

GRAND STREET



David Mamet | *Tony Smith*
Suzan-Lori Parks | *Tennessee Williams*
José Saramago | *Pablo Neruda*

MEMORY | 64

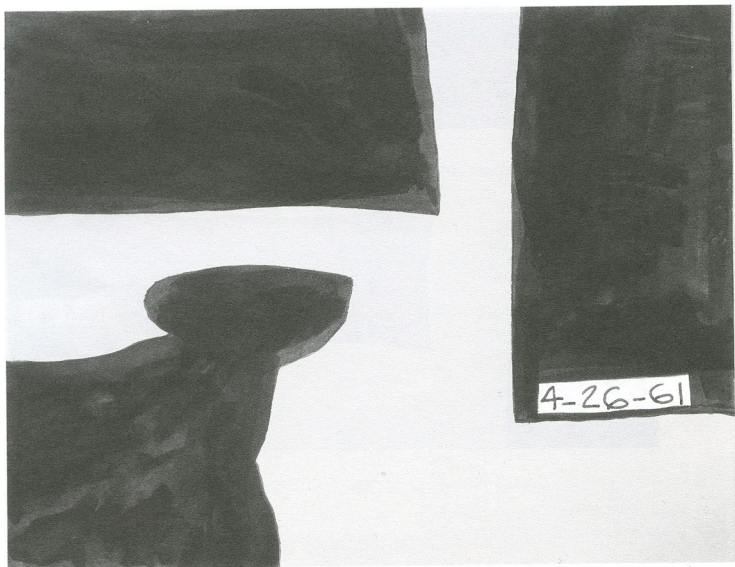
TONY SMITH



PAGE 55:
Untitled, 1961.

PAGE 57:
Untitled, 1934.

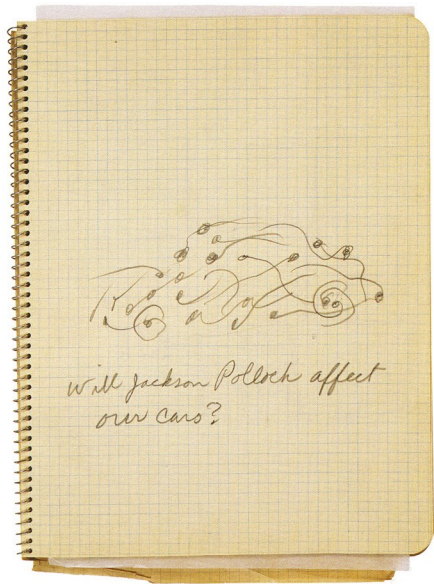
BELOW:
Untitled, 1961.

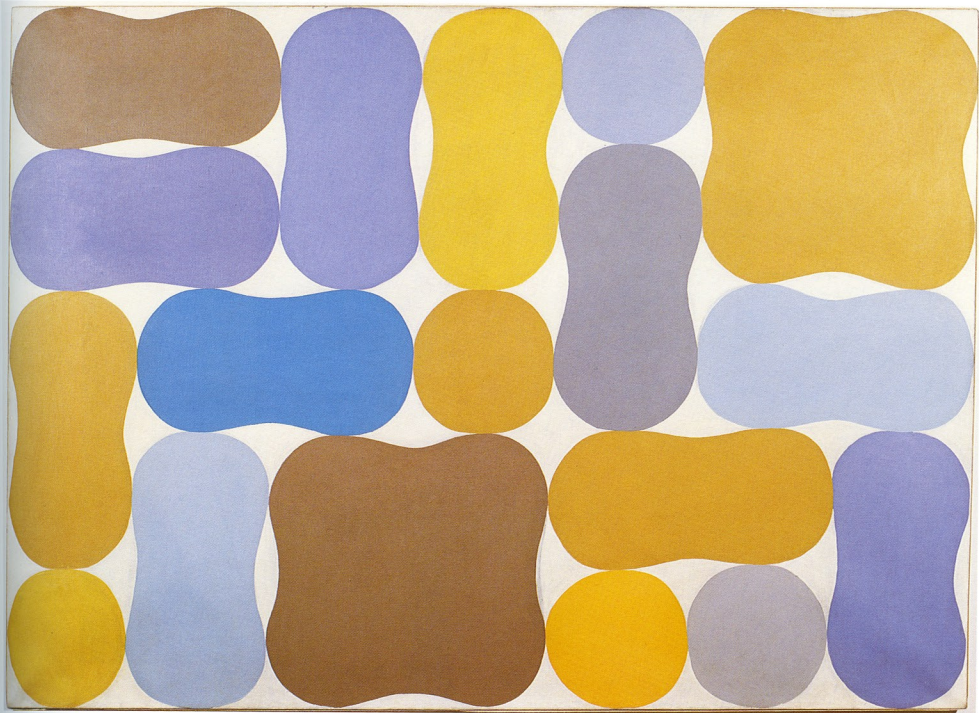


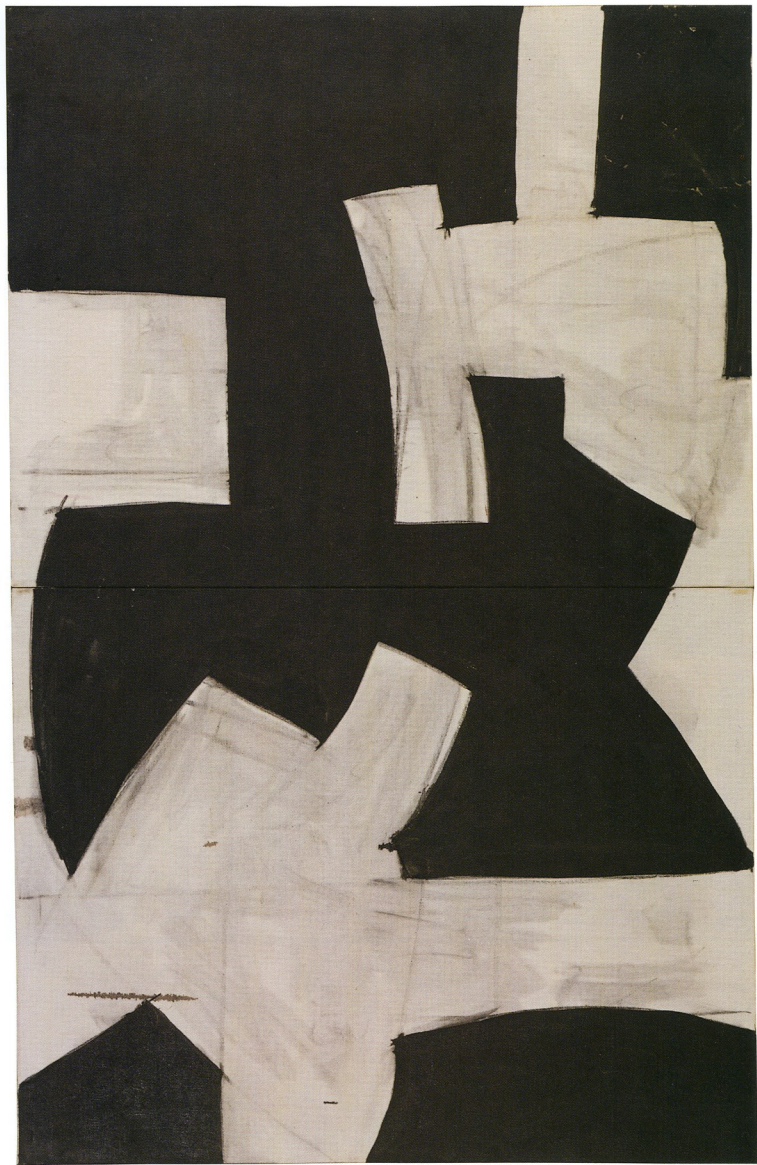


BELOW:
Will Jackson Pollock
Affect Our Cars?,
c. 1949-50.

PAGE 59:
Louisenberg #5,
1953-54.

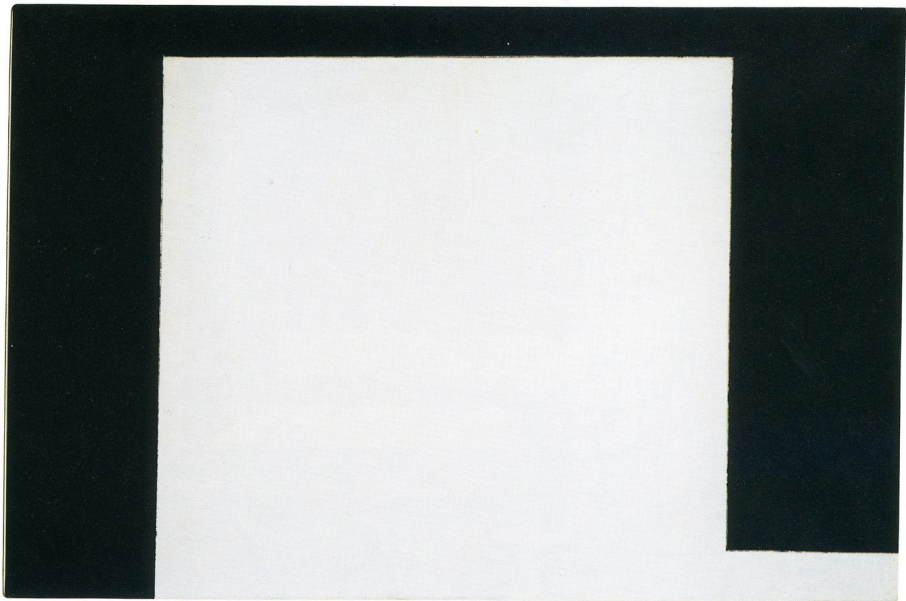






PAGE 60:
Untitled, 1962.

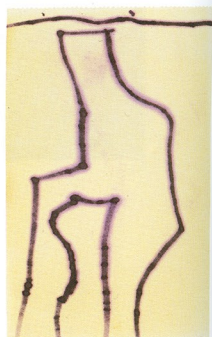
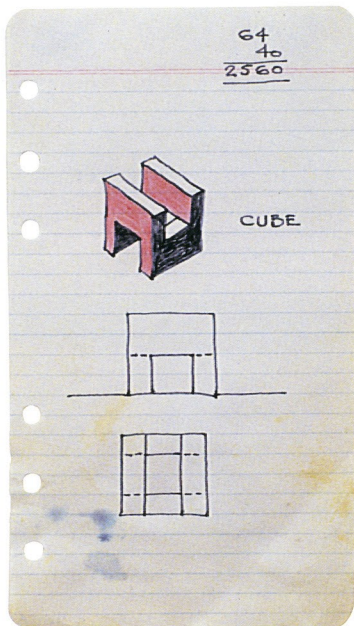
BELOW:
Untitled, 1962-63.



RIGHT:
Untitled, c. 1962.

BELOW:
Untitled, c. 1960s.

PAGE 63:
One Gate (drawing
for Stinger), 1967.



(The History of Cities) — The Crooked (shall

One Bad Gate #1 (Title 2 [?])



the first made way of road still to be seen.

What do you do when there is only one gate? S.P.F!

Practically, this may seem too open, but, the majesty of the scale will give it cohesion. Earlier scheme is too oppressive.



PAGE 64:
For Marjorie, 1961.

BELOW:
For J.C., 1969.



Tony Smith

"The pure products of America go crazy," William Carlos Williams, the Paterson, New Jersey doctor/poet warns readers in one of his prismatic odes to the everyday. His was a post-Whitman view of America's democratic vistas, with the ominous shadows fleshed out. Tony Smith, a prodigal son of neighboring South Orange, New Jersey, responded to Whitman's call for a native art of heroic aims and proportions, but he shared Williams's darker vision, as well. He had reason. Madness in a bottle claimed his close friend Jackson Pollock, while corrosive early fame—and more booze—ate away at the creative powers of another, Tennessee Williams. That Smith should have named two of his most important early sculptures *Eleven Are Up* and *The Snake is Out*, both slang expressions for chronic drunkenness, effectively places him at the bar beside them. An equally "pure product of America," he too flirted with disaster in the hard-living style of his generation.

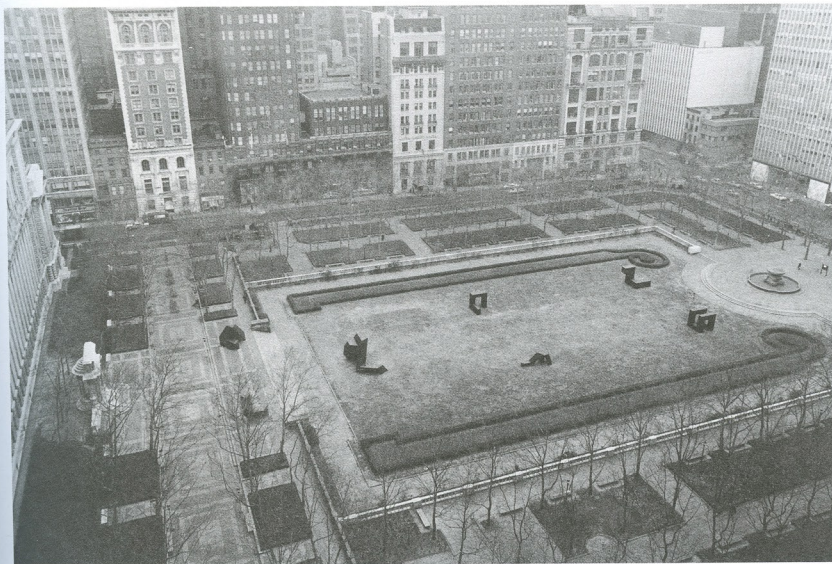
But Smith never fully succumbed to the obsessions that bedeviled him and his contemporaries. It was not just that he instinctually pulled back from the brink his friends went over, but that he had been pacing himself all along. In fact, Smith did not come into his own until the 1960s, after most of his comrades had passed from the scene. Late-bloomer and aesthetic jack-of-all-trades, he successively mastered each of his chosen disciplines—painting, architecture, and sculpture—without ever pursuing professional status in any of them. His standards and methods were rigorously his own. As were his motives.

Intense, conflicted feeling, spiritual dilemmas, and mystic longings kept his mind in constant turmoil. For much of his life, rapturous theorizing

consumed the energy these tensions spun off; a secretive ruminator and manifesto writer, Smith was also a wild, lyrical talker and, in the way of some autodidacts, a natural teacher. Like his alternately encyclopedic, incantatory, and aphoristic texts, Smith's drawings—which sometimes serve as manuscript illuminations—range from visual equations and thumbnail constructions to symbolist diagrams, transformational erotica, and aesthetic whimsy. (In the last category Smith's idea of a Pollock-style automobile is a match for his friend Ad Reinhardt's art cartoons.)

As an architect, Smith built few buildings, and fewer still remain intact. Nevertheless, inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright, his mentor, and Le Corbusier, his idol, he dreamed up cities. As a painter, he also worked small but thought big—which explains why his canvases, usually at the low end of easel-scale, evoke a grandeur out of proportion to their actual size. It was only as a sculptor that Smith was able to take his own full measure. Even then, there were qualifications. "I don't make sculpture. I speculate in form," he told a friend, and most of those speculations shaped up as tiny cardboard maquettes which he passed on to assistants or professional sheet-metal workers to enlarge. (A skilled but reluctant craftsman, Smith called upon his students and family—including daughters Kiki and Seton, now well-known contemporary artists in their own right—to fold and tape these models, as well other protégés, like Richard Tuttle, to make large wooden mock-ups he exhibited when industrial fabrication was too expensive.)

That Smith knew exactly how these fragile paper boxes would translate into imposing steel objects is plain from the results. Fixated since his youth by the



Bryant Park installation, New York City, 1967.

idea that America had yet to produce monuments equal to those of ancient civilizations or to its own vast and varied dimensions, Smith responded with four-square blocks, listing polyhedra, angular knots, ground-hugging arches and towering volumetric puzzles that in their variously obdurate, eccentric, and exalted permutations express this country's uneasy greatness. The big painterly gesture of Pollock thus found its unexpected equivalent in Smith's space-dominating, space-framing sculptures, just as the welter of masculine emotion typical of Williams's melodramas is contained in

Smith's restless but firmly rooted "presences" as the artist liked to call them.

"The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing," wrote the mathematical genius and pitiless Catholic philosopher, Blaise Pascal. He too is somewhere in the crowd, behind Williams, Whitman, and the rest. And Smith, Pascal's co-religionist and soul-torn innovator in a tradition of rationalist modernism, echoed back, "Geometry has its reasons that reason cannot know." His work is the manifold proof.

Robert Storr