

MNUCHIN GALLERY

# ARTnews

## From the Archives: Ed Clark's Dynamically Constructed Abstractions

By the Editors of ARTnews  
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Ed Clark, *Blacklash*, 1964, oil on canvas. COURTESY MNUCHIN GALLERY, NEW YORK/ARTWORK: ©ED CLARK/PHOTOGRAPH: TOM POWEL IMAGING

*Currently on view at the Mnuchin Gallery in New York is a career survey of Ed Clark, the painter known for abstractions created by moving a push broom across a canvas. Clark's work is also on view at the Brooklyn Museum in "Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power." With both shows in mind, we surveyed reviews from the ARTnews archives that spotlight the 92-year-old painter's output. In one from November 1972, Lawrence Campbell notes that Clark may have been the first painter of a shaped canvas. Cynthia Nadelman, writing for the March 1982 issue on the occasion of a Studio Museum in Harlem survey of Clark, asks, "Where has Edward Clark been all our lives?" —Alex Greenberger*

### **"Reviews and previews"**

**By James Schuyler**

**March 1958**

Edward Clark [Brata; March 7-27], in a first New York one-man show, offers dynamically constructed abstractions. Clark carefully builds up different flat areas to work against each other and against the four edges of the canvas. In the structuring of the spatial movements—up and down, over and across, forward and backward—one is always aware of the canvas edge as a positive element. Clark is a craftsman; he has a control over his means. Prices unquoted.

### **"Reviews & Previews"**

**By Lawrence Campbell**

**November 1972**

Edward Clark, one of the few Americans to find a place in Michael Seuphor's "Dictionnaire de la Peinture Abstraite"—which appeared in 1957 heavily freighted with Frenchmen who have since vanished from the scene—had a startlingly beautiful show at the new *141 Prince Street Gallery*, which expects to serve as an outlet for uptown galleries such as Elkon. Clark, born in

New Orleans in 1926, was part of the Paris scene in the 1950s when young Americans on the G.I. Bill were making Paris over into the image of their dreams. He is generally credited with having been the first painter to make a “shaped canvas.” The recent paintings are either oval in shape or ovals set within large rectangular shapes. All consist of very narrow stripes of color extending horizontally, parallel to each other, sometimes running beyond the limits of the oval, sometimes contained within. The subtlety of the colors, their inner relationships, their groupings and juxtapositions result in harmonies that suggest the vastness of the sea when it mirrors the vastness of the sky—an example of how a technique and a process of painting can result in an appearance of nature closer and more faithful to it than if the painter had sat down in front of the sea and endeavored to fix its image on the canvas. Of course one cannot suppose it was Clark’s intention to paint the sea: he wanted to paint what was inside him. But the result is a kind of harmony, such as nature experienced in an Emersonian eyeball.



Ed Clark, *Intarsia*, 1970, acrylic on canvas. COURTESY MNUCHIN GALLERY, NEW YORK/ARTWORK: ©ED CLARK/PHOTOGRAPH: TOM POWEL IMAGING

**“New York Reviews”**  
**By Cynthia Nadelman**  
**March 1982**

Edward Clark (The Studio Museum in Harlem): Horizontal bands of color are wedged to horizontal lozenges or ovals outlined on canvas in work that makes a strong contribution to the language of Abstract Expressionism and post-Abstract Expressionism. Where has Edward Clark been all our lives? In 1957 he was precociously working on shaped-canvas paintings, one of which was exhibited in this retrospective. The work’s energy, tension and structure make its reach beyond the rectangle seem inevitable, though not predetermined. Similar strength and spontaneity of paint application was next achieved through manipulation of a push broom on canvas. In some hands, this might have been a gimmick, but Clark has demonstrated amazing

expressivity with it. Cutting wide and bold swaths across canvases—sometimes turning, sometimes not deviating from a straight line, the strokes may also leave energetic yet delicate splashes in the broom’s path. Their horizontality is what seems to have led, beginning in the ’70s, to containment within oval shapes or to the incision of elliptical lines in the horizontal fields of color. The variety of options within these frameworks is staggering, the subtle manifestations Clark works, admirable.



Ed Clark, *Untitled*, 2001, dry pigment on paper. COURTESY MNUCHIN GALLERY, NEW YORK/ARTWORK: ©ED CLARK/PHOTOGRAPH: TOM POWEL IMAGING

## **“National Reviews”**

**By Margaret Hawkins**

**May 2003**

This exhibition of Clark’s new paintings [at G. R. N’Namdi gallery in Chicago] (all dated 2002) demonstrated his continuing exploration of mood and emotional nuance through the broad stroke. A seminal 1950s New York–based Abstract Expressionist, Clark now divides his time between New York and Paris. A master of controlled accident, he pours paint onto floor-laid canvases and moves it around with a broom, managing to preserve his own dynamic physical gesture. The broom is absent, yet its presence is preserved in the motion of the paint. His big, arcing strokes of ice-cream colors evoke thoughts of tumultuous weather systems and sensual nudes, without ever departing from pure abstraction.