



Smithsonian American Art Museum

## **Negotiating Modernism: Color-Field Painting and the Upheaval of Art Criticism in America, 1952–67**

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This research explores the ways in which five color-field painters—Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, and Frank Stella—negotiated the rise of modernist art criticism from the early 1950s through the late 1960s. Using the rich resources at the Smithsonian Institution, my project will redefine the relationship between color-field painting and a variety of critical practices, and make an important contribution to the scholarship of postwar American art and art criticism.

In recent discussions of art after abstract expressionism, color-field painting has tended to be eclipsed by Neo-Dada and pop art. Its waning presence in scholarship is due in part to current critical perceptions of Clement Greenberg, with whom the color-field painters have been closely associated. It is important to note, however, that these painters were also appreciated by other diverse groups: the New York School poets, minimalist artists, and various art critics and curators. Their views, which differ from the modernist interpretation advocated by Greenberg, also fostered the contexts in which the color-field painters emerged and prevailed in the history of postwar American painting.

My dissertation investigates how the color-field painters drew from several critical perspectives to construct meaning for their work and analyzes the degree of heterogeneity of color-field painting. Taking into account the manifold aspects of color-field painting, I will reframe the painters' relationship with modernist art criticism as one of diverse negotiation instead of unilateral dependence.