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Newark Museum

By Joe Jacobs

In the beginning of the 1970s, the early geometric abstract painting of William T. Williams stood as an emblem for contemporary art for many people. His 1969 *Elbert Jackson, L.A.M.F.* was prominently hung in the lobby of The Museum of Modern Art. It was the first thing seen upon entering this temple of twentieth-century art and it seemed to embody the period's ardent faith in the superiority of abstraction. These dramatic and powerful paintings were made when the artist was in his twenties, fresh out of Yale art school, and they announced a promising career.

It is perhaps ironic that, although Williams went on to become a distinguished painter with several retrospective exhibitions in recent years, none of these shows included his earliest work, which is largely forgotten today. The Newark Museum has reassembled a number of these first mature works, which rank among the most powerful paintings from the late 1960s or early 1970s, and yet have not been seen since they were made.

These paintings are explosive, the color and compositions exploding off the surface and out of the frames. Unlike most of the art of this period, Williams' geometric abstraction is asymmetrical. Furthermore, it appears intuitive, not proceeding from geometrical or mathematical premises, which were characteristic of the era. Lastly, Williams in his daring paintings almost seemed to be commenting on the state of abstract art at the time, taking a critical stance which only became fashionable in the 1980s and is still important today. A selection of recent paintings that complement these early works will also be on display.

Not only do these forgotten early works by a young artist bear remarkable conceptual resemblance to art of today, they are visually exciting and as fresh as the day they were made.

From March 15 to May 14 these exciting works will be on view in the Contemporary Artists Gallery in the North Wing. The show is the fourth in the *Projects Series*, small-scale exhibitions designed to study issues in contemporary art.

Project 4: William T. Williams, The Early Paintings, 1970, March 15 through August 13 in the North Wing Contemporary Artists gallery



Sweet's Crane, 1969, Empire State Collection



Elbert Jackson LAMF, 1969, MOMA



I Am A Genius, Private Collection, 1971