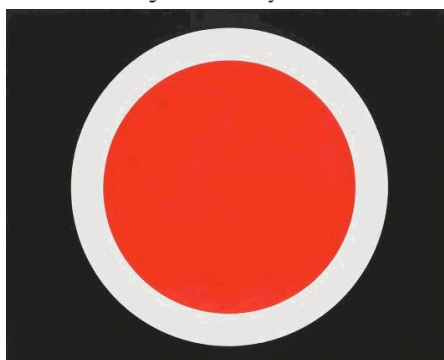




Connecting the Dots: Alexander Liberman's Abstract Paintings and Sculptures Go on Display

by *Dodie Kazanjian*



Spot and circle paintings are back on Madison Avenue, but this time they're not by **Damien Hirst** or **Yayoi Kusama**. The paintings and tabletop sculptures at Mitchell-Innes & Nash (through October 26) are by Alexander Liberman, and they look as fresh and exhilarating as they did in the fifties and early sixties, when he made them. Liberman (1912–1999), the Russian-born aesthete whose day job was being art director of *Vogue*, was also a serious artist who showed with Betty Parsons and whose work during these years anticipated minimal art by a decade. The paintings and lollipop-like, stainless steel, tabletop sculptures on view, with their crisp outlines, geometrical forms, and bold reds, whites, and blacks are not only prescient, they're eye-poppingly full of life and crackling with authority.

He stopped making work like this in 1963, just as minimalism burst on the scene with hard-edge paintings by **Frank Stella**, Kenneth Noland, and **Ellsworth Kelly**, and sculptures by Donald Judd and Dan Flavin. The question is, why? Liberman was tired of the “negativism and severity of geometric painting,” and of the “moral straitjacket,” he told me, years later, when my husband and I were writing his biography. His own work became much more expressionistic—just as Abstract Expressionism was losing steam. As he put it: “I was always working against the grain.”

The show at Mitchell-Innes & Nash makes you wish Liberman had stayed longer with his minimal muse. It's a gem; a sparkling reminder of a pioneering moment in American art when everything seemed new and surprising.

“Alexander Liberman After Image: Paintings and Sculpture from the 1950s” is on view through October 26 at Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Avenue, New York