

Educator Notes

Alan Shields: Protracted Simplicity (1966–1985)

June 24–October 2, 2016



A1st Wro, 1969. Acrylic, thread on canvas, 118 x 136 in (299.72 x 345.44 cm). Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. Private collection. Photo: Steven Probert

About the artist

Alan Shields (b. 1944, Herington, KS; d. 2005, Shelter Island, NY) was an artist who created brightly colored works that are playful, meditative, and reflect his belief in a direct connection between art and life. Shields attended Kansas State University, and his work is held in many museum collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Tate, the Walker Art Center, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

About the exhibition

Alan Shields's exhibition at the Aspen Art Museum presents a concentration of the artist's paintings and sculptures—some of which belong to important museum collections and others that are being shown in a museum for the first time. He worked fluidly between these mediums and others, including drawing and printmaking.

Shields's layered artworks suggest movement and energy. Some hang suspended from the ceiling, and others exist in the physical space of the viewer, playing with positive and negative spaces, and creating a dynamic viewing experience.

Growing up in Kansas, Shields was familiar with canvas in the context of a farm before he realized its use in the studio by painters. He saw inspiration everywhere, from the yellow stitches in a pair of overalls to the lobster cages in Shelter Island, where he lived for the last half of his life. The colors, materials, and textures of his work invite viewers to meditate on the energies of art.



Dance Bag, 1985. Acrylic, canvas, glass beads, thread on aluminum tubing, mirror. Height: 40 in; Diameter: 48 in (Height: 101.6 cm; Diameter: 121.9 cm). Estate of the artist. Courtesy Van Doren Waxter, New York

Questions for discussion

- 1 How many geometric shapes can you find?
- 1 What do you notice about Shields's use of color? Does it remind you of anything in real life or your imagination?
- 1 Shields said that he would "reflect a lot of times on the joy in [his] work." What do you love to do, and how could you translate this to an artwork?

Suggested activities

Sculptural Paintings / Painterly Sculptures

Gather muslin or canvas fabric, brightly colored acrylic paints, brushes, scissors, wooden dowels, and string.

Give each student approximately one yard of muslin or canvas fabric. Invite them to paint directly on the fabric with an assortment of acrylics; these can be patterns or abstract designs. Allow time for the painted designs to dry completely.

Once the paint has dried, help students rip or cut their fabric into thin strips. Have students arrange their painted strips of fabric into a design of their choosing to hang from a wooden dowel. Encourage them to experiment with both geometric and abstract shapes when tying and knotting the fabric strips together. Once the design is complete, give each student a piece of string to tie around both ends of their dowel.

Create a gallery space in the classroom by hanging the finished artworks on the walls. Encourage students to reflect on their artistic choices and share with friends and family.

For more information, please contact the Education Department at 970.925.8050 ext. 133 or email education@aspenartmuseum.org

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