

# PAULA COOPER GALLERY

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## **LEONARD CONTINO**

529 W 21st Street

April 13 — May 4, 2019

NEW YORK — An exhibition of paintings by Leonard Contino opens on April 13th, 2019 in the gallery's vitrine space at 529 West 21st Street. A self-taught artist, Contino (1943–2017) worked extensively in painting as well as sculpture, wall relief and collage for over fifty years, creating complex works of geometric abstraction. In their delicate transparencies, subtle hues, and changing perspective, the four paintings presented here demonstrate the artist's perseverance and dedication to artmaking, after suffering an injury in 1962 that left him a quadriplegic. The exhibition will be on view through May 4th, 2019.

Organized into distinct bodies of work, Contino's practice explores shifting spatial dynamics through a keen manipulation of color and form. Following a diving accident at the age of 19 that resulted in quadriplegia, Contino met artist and fellow patient Mark di Suvero while receiving treatment at the Rusk Institute in New York. Through the encouragement of di Suvero, Contino began to make drawings and eventually to paint: "He brought me brushes, paint and canvases. [He] took me around and explained to me about art ... He taught me without teaching. He made me want to do it."

For the paintings on view, created between 1984 and 1994, Contino described his process as one of improvisation, erasure, and phenomenological acuity. Using a palette of softened colors, Contino painted multifaceted and whimsical shapes against an atmospheric backdrop of subtly changing hue. Merging architectural linearity and impulsive biomorphism, the variable forms resist structural clarity as their illusionistic modeling opposes a consistent or logical ordering of space. Contino's artist's statement explains: "Within this flexible geometry, the spatial ambiguities occur over time creating a continually shifting pictorial plane." The delicate composition of synthesized shapes and constructional elements recede and protract, producing a radiant and lively optical tension.

With the support of artist friends that included Mark di Suvero, James Clark, and Frosty Myers, Leonard Contino (b. 1943, New York City) remained dedicated to artmaking for over fifty years. In the 1960s and early 1970s, Contino's work was exhibited at such New York venues as the Green Gallery, Park Place Gallery, Paula Cooper Gallery, and P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center. In 1978, Janie C. Lee Gallery in Houston presented a one-person show of his work. More recently, the artist's paintings were presented at the CUE Art Foundation in an exhibition curated by Mark di Suvero in 2013, and at Mitchell Algus Gallery in 2015. Contino's works are in a number of museums and private collections including the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington D.C., the Dallas Museum of Art in Texas, and the Foundation of Contemporary Art, Geneva. Contino passed away in 2017 in Queens, New York.

For more information and images, please contact the gallery:  
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