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A Long-Lost Series by a Difficult-to-Categorize Abstract Expressionist Finally Gets a Showing—See It Here

Show of the Day: "Ray Parker: The Nines" at Washburn Gallery, New York.

Sarah Cascone, January 23, 2018



"Ray Parker: The Nines," installation view. Photo courtesy of Washburn Gallery.

What the Gallery Says: "Briefly in 1964 and 1965, [Ray] Parker created a short series of paintings called 'The Nines.' Never shown together at the time, this is the first exhibition of the eleven 'Nines' known today. Parker painted with brush, rags, and tubes of paint, but whatever shape they ultimately take, Parker's absolute command of color unifies his entire body of work."

Why It's Worth a Look: Months after his death in 1990, Ray Parker was the subject of a retrospective-turned memorial at New York's Hunter College, where he had taught for 30 years. "He deserves a place in the history of American abstraction, particularly in the postwar American effort to reconcile the open-endedness and sweep of Abstract Expressionism with the refined lyricism of Matisse, but it is a modest place—and it is not so easy to define what that place is," wrote Michael Brenson in the *New York Times*.

Parker's "The Nines" series recalls Gerhard Richter's better-known "Color Charts" (begun in 1966, just after). But where Richter was inspired by the scientific precision of industrially produced paint chips, Parker's work has a much more organic feel. The work of a jazz-lover who played the trumpet, Parker's canvas reveal a more improvisational nature with visible brushwork and subtle gradations of color. The show is a compelling introduction to his oeuvre that leaves me eager to learn more about this Lyrical-Abstractionist and his contributions to Color Field painting.

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