

eric firestone gallery

For Immediate Release:

Sensibilities of Shape and Form: Paintings, Sculpture and Works on Paper by Douglas Denniston and Paul Harris

December 13, 2007 - January 27, 2008

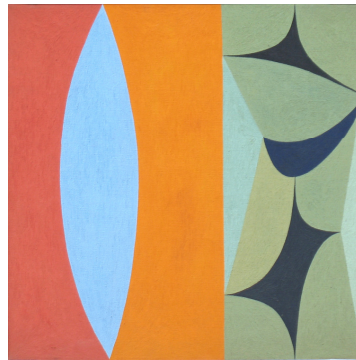
Reception: Thursday - December, 13 - 7:00 – 9:00pm

Book Signing: Friday - December, 14 - 10:00am

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Douglas Denniston and Paul Harris first exhibited together as two of *Eight Young Artists* at the Jonson Gallery in Albuquerque in 1950. Richard Diebenkorn, Jack Garver, Herb Goldman and Robert Walters also showed in the exhibit, which proved to be a seminal event in the advancement of American abstraction. The artists and the City of Albuquerque received national attention as the arts community was heralded as the “Greenwich Village of the West”. The fifty-seven years that have passed have seen each artist move away from those early works yet remain true to the Modernist core they each established early in their careers. Both artists are keen observers of the world around them, they marry a knowing exactitude and a sensual lingering over idea and surface, which is then heightened and finished by a sophisticated simplicity and an emptying out of the unnecessary. *Sensibilities of Shape and Form* will combine paintings and works on paper by Douglas Denniston from the late 1940’s and early 1950’s with sculpture and drawings Paul Harris has been creating over the last forty-five years.

Douglas Denniston (1922 – 2004) arrived in New Mexico in 1945 and immediately immersed himself in the romantic nostalgia of the Santa Fe/Taos Art Movement and the avant-garde leanings of Raymond Jonson’s Transcendental Painting Group. Searching for a singular artistic approach, Denniston absorbed the traditions of the region and combined their color and pattern with his New York roots. Over the next several years a distillation of outward and inward experience produced a pure abstraction devoid of obvious reference to the figure or landscape. In 1948, Denniston, in full stride, energized his abstract compositions with a charged palette of jarring incandescent color, equal parts sweet syrup and bitter acid. Simultaneously, Denniston began to emphasize an autographic approach of applying paint that made the surface just as important a formal and symbolic element as shape and color. Exploring, for the next decade, the possibilities of materials, process and variation Denniston created a dizzying number of works. Exhibits from this period would include The Museum of Modern Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Butler Institute of American Art. The intense inquiry of the period and the non-objective abstractions that resulted had a profound effect on Denniston; they became an entrance into the spiritual and allowed him the confidence to follow his own path for the sixty years that followed.

Paul Harris (born 1925) began making plaster sculpture of the human form in New Mexico in the late 1940’s. Throughout the fifties his sculpture remained largely experimental. Utilizing plaster, papier-mâché and string, Harris created raw, ephemeral and thought-provoking works, which would receive critical praise throughout the decade at New York’s Poindexter Gallery. The masks, figures and environments from the period conveyed psychological emotions as they unveiled not only the figure but also the space it mentally and physically occupied. A linear quality controlled the whole and gave action and life to dense masses that were added to, shaped, scraped or woven; a never ending reference to labor and to the artist’s studio. In the 1960’s, as Harris turned to his immediate external world, the sculpture moved away from the experimental yet retained the marriage of high art and domestic craft in stuffed and stitched cloth sculptures that used everyday items as armatures and inspiration. Harris’s soft sculpture naturally led him to the possibilities of the “hard” mediums of bronze and wood, traditional processes that hearken back to antiquity. Over his career, Harris has worked with almost every sculptural medium and process, yet in his drawings (ongoing since childhood) he has preferred wax crayons as his primary medium. Harris uses crayon much in the same manner he used string in his experimental sculptures from the 1950’s in which form was implied then actively defined by a tangle of lines that could spontaneously unravel into nothingness. Just like Harris’ life work, the drawings let backgrounds mesh freely with subjects as each competes for attention and often shifts in importance as every square inch is attended to and extended by the artist’s hand and the crayon’s colored point.

Paul Harris studied with Johannes Molzahn in New York, NY and Hans Hoffman in Provincetown, MA. His work has been exhibited widely: Museum of Modern Art, NY, the San Francisco Museum of Art, CA and the Los Angeles County Museum, CA. **Together with his wife Meme, Paul Harris established Wrongtree Press in 1973. Eric Firestone Gallery will celebrate Wrongtree Press’ newest release, *Paul Harris: Black and White Drawings and Prints 1938 - 2006* with a book signing Friday, December 14th at 10:00a.m.**

Image: Douglas Denniston – *Acrobatic Dark* - dated 1949, oil on canvas 15” x 15”