking, 'Is this enough—are movements and light enough for a painting to be about?'"¹⁸

Elizabeth Murray's work is concerned with the integration of paint with the