

AD REINHARDT (1913-1967)**Untitled (Blue-Purple Painting)**

Signed lower right, "Reinhardt 1952"

oil on canvas

36 x 24 in. (37 5/8 x 25 5/8 x 1 3/4 in.)

1952

11942

PROVENANCE:

Betty Parsons Gallery, New York

Galerie Iris Clert, Paris

Mrs. Ethel Epstein, New York (acquired from the above in 1963)

Private Collection (by descent from the above, 1966)

Private Collection (by descent from the above, 2002)

EXHIBITION:

Paris, Galerie Iris Clert, Ad Reinhardt exhibition, June 1963.

New York, David Zwirner Gallery, "Ad Reinhardt: Blue Paintings," September 12 - October 21, 2017.

LITERATURE:

The Ad Reinhardt Foundation has confirmed that this painting will be included in the forthcoming catalogue raisonné of the artist's work. The inscription on the front of the painting was most likely added at a later date. This work retains artist's original painted strip frame.

Born Adolph Frederick Reinhardt on December 24, 1913 in Buffalo, NY, Ad Reinhardt was a prominent American painter best known for his shaping of the Conceptual and Minimalist art movements. Influenced by Stuart Davis's Cubist-inspired paintings, Ad Reinhardt's early work features canvases covered in colorful and asymmetrical geometric forms. Reinhardt's collages are similarly complex, with layers of printed paper cut and pasted in irregular rectilinear forms.

His own influence on Minimalism is foreshadowed by his later monochromatic paintings, most famous of which are his seminal Black Paintings (1954–1967), which he considered an end-game evolution of Modernism and dubbed "the last paintings one can make." Inspired by Kazimir Malevich's landmark Black Square (1914), Reinhardt's series contains extremely subtle tonal and chromatic shifts, lending a visual and conceptual complexity that can only be appreciated in person. A philosophically rigorous artist who strived for purity, he once observed, "As an artist I would like to eliminate the symbolic pretty much, for black is interesting not as a color but as a non-color and as the absence of color."

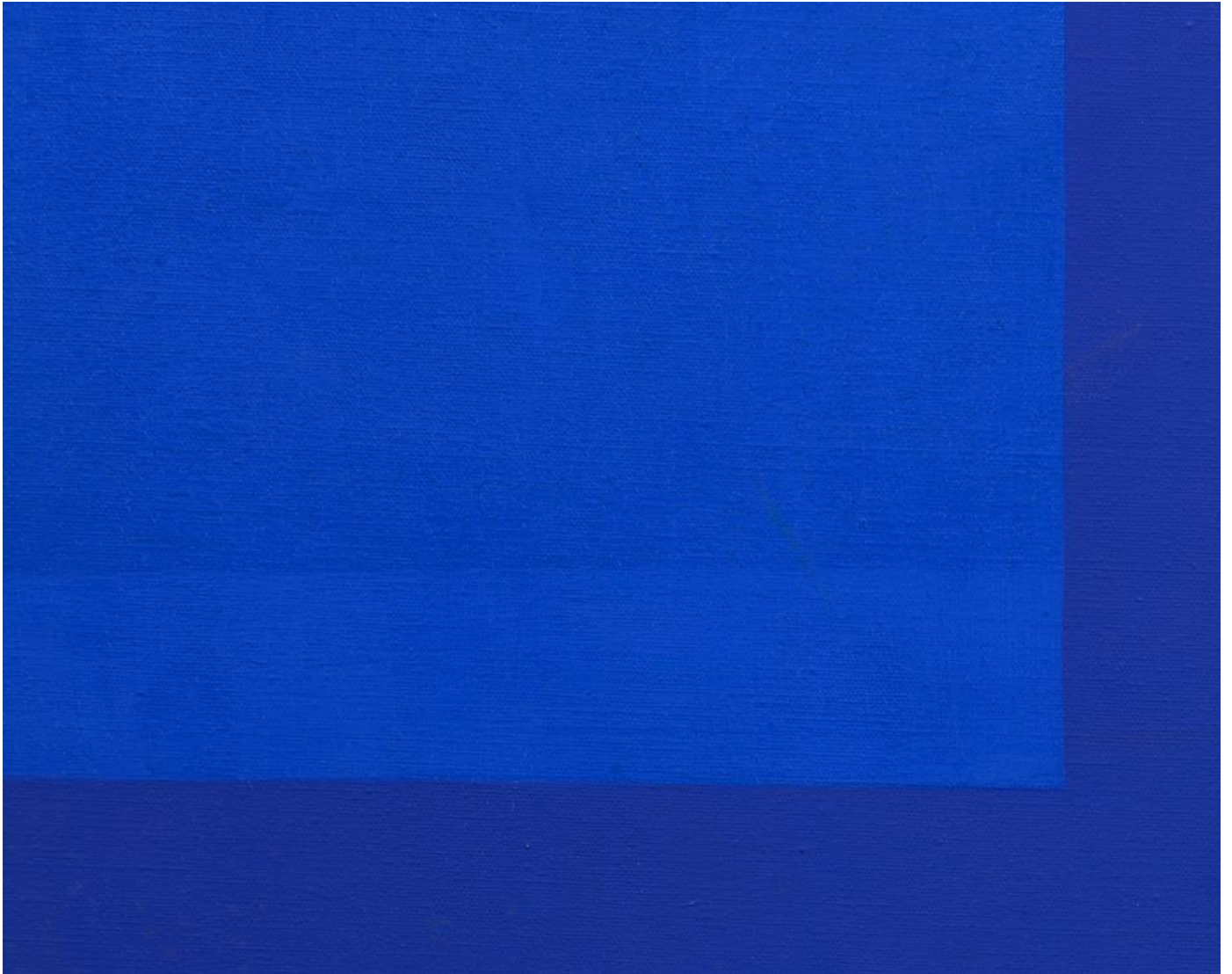
Reinhardt studied art and art history at Columbia University, graduating in 1935. His estate has been represented by David Zwirner gallery in New York since his death, and his works are found in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Tate Gallery in London, the Walker Art Center in

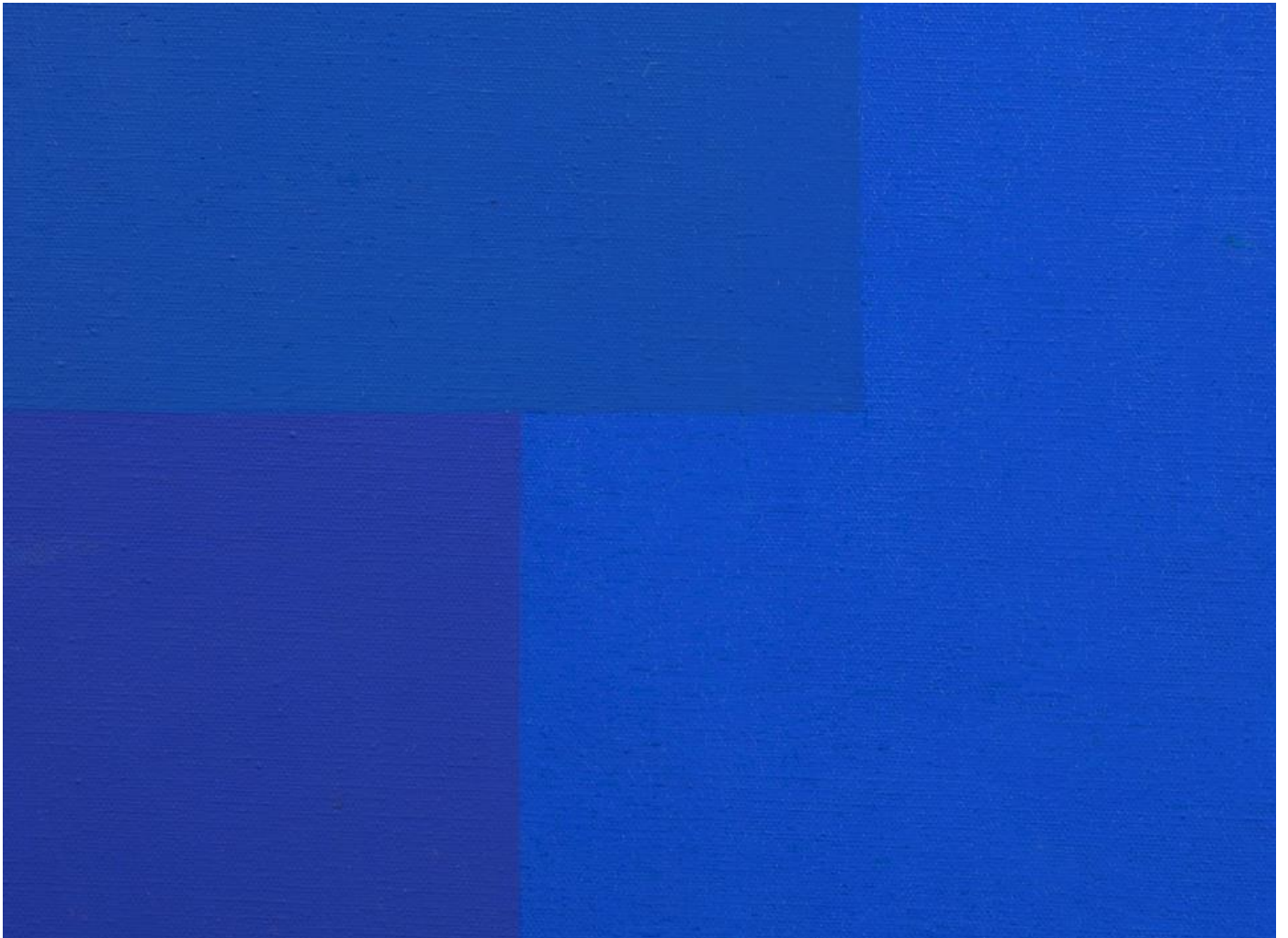
Minneapolis, and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., among others.
Reinhardt died on August 30, 1967 in New York, NY.

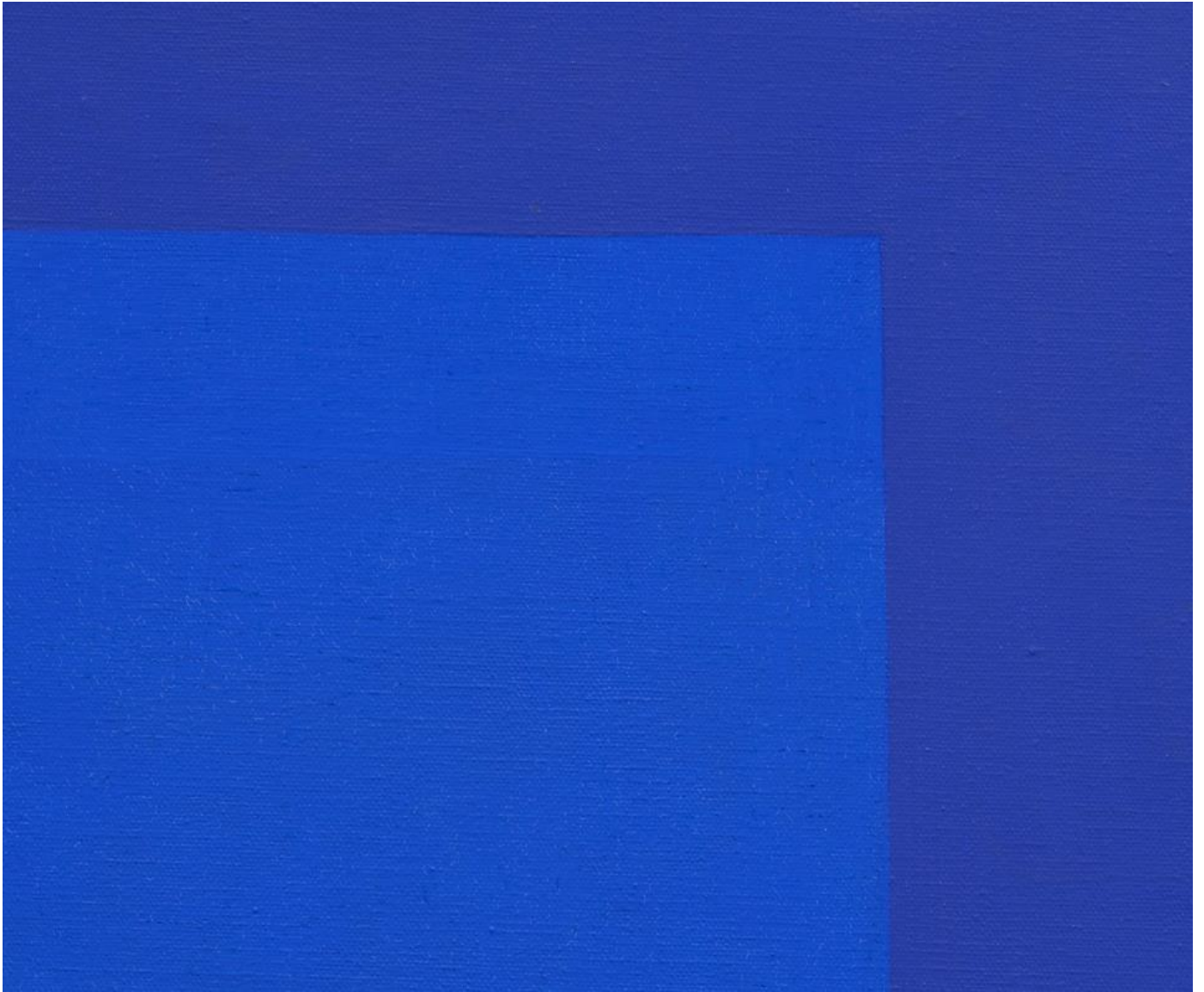
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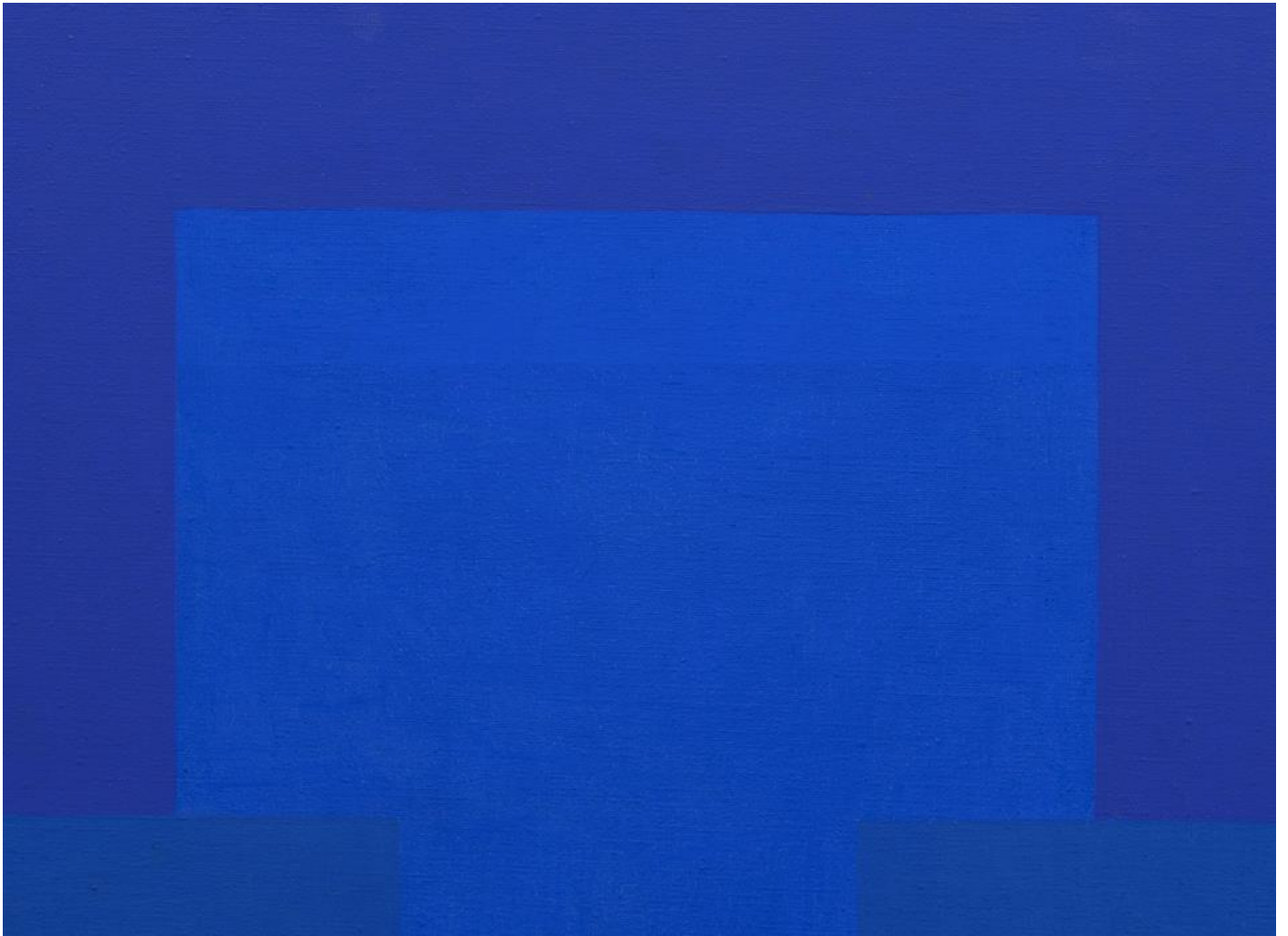


















Ad Reinhardt, letter to Dorothy C. Miller, curator at the Museum of Modern Art, describing the Iris Clert exhibition in Paris where *Untitled (Blue-Purple Painting)* was exhibited in June 1963

JUNE 15
rec'd 6/17/63

DEAR DOROTHY: SO BUSY WITH COMPLAINTS SOMETIMES THAT I DID OVERLOOK TELLING YOU HOW NICE YOUR "AMERICANS 1963" CATALOGUE LOOKED AND THE TWO COPIES OF IT THAT WERE IN THE GALLERY HERE (I BROUGHT ONE OVER) WERE SWIPED IN THE FIRST FEW HOURS DURING OPENING NIGHT.

THE SEVEN PAINTINGS LOOK FAIRLY GOOD IN THIS GALLERY MAINLY BECAUSE THERE ARE HEAVY STANCHIONS OR POSTS THAT SEPARATE THE PAINTINGS SO THAT EACH PAINTING HAS ITS OWN NICHE. WHEN THE GUGGENHEIM SHOWED ONE OF MY PAINTINGS IT LOOKED PRETTY GOOD ALSO BECAUSE IT WAS "SEPARATED" BY THEIR "SECTIONALIZED" AREAS. PERHAPS THEN WHAT WE SHOULD HAVE DONE WAS SOMETHING LIKE THIS —

I ERECTED A STRING "FENCE" HERE, TOO, IN FRONT OF THE PAINTINGS. SAUL STEINBERG SAYS THIS MAKES THEM ALL "MONA LISAS!" "WELL?" (I SAID.)

I HAD TO STOP A FRENCH CUSTOMS-OFFICIAL FROM POUNDING THE FRONT OF ONE OF MY PAINTINGS TO SEE WHETHER IT WAS HARD OR SOFT.

OTHERWISE ITS NOT WARM OR SUNNY YET IN PARIS. LOTS OF CLOUDS AND RAIN. Ad

28, rue du fg. st. honore
Paris VIII^e - anjou 32-05
iris clert

NEW YORK

Ad Reinhardt

DAVID ZWIRNER

The recent exhibition at David Zwirner of twenty-seven blue paintings made by Ad Reinhardt, focusing on the period between 1950 and 1953, was a tour de force on many levels. It is doubtful that any museum could or would have assembled such a concentrated, ambitious show, since it lacks the box-office appeal of shock-and-awe sensationalism. Ironically, the gathering of such a cohesive group of paintings was shocking in its laser-like focus and awe-inspiring in the loftiness of its uncompromised aesthetic achievement. It was, without a doubt, one of the most beautiful and coherent, even breathtaking, exhibitions this writer can remember.

Reinhardt, who died precipitously and prematurely in 1967 at the age of fifty-three, was a prolific writer who laid out his premises with unambiguous clarity if not dogmatism. The only member of the New York School who began as an abstract artist, he used cartooning to drain off any content linking art to life. This put him at odds with the other major figures of his generation, who were affected by various forms of Surrealism and Expressionism, which he found compromised the integrity of art as art.

After serving in World War II, Reinhardt took postgraduate courses in East Asian art with Alfred Salmony at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, which deepened his interest in the cultures.

Increasingly, he was drawn to Chinese and Japanese painting, whose calligraphy inspired his works of the late 1940s. The red and blue paintings that followed consolidated any residual gestural elements into patches, blocks, or, as Reinhardt referred to them, rectangular "bricks" of color, gradually eliminating both hue and tonal contrasts in favor of increasingly close values. As they developed, these works verged on the monochrome.

Margit Rowell, in her 1980 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum exhibition catalogue *Ad Reinhardt and Color*, the only publication to seriously examine the artist's relationship to hue, called Reinhardt "a born colorist." She characterized his ultimate elimination of even red and blue in his final black paintings as resulting from his decision to abolish the tension of

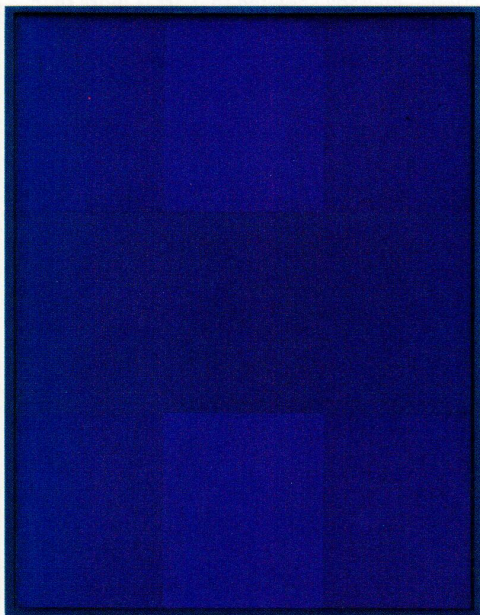
contrast as well as illusions of advancing and receding planes from his art. Both the red and the blue series are dated 1950 to 1953, although the blue series, as the works within it gradually turn brown and purplish, moves ever more resolutely into the darkness of Reinhardt's final series of black paintings. In the first of the blue paintings, there are still considerable color variations in the horizontal and vertical blocks of blue, green, and purple, floating as if weightless in an ambiguous space that many writers of the time compared with Claude Monet's water lilies. However, given that many of the blue paintings have a vertical format equal in size to Chinese scroll paintings, the forms released from earthly gravity in the blue paintings were more likely inspired by such art.

Reinhardt was a scholar and a teacher as well as a painter, and his own references to color reflect his understanding of its function and possibilities. "There is something wrong, irresponsible and mindless about color, something impossible to control," he wrote in 1960. "Control and rationality are part of any morality." To make sure his colors did not evoke associations, he made lists of potential symbolism such as "red, fire, blood, hot, riot, revolution, passion, energy, fear, jealousy, deceit" and "blue-color of villains, ghosts and fiends' hope, heaven, sky."

The fundamental issue, he concluded, was not color contrast but light. "Not colored light," Reinhardt wrote in 1966 to Sam Hunter, "but color that gives off light." Eventually, Reinhardt excluded chromatic color in the conclusion of a process he had begun to consider earlier. Thinning his paint radically, he began to superimpose layer upon layer of color, effacing all traces of distracting brushwork. Trained as an art historian at Columbia College, New York, where he studied with Meyer Schapiro, he knew the techniques of painting well. He realized that the layer after layer of thin oil paint, which he painstakingly built up, produced an evanescent haze that would make the black paintings that follow seem so mysterious.

"Art is art. Everything else is everything else," Reinhardt famously proclaimed in his disavowal of any Romantic or expressive associations in his work. Yet it is difficult to see these luminous radiant blue paintings as totally disengaged with the subtle light effects of dawn or twilight, in which illumination gradually progresses or diffuses into darkness. He produced the velvety surfaces of these works via a meticulous process of leaching oil from pigment, making it increasingly powdery rather than shiny or reflective. The resulting matte surfaces are necessarily extremely fragile, but fragility is an important part of the content of Reinhardt's work. And despite his constant denial of content as part of totally abstract art, it is the poetic content of these profound and beautiful paintings that sets them apart and continues to move us.

—Barbara Rose



Ad Reinhardt, *Abstract Painting, Blue, 1952*, oil on canvas, 18 x 14".

Kara Walker

SIKKEMA JENKINS & CO.

Kara Walker made all of the works for her September show at Sikkema Jenkins & Co. this past summer. She offers this information as a kind of afterthought, along with a dry, technical description of her awesome, stomach-turning output ("This is a show of works on paper and on linen, drawn and collaged using ink, blade, glue, and oil stick") in the concluding paragraph of her accompanying statement. The text, save for its matter-of-fact ending, is an artful paroxysm of frustration and despair. Walker, an African American woman artist, who has for decades merged historical fact and fable to depict surreal, often pornographic scenes of the transatlantic slave trade and the antebellum South—drawing upon a pernicious American lexicon of caricature to do so—is tired now, she writes, "of standing up, being counted, tired of 'having a voice' or worse 'being a role model.'" It's a burden made heavier, surely, by her shocking, unsparing, and controversial approach to a grave subject. "How many ways can a person say racism is the real bread and butter of our American mythology?" she wonders about her life's work in light of that mythology's dreadful new dawn.

Walker's famous silhouettes—of genteel planters and their well-dressed women, archetypes of minstrelsy and white fantasies of black savagery—made an appearance in this show, lending their familiar air of ominous ambiguity to new works, such as the grand, infanticide-

ART & DESIGN

The Best Art of 2017

By ROBERTA SMITH, HOLLAND COTTER and JASON FARAGO DEC. 6, 2017

The art critics of The New York Times Roberta Smith, Holland Cotter and Jason Farago share their picks for the best art of the year.

Roberta Smith



An installation view of “Ad Reinhardt: Blue Paintings,” a standout show at the David Zwirner Gallery in New York.

2017 Estate of Ad Reinhardt/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London

1. BEST GALLERY SHOW I REGRETTABLY DID NOT REVIEW “[Ad Reinhardt: Blue Paintings](#)” at the David Zwirner Gallery, which brought together 28 luminous abstract paintings from this artist’s early-1950s “blue period” — the most ever. With blue fields layered with levitating blocks, or intersecting beams of contrasting blues and sometimes greens or purples, these immersive paintings evoked geometric versions of Monet’s “Water Lilies.” Their joyfulness stood in striking contrast to Reinhardt’s relatively daunting if better-known Black Paintings, which suddenly seem a little pretentious.