

An abstract painting featuring a dense, textured composition of numerous small, irregular brushstrokes and dabs of paint. The color palette is rich and varied, including warm tones like red, orange, yellow, and brown, as well as cooler tones like blue, green, and white. The overall effect is one of vibrant energy and complex visual rhythm.

JOHN GRILLO

Works from the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s

BEYOND THE FIFTIES

The sun comes out in many mind's eyes at the mere mention of John Grillo's name. His first show at Howard Wise Gallery on a stormy miserable day in 1961 had such great impact — "It was like walking into a room full of sunshine." "It seemed ten degrees warmer in there." "Everyone was so depressed by the bad weather and their spirits lifted as soon as they entered the room," etc. — that no one forgets the experience. One artist called Grillo the Renoir of Abstract Expressionism; another compared him to Rubens for his sensuality. One critic brought up Turner while another waxed eloquently about Venetian luminosity in his regard. All these references still seem apt when you see these gorgeous, light filled canvases.

One reference which was not made at the time might be made now, and that is to Futurism... Like the Futurists, Grillo painted pure energy. Unlike them (primarily because of his Abstract Expressionist training with Hans Hofmann) he wasn't tied to the world of object or specific mechanized forms of action. Thus the noisy, heated, super-charged world they depicted seems controlled in comparison with the explosive painterly manifestations of Grillo...

Upon occasion, he successfully resisted the temptation to impose order on the maelstrom of flying forms which the Futurists were never able to do, and at those times he indulged his love of pigment for its own sake to the fullest. The canvases and huge collages, in which he mashes paper into paint like pulp, seem hedonistic and full of joy as the best Hofmann's of the 60s and are even more sensuous.

Grillo had rebelled as a Hofmann student, moving out of his late 40s mythologizing biomorphism into impastoed squares of brilliant color in huge grid formats. He comes close to Hofmann in these painterly canvases of the early 60s and then returns to sterner control in the hard-edge abstractions of the late 60s. Of course, Hofmann had his Constructivist side as well, but it was never as rigorously employed as Grillo's...

Yellow was the color of the spirit according to Van Gogh, and Grillo redefines it as high spirited. His paintings exude happiness. Rhetorical Abstract Expressionism, which was the crucible in which he was formed, was much more sober and "down" in mood.

The verbal rhetoric—as opposed to the painted kind—of these years focused on light; this is the main reason these paintings by Grillo were so exciting to the audience that greeted them. As one reviewer, Dario Suro, said "He produces the light that acts as its own statement." Grillo actually painted quite thickly, with all manner of palette-knife flash and dash and semi-automatic techniques; however, the substance of the pigment seems to evanesce before your eyes it is so 'light.'... Like the restless seas on which young Grillo sailed during the war, light never falls the same way twice. It takes an open, ever-changing responsive sensibility such as Grillo's to capture its palpitating essence in such recalcitrant materials such as pigment on wood-stretched canvas.

*April Kingsley***

