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Contact: Garth Greenan  
(212) 929-1351  
info@garthgreenan.com  
www.garthgreenan.com

## Independent 20th Century



*Untitled*, 1976, mixed media on paper collage, 51 x 74 inches

For the inaugural edition of Independent 20th Century, Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of three works by Al Loving, made between 1971 and 1976. The works chart phases in the artist's whirlwind transformation at the early stages of his career.

By 1969—within just one year of his move to New York—Al Loving's early hard-edged abstractions had established him as the first African American to secure a solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum. Loving, however, felt that the early success was restrictive. "I felt stuck inside that box," he said of his work at the time. While *Untitled* (1971) is representative of the hard-edge paintings of the period, a single panel breaks in the work from the smooth, uniform surfaces, hinting at the freeform explorations of materiality that were to come.

In years that followed, Loving completely departed from the Apollonian notions of centralized composition, figure/ground separation, and pictorial frame. "[It] strikes me as radical a rupture as one can make in one's history," wrote the critic John Yau. His new works stretched irregularly, spiraling outward, and interacting sensuously with the space around them. In *Untitled* (1976), the artist unites brightly colored pieces of cut and torn paper into an abundance of overlapping pattern and texture. These joyous and, at times, musical assemblages reflected Loving's rich, intuitive use of color and appreciation for beauty. "I would like my art to be liked by 2-year-old kids and 80-year-old people," he once remarked, defining beauty not as merely aesthetic, but as something deeply connected to human feeling.

Fifty years after Loving's bold decision to break away from hard-edged abstractions, the monumentally scaled, dyed, and torn fabric wall hangings are signatures of the artist's work. In *Untitled* (1975), irregular strips of canvas hang together, forming a tattered flag or garment. It was in these dynamic constructions that Loving felt conclusively liberated from the rectilinear strictures of his earlier works: "I had gotten completely out of jail."

The artist passed away in 2005. Throughout his career, Loving had solo exhibitions at many prestigious institutions, including: Gertrude Kastle Gallery (1969, 1970, Detroit), William Zierler, Inc. (1971, 1972, 1973, New York), Fischbach Gallery (1974, 1976, New York), The Studio Museum in Harlem (1977, 1986, New York), Diane Brewer Gallery (1980, 1983, New York), June Kelly Gallery (1988, 1990, 1992, New York), the Neuberger Museum of Art (1998, Purchase, New York), and Kenkeleba House (2005, New York). His work was also featured in many important group exhibitions, such as *L'art vivant aux États-Unis* (1970, Fondation Maeght, Saint-Paul, France), *Contemporary Black Artists in America* (1971, Whitney Museum of American Art), *Lamp Black: Afro-American Artists, New York and Boston* (1973, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), *Another Generation* (1979, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York), *Afro-American Abstraction* (1981, P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, Queens), and *The Appropriate Object* (1989, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo), among others.

Most recently, Loving's work appeared in *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting, 1967–1975* (2006, Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina, Greensboro), *Target Practice: Painting Under Attack, 1949–1978* (2009, Seattle Art Museum), *America is Hard to See* (2015, Whitney Museum of American Art), *Marrakech Biennale 6* (2016, Morocco), *Delirious: Art at the Limits of Reason, 1950–1980* (2017–2018, Metropolitan Museum of Art), *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* (2017, Tate Modern; 2018, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art; 2018–2019, Brooklyn Museum), *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* (2018, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; 2018, High Museum of Art, Atlanta; 2018–2019, Los Angeles County Museum of Art).

Loving's work features in the collections of major museums around the country, including: Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Rollins College, Winter Park, Florida; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas; the Detroit Institute of Arts; the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Museum of Modern Art; the National Gallery of Art; the Pérez Art Museum Miami; the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Rose Art Museum, Waltham, Massachusetts; and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to represent the estate of Al Loving.

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