

"It was daunting to move into the cavernous studio [Tuscany, 1965-66] occupied by the sculptor Adolf von Hildebrandt nearly a century earlier. Surrounded by casts from the Parthenon, I began timidly with a little geometric painting. Freezing in winter, I burned lumber scraps in the round stove and learned to paint with gloves on. The high window gave me sky and the tips of cypress trees. I came to love this great vaulted 16th century room. The sculpture I learned to ignore, little realizing that 30 years later many paintings would be based on it."

— George Woodman, 2006

George Woodman (1932-2017) was a painter and photographer whose career spanned more than sixty years and included forays into diverse visual media. Woodman began his career as an abstract painter, best known for his formally inventive tessellations and complex understanding of color. He was deeply influenced by classical and modernist traditions and his extensive international travels. Woodman remained committed to explorations of color and abstraction in a variety of forms—referencing landscape, architecture, geometry and pattern—before embracing representation and turning primarily to photography.

Woodman was born in Concord, New Hampshire. At age 13, he took art courses at the nearby Manchester Art Institute and decided to become a painter. After attending Phillips Exeter Academy, Woodman graduated from Harvard University in 1954 with honors in philosophy. While at Harvard, Woodman continued his education as an artist through courses at the Museum School at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and in a pottery class in Cambridge taught by Elizabeth (Betty) Abrahams, who became known as Betty Woodman after the pair married in 1953. The young couple relocated to Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1954, where Woodman studied painting at the University of New Mexico and earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in 1956. After completing his studies, they moved to Boulder, Colorado, where Woodman taught painting and philosophy of art at the University of Colorado Boulder for thirty years, becoming Professor Emeritus in 1995. He was an influential professor and artist in the Colorado art scene, particularly in the 1960s and 70s, associated for many years with Criss-Cross—a collective of artists concerned with pattern and structure—and was a founding member of the pivotal Spark Gallery in Denver.

With his wife and children, Charles and Francesca, Woodman spent a year (1959-60) in Italy, setting up a studio in Settignano. He was profoundly influenced by the ordered appearance of the Italian landscape, which shifted the approach of his landscape paintings away from the influence of Cézanne and towards geometric or topographic abstraction. Upon returning to Boulder in 1960, Woodman's abstract landscapes continued to evolve and he presented this new style of work in solo and group exhibitions in New York and Colorado.

Woodman returned to Italy, near Florence, in 1965 on a University of Colorado Faculty Fellowship, spending the year with his family and painting in a 16th century studio surrounded by



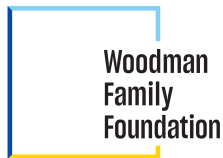
casts from the Parthenon. There he began his first series of compositions formulated according to a pre-ordained color system. This year spent in proximity to European art and culture, including a visit to the Alhambra in Spain to study tiles, proved to be consequential and inspired his distinct move to pattern painting. Italy's profound effect on the artist led him and Betty Woodman to use the funds from his 1967 National Endowment for the Arts grant to buy a farmhouse in Antella, just outside of Florence. Woodman kept a studio there starting in 1969 and returned to Antella for part of every year for the rest of his life.

Woodman's idiosyncratic approach to pattern and color—influenced by Minimalism as well as eclectic decorative traditions absorbed on his increasingly frequent travels—continued to develop throughout the 1970s. During this decade, he covered canvases with geometric tessellations while also incorporating a shifting color palette, rendering his patterns with depth and complexity. By 1978, he developed a pattern system which he referred to as “non-periodic” that led directly to his immersive paper tile installations, which he often created in collaboration with university students according to his instructions. Woodman's work was championed by such influential critics as Amy Goldin and he began to show more widely both internationally and nationally alongside artists connected to the Pattern and Decoration movement.

After spending odd semesters in New York City starting in 1978, he and Betty Woodman bought a loft there in 1980, and began dividing their time between Boulder, New York, and Antella. Meanwhile, Woodman's work with pattern continued to evolve. Temporary paper tile installations led to permanent compositions in ceramic tile, with major public commissions in Detroit, Michigan; Denver, Colorado; and Buffalo, New York. Floral imagery and architectural elements appeared in his paintings, which at times were constructed as free-standing screens. He began to paint the figure, shrouded in layers of pattern. Although tessellations began to recede over the course of the decade, the figure remained, in the form of shaped canvases and other paintings based on classical and Renaissance motifs, as well as in photographs, which became his primary medium from this point on.

After retiring from teaching in the 1990s, Woodman spent half of each year in Antella and half in New York for the next two decades. He continued an active studio practice centered largely on black and white photographs of nudes in classical architectural and sculptural settings. His photographs derived much from his decades of exploration as a painter, including integrating complex series of patterns; layering abstract and representational imagery in both the darkroom and camera; constructing complex compositions from discreet parts; referencing classical and modernist art; and eventually returning to painting, adding color and geometry to his gelatin silver prints.

Woodman's work has been exhibited in museums throughout the United States, Europe, and Mexico since the 1970s. Solo exhibitions include National Academy of Sciences, Washington, DC, 1982; Palazzo Pitti, Florence, 1997; Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Boulder, Colorado, 1998; Museo del Chopo, Mexico City, 1999; Grand Arts, Kansas City, Missouri, 2004; and a retrospective of forty years of Woodman's painting at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha, Nebraska, 2006. Notable group exhibitions include *Patterning and Decoration*, Museum of the American Foundation for the Arts, Miami, 1977; *19 Artists* –



Emergent Americans, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1981; *More than One Photography*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1992; and posthumously *Pattern, Decoration, and Crime*, Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva and to Le Consortium, Dijon, France, 2018; *Les Chemins du Sud*, Musée Régional d'Art Contemporain (MRAC) Occitanie, Serignan, France, 2019; and *Betty Woodman and George Woodman*, Charleston, Lewes, East Sussex, England, 2023.

An accomplished writer, Woodman published critical texts, catalogue essays, and exhibition reviews in addition to four books: *Museum Pieces*, 1996; *The Further Adventures of Pinocchio* with poems by Edwin Frank, 2004; *How a Picture Grows a World* with poems by Iris Cushing, 2010; and *Metaphysics is to Metaphor as Cartography is to Departure*, 2011.

George Woodman's works are represented in public collections including Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Denver Art Museum, Colorado; Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, New Hampshire; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut; RISD Museum, Providence, Rhode Island; and Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.