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Independent 20th Century



Paul Feeley, *Untitled*, 1961, oil-based enamel on canvas, 94 x 140 inches

For the 2023 edition of Independent 20th Century, Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to present three paintings by Paul Feeley from the early 1960s, a time of intense formal and technical innovation for the artist.

The two works from 1960—*Vespasian* and *Germanicus*—in some ways epitomize the animating tension at the heart of his most compelling works; that between Dionysian chaos and Apollonian order. These paintings mark some of the initial moments that archetypal, jack-like forms began to precipitate out of the chaotic blotches that preceded them in the 1950s. In later paintings like *Untitled* (1961), the forms solidify further, taking on firm borders, becoming more settled and architectural.

Paul Feeley was a prolific painter, sculptor, and teacher. His art historical legacy is intertwined with that of Bennington College where he taught for 27 years (1939–1966), founding its celebrated art department in the process. At the school, Feeley organized the first retrospective exhibitions of Hans Hofmann, Jackson Pollock, and other artists who would later take on canonical significance. Feeley's social and cultural proximity to the most significant artists and critics of his time was a great benefit to his students who, in turn, made their own impact. His students, likewise, had a reflexive influence on

Feeley, and perhaps reinforced his already preternatural curiosity and openness. Notably, his technique of thinning oil-based enamel paint, particularly evident in *Vespasian* and *Germanicus*, was developed by his pupil Helen Frankenthaler.

His contemporary, the critic Clement Greenberg, labeled *Germanicus* as most likely to become “the masterpiece” of Feeley’s first solo show at Betty Parsons Gallery in 1960. Despite its proximity to Greenbergian Formalism and other domineering influences of the day, Feeley’s work remained highly eclectic and idiosyncratic—combining elements of Abstract Expressionism, with Color Field, earlier Surrealist automatism, and even Pop. The works coalesce these varied influences into somatic forms that provoke a sense of the elemental chaos at the heart of the physics that organizes the world.

Born in 1910 in Des Moines, Iowa, Paul Feeley studied painting at Menlo College, Menlo Park, California, and at the Art Students League, New York. After completing his training, Feeley began teaching, first at Cooper Union (1935–1939) and later at the aforementioned Bennington College.

Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Feeley had solo exhibitions at many prominent institutions, including Tibor de Nagy Gallery (1955, 1958, New York), Betty Parsons Gallery (1960, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1970, 1971, 1975, New York), and Kasmin Gallery (1964, London). During this period, his work was also featured in important museum exhibitions, such as *Post Painterly Abstraction* (1964, Los Angeles County Museum of Art), *The Shaped Canvas* (1964, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum), (1965, Museum of Modern Art), and *Systemic Painting* (1966, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum), among others. In 1968, the artist was the subject of a memorial retrospective exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. More recently, a full-career retrospective of Feeley’s work took place at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery (2014–2015, Buffalo) and the Columbus Museum of Art (2015–2016), accompanied by a fully illustrated catalog.

Feeley’s work is featured in the collections of major museums around the country, including the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; the Columbus Museum of Art; the Detroit Institute of Arts; the Fogg Museum, Harvard University; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution; the McNay Art Museum; the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Museum of Modern Art; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; the Phoenix Art Museum; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford; and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to represent the Estate of Paul Feeley.

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