



KARL BENJAMIN (1925-2012)

Bars- Black, Yellow, Purple

Signed "Karl Benjamin" verso

oil on canvas

48 x 16 in. (49 1/2 x 17 1/2 in)

1958

33639

PROVENANCE:

Gary Snyder Fine Art, New York

Private Collection, Michigan

Born in Chicago, Karl Benjamin (1925 – 2012) began his college education at Northwestern University before leaving to serve in the Pacific Theater of World War II. Returning from his service, Benjamin settled in California, graduating from Southern California's University of Redlands in 1949 with a degree in English literature, history, and philosophy. Out of college, Benjamin found a job teaching fifth and sixth grade in the public schools of Bloomington, California. State law at the time required him to teach art and, in teaching, he became fascinated by his student's artwork, saying later that "what my students produced seemed very mystical to me."

Inspired by the work of his students, Benjamin began experimenting with painting that explored color as a subject, employing simple repetitive geometric forms and vibrant color combinations. After continuing to work as an artist and teacher, Benjamin's paintings were included in the landmark 1959 exhibition Four Abstract Classicists, which garnered international attention for Benjamin's work and precipitated a new term for his style: Hard Edge Painting. Benjamin and other Hard Edge Painters helped develop the blossoming West Coast art and design scene in the 1960s. Along with artists like Ed Ruscha, Judy Chicago, David Hockney, and John Baldessari Benjamin helped to define an artistic alternative to the then-dominate style of Abstract Expressionism and the focus on New York City as the center of the art world.

Benjamin's work was included in the exhibit Purist Painting traveling to Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse and the Columbus Museum of Art. The Whitney Museum used his work in Geometric Abstraction in America (1962). Museum of Modern Art also featured the artist in their watershed exhibit The Responsive Eye (1966). His work is represented in the collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, Israel; Oakland Museum, Oakland, CA; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; Seattle Art Museum, WA; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, NY among many others.

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