

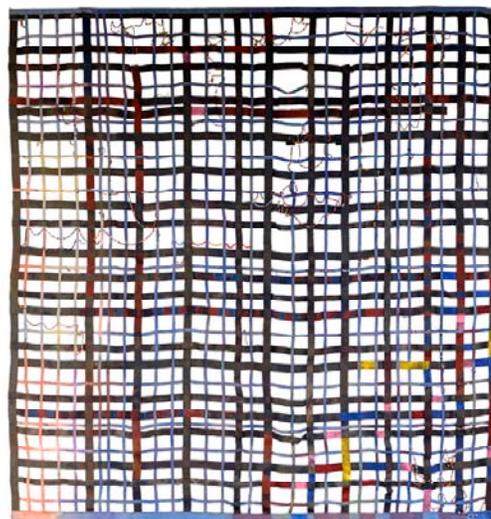
## ALAN SHIELDS

[1944-2005]

Canvas and Constructions 1973-2003

May 27 – June 27, 2010

Reception: Saturday, May 29, 5-7 pm

*Shape Up, 1976-77, 75 x 72 inches*

From May 27 – June 27, 2010, The Drawing Room gallery in East Hampton is pleased to present **Alan Shields (1944- 2005) Canvas and Constructions**, an exhibition of selected stitched and stained canvases and sculpture from the 1970s through 2003. Educated as an engineer at Kansas State University, Shields turned to theater before making a name for himself in the vibrant New York art scene of the 1960s. Represented from 1969 to 1991 by the Paula Cooper Gallery, Shields has been shown broadly around the world and his work is in the permanent collections of all major museums including MoMA, the Whitney and the Metropolitan Museum.

While the modernist tenet of faithfulness to materials still prevailed in the 1950s and 60s, Minimalism's reverence for the flatness of the stretched canvas became suspect. Shields and his contemporaries Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Sol Le Witt and Donald Judd were enthralled by process and transformed the conundrum of the stretched canvas into combines, wall drawings and in Johns' case, a lifelong investigation of the persistence of the canvas object. From the start, Shields approached painting as an experiential, multimedia expression born of an intuitive comfort with a complexity of visual systems which required the metaphorical and physical quality of soft canvas.

Shields' innovative process began in the late 1960s when he mastered the sewing machine as his drawing tool. One invention led to another: the stitching allowed Shields to incorporate drawing on both sides of the canvas that had to be relaxed and pliable to slip through the machine. He loved the material and wanted it to hang with its own weight, a softer look than a stretched canvas. Stitching colored thread lines into geometrically organized stained canvases, he created a unique working method so flexible he could work on any scale. Shaping cut and torn interlaced canvas strips, he suspended double sided stained paintings off the wall or draped canvas strips into cones, cylinders and banners. This exhibition focuses on key works from 1973 to 2003, in every scale. In *Dune Dang on the Trails* from 1973, Shields presents a subtle, mysterious stain painting on a piece of raw canvas, bound at the edges. Devoid of visible brush marks, this work evokes a deep space of soaked blue green that achieves tremendous depth and luminosity. On closer examination, one finds the gesture of rag painting has saturated the canvas with aqueous tourmaline pigment that is delicately punctuated by stitches of thread charting their journey across the liquid expanse. At once, we understand the sensuous presence of unstretched canvas, and its lack of pretension.

*Chunky Blue Mint*, 1974-77, is a tall vertical painting reminiscent of a silk Tanka or a cotton Pichwai painting in a Hindu Temple. The hazy divisions between rectangles of deep, emotional reds and a lapis lazuli blue recall Rothko and saffron monks' robes. Here, Shields explores the tension between a minimal stitch drawing and the ephemeral hues floating on the hanging fabric.

(over)

By 1976, in *Shape Up*, Shields created off the wall, paintings in the round by crisscrossing canvas belting in an open grid of strips stained individually as paintings and embellished with strung beads. The two-sided, signature lattice object activates and engages the space and light between and behind the strips. Hanging from the ceiling and out from the wall it ritualizes the deconstruction and reinvention of painting.

From 1969 through 1991 Shields produced a phenomenal body of highly original sculptural paintings of strips of canvas shaped by gravity. Some hung from the ceiling, others stood as environments to walk through, and all were presented at the Paula Cooper Gallery in memorable installations. His monumental work gained notoriety for its exuberance and originality as it defied with the simplest of means the traditional parameters and goals of painting and sculpture.

By the mid 1980s Shields had moved to Shelter Island and was working in all dimensions and media. *Polo Rollover*, *Tap Shoot Count* and *Direct Dodge* are rich layered stained paintings in which intricate geometric patterns become jazzy personal mandalas of primal forms and ancient color.

In *Emergency Alert*, 1992, a tour de force measuring 115 x 88 inches, Shields' ambition for painting reaches new expression. In this work he seemed to express a revelation he had a decade earlier: "The more variety you have in your concepts, the more comfortable you're going to be in life." For Alan Shields, grappling with the complexity of life's offerings fired his imagination and gave dazzling energy to his life and to his art.

**Hours: Monday, Thursday, Friday & Saturday, 11–5, Sunday 11-4.**

For further information and reproductions, please contact Kristin Miller at 631.324.5016 or [info@drawingroom-gallery.com](mailto:info@drawingroom-gallery.com).