



Hassel Smith: 55 Years of Painting

Oct 25, 2002 - Jan 26, 2003

Curated by Peter Selz

A major figure in the Bay Area Abstract Expressionist period of the 40s and 50s, Hassel Smith's lifelong career as a painter is being recognized by the Sonoma County Museum with a retrospective, *Hassel Smith: 55 Years of Painting*, on view October 25, 2002 through January 26, 2003.

Curated by the renowned art historian Peter Selz, this is the first comprehensive survey of the internationally acclaimed Bay Area artist in many years.

The exhibition features 28 paintings, and in addition to the gesture paintings of his Abstract Expressionist period, the show will include some of his early figure studies, the delightful and witty figurative paintings that he did over a ten-year period in the 1960s.

Much of the exhibition is devoted to Smith's paintings of the 50s. In 1955 after his years of teaching at the San Francisco Art Institute, Hassel Smith acquired an apple orchard in Sebastopol and built his studio there. Some of Smith's finest paintings were painted in Sebastopol and are what art and architecture critic Allan Temko called Smith's "Thunderbolt Phase," works of great exuberance, which combine lyrical power with a sense of satire.

The Sebastopol paintings are some of his most successful works, and led to his international reputation. He left Sebastopol permanently in 1966 and moved to England. Now in his 80s Smith and his wife live in England.

Between 1966 and 1981 Hassel Smith painted a strong series of geometric canvases, which he called his "measured paintings" and then, since the mid-1990s the artist returned to all-over canvases of amazing intensity.

In a review of a Hassel Smith exhibition many years ago the renowned art critic Alfred Frankenstein wrote in *The San Francisco Chronicle*: "Hassel Smith is one of the small, distinguished group of Bay Region painters whose reputations are world-wide, whose dealers are in New York, who sell all over the world, and are very hard to see at home. Seeing his work in the Bay Area is therefore an event of special interest and importance."

About the curator

Peter Selz is an author, curator and Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley. He is the founding director of the Berkeley Art Museum; and former Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

An illustrated catalog accompanies the exhibition.

This exhibition is generously supported by the Sonoma County Community Foundation and the Sonoma County Museum Director's Circle.

(Title image courtesy of Jann Kalbaugh)



Hassel Smith in his Sebastopol studio. Bob Kalbaugh, circa 1964