

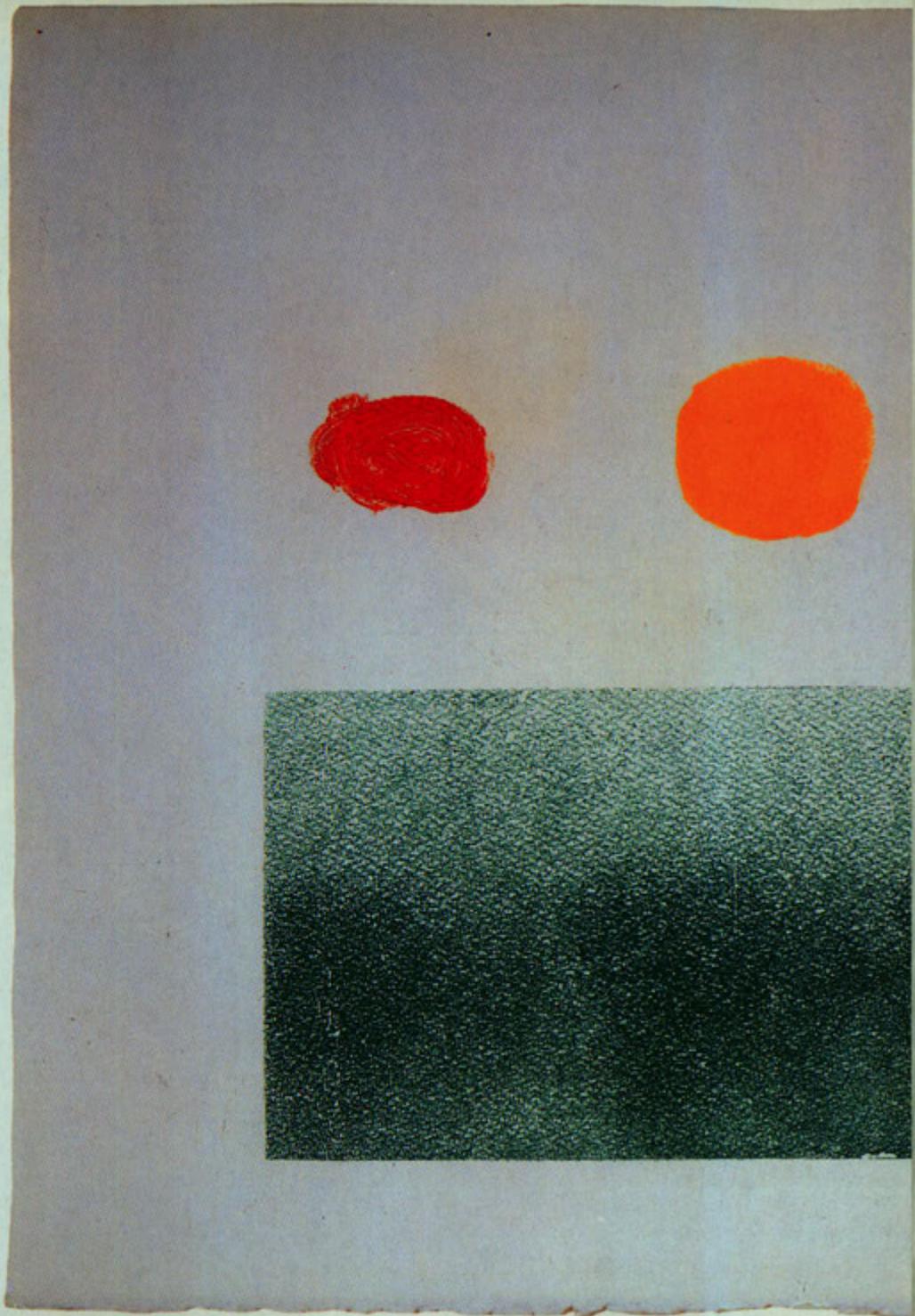
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M O N O T Y P E S  
O F A D O L P H

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# GOTTLIEB





COVER  
UNTITLED (M7319)  
1973  
monotype in oil on paper  
24 x 18"  
EXH. NO. 12



THROUGHOUT HIS FIFTY-YEAR CAREER as an artist, Adolph Gottlieb developed his paintings by working in series. The names of his major series, the Bursts and Imaginary Landscapes, have become almost synonymous with Gottlieb's own. He repeatedly created individual works that surpass the expected results from a series progression. The group of monotypes he created in 1973 and early 1974 comprise a small but comprehensive series of work and allow the viewer to glimpse the process Gottlieb used to explore and expand his paintings. Since they date from the very end of

his career, they contain an unusual element of recollected themes and ideas. The monotypes uniquely seem to be the artist reflecting on his own work.

Gottlieb based his paintings on the manipulation of color and form on the canvas, which he called "the painter's rectangle." He maintained the interplay of emotions as his subject but reduced his means to nothing but color and a few basic shapes. In Gottlieb's visual universe, the placement of forms and allusions to graphic imagery insist that a painting be actively scanned. Viewing a Gottlieb composition entails directing one's vision in and out of fields of relative depth, surface, density, and handling.

The precision of Gottlieb's method elicits the attempt by the viewer to impose ordered meaning on the work. This process cues an intellectual reaction at the same time as the specificity of color, shape, and surface generate an emotional response. His highly complex works are conceived to simulate the process by which we consider what we see. The apparent simplicity of the visual image belies the richness of his paintings.

Beginning with the Pictographs of 1941, Gottlieb abandoned the use of preparatory works. Thereafter he explored ideas by creating fully realized paintings rather than studies or drawings. This method challenged him and became a necessary element in his creative process. Despite his reliance on series as a method, individual paintings were not the result of simple progression. For Gottlieb, it was the individual work that counted.

Working in series allowed him to designate specific areas of exploration. For example, the defining factors of the Imaginary Landscape series are horizontal format and allusion to a horizon line. Gottlieb used these formal devices to intensify his focus, exploring opposites within one clearly defined unit. The series formed the conceptual outline within which Gottlieb could explore and experiment freely. Each group of works taught him something about his own needs to paint and the relevance of specific concepts. At the same time, serial progression allowed him to assess the reactions of colleagues, friends, and other audiences. The process became, almost by definition, one of constant refinement.

By the late 1960s Gottlieb had narrowed the scope of his paintings, dealing repeatedly with very basic horizontal or vertical

formats and severely limiting the already small amount of graphic imagery in his work. As a group the paintings of 1968 and 1969 are the most reductive of his long career. In 1970 Gottlieb suffered a major stroke, which left him paralyzed in one arm and confined to a wheelchair. As he began to recover with the assistance and support of his wife, Esther, Gottlieb's response to his physical limitations was to reverse his earlier direction by enlarging both the size and the range of his work. Underlying his efforts in the late paintings is a sense of his need to express many ideas in what he knew would be a limited period of time. At that point he needed to confront his physical limitations by reviving and expanding the themes of his work.

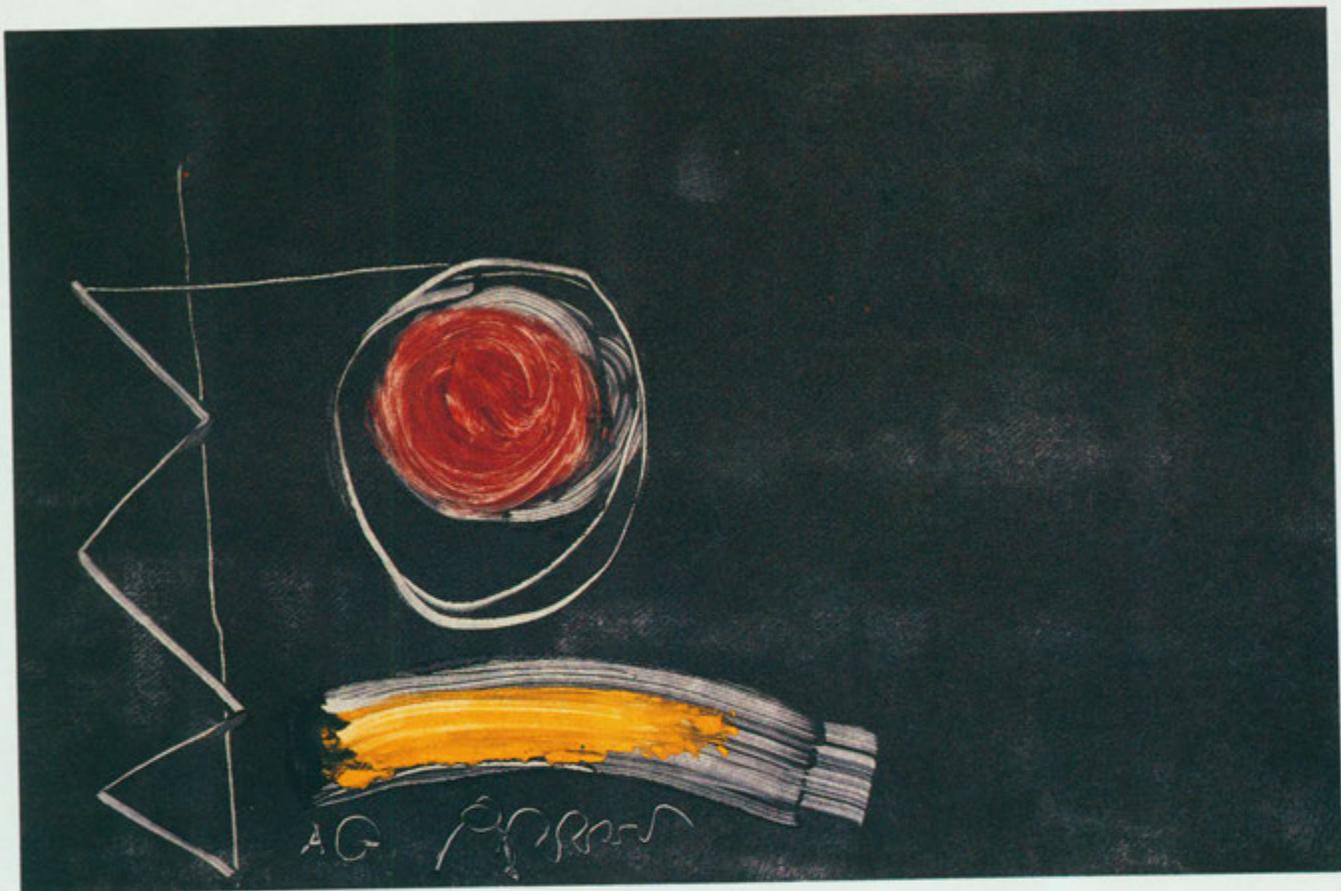
The procedure for making large-scale paintings changed after 1970. Gottlieb was not physically able to develop a painting on the canvas, which had been his preferred method for some fifty years. Now, in order to execute even moderate-size paintings, he had to instruct assistants to prepare a canvas, mix color, and position the surface so he could reach areas he wanted to paint. More important, Gottlieb had to preconceive the painting in order to instruct his assistants.

Art dealer Brooke Alexander proposed the idea for a new group of prints in the spring of 1973. In support of this project, Alexander had a press delivered to Gottlieb's studio in East Hampton, N.Y., and personally selected and delivered various papers for Gottlieb to use. The idea of making monotypes began as an exercise while planning a series of etchings and aquatints, media he had last explored in the 1930s and 1940s. Gottlieb produced a series of twenty-one monotypes in the East Hampton studio in the summer of that year.

Enthusiastic about these new works and eager to increase their size, Gottlieb ordered a large etching press for his New York studio in the early fall. While awaiting delivery of the large press, which arrived in February, 1974, he set up a smaller one on which thirty-two monotypes were run in late 1973 and early 1974.

The monotypes provided a relief from the chore of working on major paintings. The smaller scale of the paper and the smaller quantities of color necessary to paint them allowed Gottlieb to return to the hands-on method he preferred. While the late paintings forced him to confront his limited physical capacities, the monotypes allowed a return to the physical control and satisfaction in working he cherished. Esther Gottlieb, who acted as studio assistant at that time, remembered above all her husband's renewed joy and energy while working in this medium. Although his health was in decline in early 1974, he was able to continue work on the monotypes. The two last, and largest, of these works were completed in late February, two weeks before Gottlieb's death on March 14th.

Because they exist separately from the paintings, these monotypes offer a unique view of the artist's final period. Several of the monotypes utilize drawing, an element Gottlieb had eliminated from his work in the early 1950s, but which had been the formal basis of the Pictograph etchings of the mid-1940s. In the monotypes, as in the Pictographs, line merges with and transforms itself into and out of image. Transformation and a parallel concept—the nature of actuality versus interpretation—are fundamental to Gottlieb's entire body of work. For example, the simple circular shape that Gottlieb repeatedly positioned at the top half of vertical paintings became an icon many



UNTITLED (M7416)

1974

monotype in ink on paper

19 3/16 x 29 3/4"

EXH. NO. 34

Top Left™

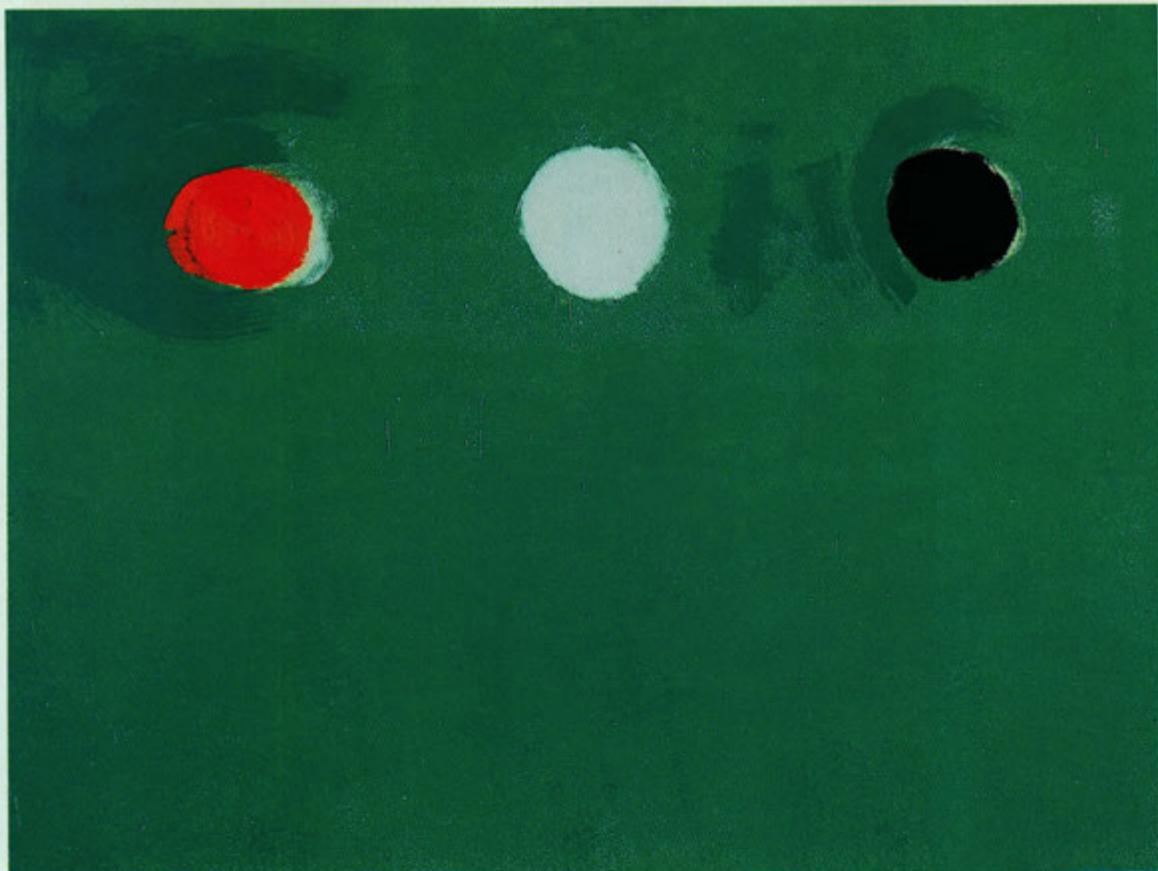
UNTITLED (M7409)

1974

monotype in ink on paper

17 3/4 x 12"

EXH. NO. 24



UNTITLED (M7320)

1973

monotype in ink on paper

18 x 24"

EXH. NO. 9



UNTITLED (M7310)

1973

monotype in oil on paper

23 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 17 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>"

EXH. NO. 11

viewers interpreted as the sun (and Gottlieb playfully drew "rays" around this disc in a couple of the monotypes), while others saw it as a reference to the Buddhist concept of yin and yang; still others saw it as a symbolic earth poised as a counterpoint to the blast of nuclear Armageddon, or a manifestation of sexual tension and release. Another example is the horizontal format, which Gottlieb referred to as the "Imaginary Landscape." This simple horizontal division of the two-dimensional surface into an upper and lower register, with each segment usually containing shapes emphasizing either control or freedom, order or chaos, has yielded many varying interpretations over the years. The most common association, which Gottlieb regularly denied, is that it depicts landscape or seascape.

Gottlieb was fascinated that the most primary shapes evoked different responses depending on the viewer. This interest began with the Pictographs and evolved through the reduction of allusive images to abstract forms and shapes. Gottlieb repeatedly claimed that he did not know at the beginning what impact a completed work would have.

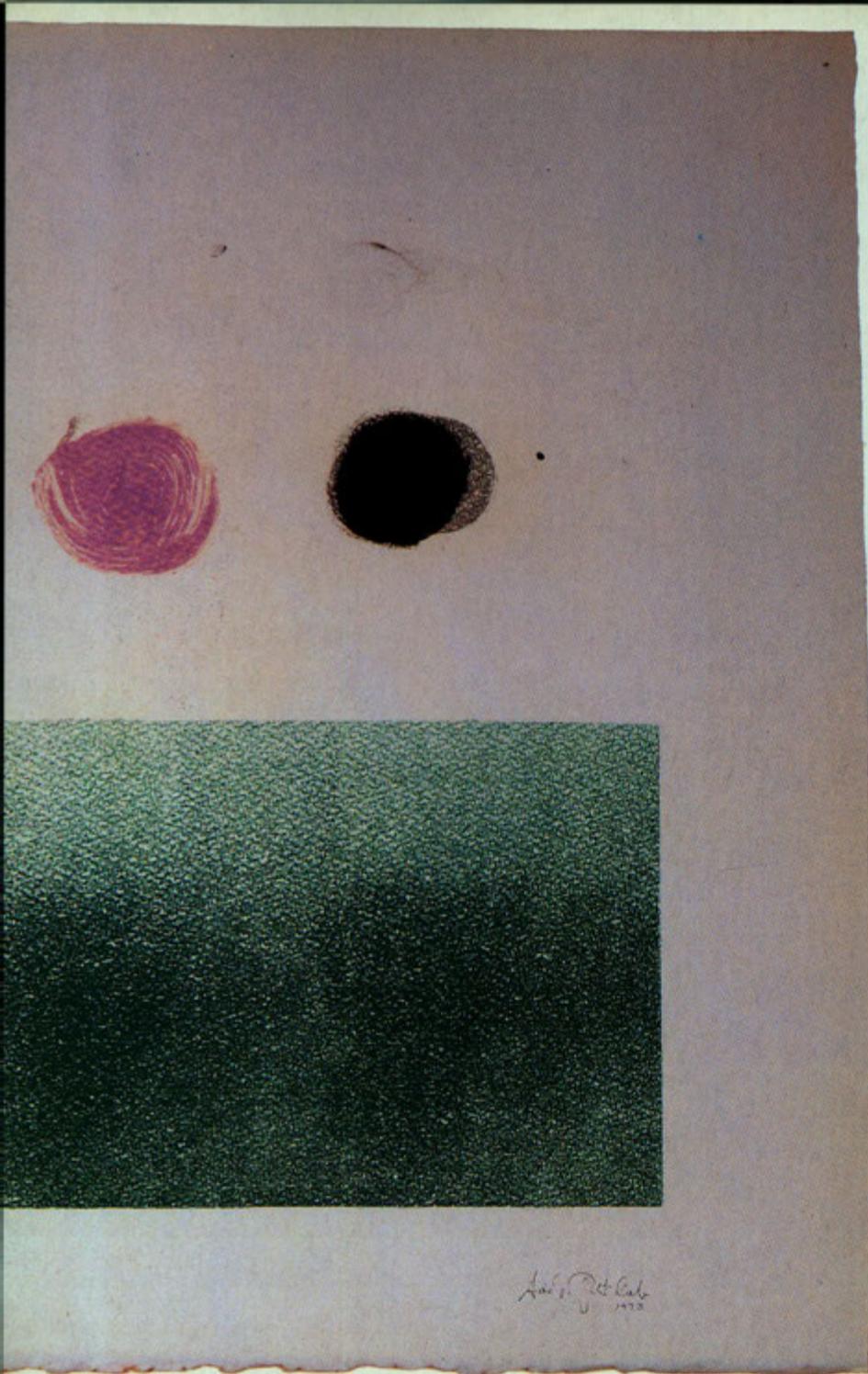
Over the years, he developed a language based on a fine manipulation of shapes, surface, color, and texture. The monotypes show how the smallest changes result in differing interpretations. Minor alterations in the shapes and hues of the discs at the top and a slight variation in the density of the green lower half differentiate between M7315 (Exh. No. 7) and M7314 (Exh. No. 10). Yet one of the works maintains a feeling of calm and solidity, while the other seems to be attempting to break apart. Similarly, the very different messages conveyed by M7317 (Exh. No. 16) and M7316 (Exh. No. 18), which are almost identical graphically, illustrate Gottlieb's powers as a painter. The former is an example of static balance, while the latter uses the same imagery to suggest a fall into chaos.

The evolution of two other works from this series, M7311 (Exh. No. 19) and M7313 (Exh. No. 14), provides a good example of the artist's need to create finished works in order to examine an idea and move forward. The selection of color, relative size of the image and paper, as well as the location of the image on the paper, illustrates Gottlieb's usual manner of working. The concentration on formal elements in these works should not, however, be taken as the mark of a rigid formalist. This artist valued spontaneous gesture and impulse. In several instances he used small pieces of cardboard or his fingers to scrape paint or ink off the plate or the paper. Many of these works were completed by overpainting after they came out of the press.

In the final analysis, Gottlieb's ability to recapture a sense of his own autonomy and satisfaction in creating, his ability to move forward during a period of crisis and frustration, is what gives these monotypes their vitality. They show both the knowledge and sophistication of fifty years of painting and the undimmed intensity and creativity in meeting a new challenge, which Gottlieb valued as the source of his art.

SANFORD HIRSCH

Director, Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation



UNTITLED (M7314)

1973

monotype in ink on paper

18 x 24"

EXH. NO. 10

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M O N O T Y P E S  
O F A D O L P H

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G O T T L I E B

C H E C K L I S T O F T H E E X H I B I T I O N

1. UNTITLED (M7303), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
10 x 12"
2. UNTITLED (M7306), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
10 x 12"
3. UNTITLED (M7302), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
10 x 12"
4. UNTITLED (M7307), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
12 x 10"
5. UNTITLED (M7309), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
12 x 10"
6. UNTITLED (M7408), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
17 1/4 x 12"
7. UNTITLED (M7315), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
18 x 24"
8. UNTITLED (M7327), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
18 x 24"
9. UNTITLED (M7320), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
18 x 24"
10. UNTITLED (M7314), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
18 x 24"
11. UNTITLED (M7310), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
23 1/4 x 17 1/2"
12. UNTITLED (M7319), 1973  
monotype in oil on paper  
24 x 18"
13. UNTITLED (M7312), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
24 x 18"
14. UNTITLED (M7313), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
24 x 18"
15. UNTITLED (M7322), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
24 x 18"
16. UNTITLED (M7317), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
24 x 18"
17. UNTITLED (M7325), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
24 x 18"
18. UNTITLED (M7316), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
24 x 18"
19. UNTITLED (M7311), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
24 x 18"
20. UNTITLED (M7328), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
24 x 18"
21. UNTITLED (M7405), 1974  
monotype in ink on paper  
12 x 17 1/4"
22. UNTITLED (M7471), 1974  
monotype in ink on tissue paper  
14 1/8 x 19 1/8"
23. UNTITLED (M7461), 1974  
monotype in ink on tissue paper  
17 1/2 x 26 1/8"
24. UNTITLED (M7409), 1974  
monotype in ink on paper  
17 1/4 x 12"
25. UNTITLED (M7402), 1974  
monotype in ink on paper  
17 1/4 x 12"
26. UNTITLED (M7407), 1974  
monotype in ink on paper  
17 1/4 x 12"
27. UNTITLED (M7412), 1974  
monotype in ink on paper  
17 1/4 x 12"
28. UNTITLED (M7404), 1974  
monotype in ink on paper  
17 1/4 x 12"
29. UNTITLED (M7410), 1974  
monotype in ink on paper  
17 1/4 x 12"
30. UNTITLED (M7413), 1974  
monotype in ink on paper  
17 1/4 x 12"
31. UNTITLED (M7411), 1974  
monotype in ink on paper  
17 1/4 x 12"
32. UNTITLED (M7464), 1974  
monotype in ink on tissue paper  
17 1/8 x 25 1/2"
33. UNTITLED (M7466), 1974  
monotype in ink on tissue paper  
19 1/2 x 14 1/8"
34. UNTITLED (M7416), 1974  
monotype in ink on paper  
19 1/8 x 29 1/8"
35. UNTITLED (M7465), 1974  
monotype in ink on tissue paper  
29 1/8 x 19 1/8"
36. UNTITLED (M7334), 1973  
monotype in ink on paper  
30 1/8 x 20 1/4"

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