Jeremy Moon

By Clarrie Wallis

Jeremy Moon was one of the most ambitious abstract painters of the 1960s. Self-trained, he occupied a significant position among those British painters committed to hard-edged geometric abstraction, where monochromatic fields of radiant color reinforce the flatness of the picture surface. Moon's approach was both cerebral and visual, maintaining a constant focus on the dynamic relationships between shape, form and color. Sir Anthony Caro described his work as having "a clarity and distinction that was very fresh," noting "to see this in England at that time was extraordinary. I saw nothing like it until I went to America and saw the work of painters like Kenneth Noland or Paul Feeley."[1]

Tragically, Moon died in November 1973 at the age of thirty-nine, following a motorcycle accident near Kingston-upon-Thames, on the outskirts of London. In a career spanning only twelve years, his individual vision, the evolution of his ideas, and his significant international success are striking. During his lifetime, Moon's work was included in major international surveys of painting, alongside Patrick Caulfield, David Hockney, John Hoyland, Bridget Riley and others. His work also entered the permanent collections of major institutions across Europe, the United States and Australia.

Moon was born in Altrincham, Cheshire, in 1934. The eldest of four children, he was part of a musical family. His mother, Ruth, was a talented musician and an early practitioner of Eurythmy;[2] while Moon himself played the flute and saxophone. He was also artistically creative, and encouraged his love of painting, drawing and making by his Uncle Peter, an architect. In 1952, National Service led him to serve as a non-commissioned officer in The King's Own Regiment; he was stationed in Germany, Japan and Korea, before being demobilized in 1954. His father, Arthur, a lawyer, was doubtless influential in Moon going on to study Law at Christ's College, Cambridge, where his recreational activities included experimenting with 16mm film, designing posters for the University jazz club, and painting murals in the college union. He also met and befriended Phillip King, who was studying Modern Languages at the same college, but also experimenting with sculpture in his spare time. Moon attended the opening of King's first exhibition in the upstairs gallery of Heffers Bookshop with his father, who bought King's small clay sculpture *Reclining Woman* (1955). The friendship that developed between the two artists during their student days would be of great significance, and in many ways would help to shape the course of Moon's artistic career.

On graduation, Moon worked briefly in Manchester before moving to London, where he took up a position as an account executive in the finance department of Napper, Stinton and Woolley, a modern advertising agency based in Soho. Outside of work, he visited art exhibitions, attended classical concerts, operas and ballets, and listened to jazz. He was experimenting with drawing and painting, using a range of styles and techniques, and creating both figurative and abstract pieces. Among these creative occupations, a strong interest in dance led him to take ballet classes quite

[1] Anthony Caro in *Jeremy Moon: A Retrospective.* Preston: Harris Museum & Art Gallery, 2001. Published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same title presented at the Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston; the Nunnery, London; and the Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield, UK.

[2] Developed in the early twentieth century by Rudolf Steiner, in conjunction with Marie von Sivers, eurythmy is a disciplined and expressive art of movement. Bringing together mindfulness and movement, its intention is the visible expression of speech and musical melody. Eurythmy is used in both education and performance, and has been influential in modern composition, ballet and dance.

seriously, until being told by his teachers that he was too old to become a professional dancer. He then toyed with the idea of a career as a choreographer – a further extension of his interest in movement. While he did not follow this path, Barry Martin would later acknowledge the influence of dance on Moon's understanding of movement, balance, rhythm and flow, and his very particular sense of composition.[3]

Around this time, New York came to be generally accepted as the center of innovation in the visual arts. British artists and writers began to visit the US with increasing regularity (many of them supported in doing so by Harkness Fellowships), and their contemporaries in the UK often discovered or responded to contemporary American art through the experience of their peers. Moon would later describe discovering "the current big issues that young painters were thinking about, not first-hand from American art, but from the English reaction to American art."[4] But while influences and affinities ricocheted between artists in the UK, and between artists in the UK and those in other countries, opportunities to see recent American painting in Britain were sporadic. This scarcity made the arrival at the Tate of the exhibitions *Modern Art in the United States* in 1956, and *The New American Painting* in 1959 landmark events.[5] But alongside these major shows – the latter of which was seen by Moon – exhibitions of American art organized by the United States Information Service (USIS) library, adjacent to the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square, were also significant in bringing the work of contemporary American painters and sculptors to the attention of the British public.

Moon attended the USIS inaugural exhibition *Seventeen American Artists and Eight Sculptors* in 1958, which included notable painters such as Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt alongside sculptors such as David Smith. At USIS's 1961 show, *Vanguard American Painting*, he was most interested in the works by Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman. Newman, in 1948, had developed a new and unique painting format, stripping out most abstract elements on the canvas, and instead laying down more vertical bands, usually with the help of masking tape. These "zips", as he came to call them, become the organizing principle behind the work, defining the spatial structure of the painting while simultaneously dividing and uniting the composition. Offering a wealth of visual and conceptual complexity, they distilled painting to its essential qualities of space, color, and figure-ground relationship. After three trips to see the exhibition, Moon referred to Newman's *Concord* (1949) as "marvellous".[6]

Of even greater significance was Moon's visit in September 1960 to the show *Situation: An Exhibition of British Abstract Painting* at the galleries of the Royal Society of British Artists. Organized by a committee including Laurence Alloway, Robyn Denny and William Turnbull, the exhibition's entry

---

[3] Barry Martin, "Jeremy Moon Retrospective, Serpentine Gallery," *Studio International*, 191 (1976): 300. Moon's archive also contains examples of how choreography influenced his way of thinking. These include an annotated program for the Royal Ballet's first performance of *The Good Humoured Ladies / Le Baiser de la Fée*, choreographed by Léonide Massine, on 11 July 1962, and an annotated copy of Peter Lennon's interview with American choreographer Paul Taylor for *The Guardian* – Taylor describes how his movements are *interpreted* rather than just looked at by the viewer. "In the Air… Paul Taylor talks to Peter Lennon," *The Guardian*, May 3, 1962.

[4] Jeremy Moon, "Jeremy Moon 29th October 1973: Interview with Barry Martin," *One*, 4 (April 1974): 3.

[5] These exhibitions are notable for giving the British public the opportunity to view, for the first time, work by artists including William Baziotes, James Brookes, Sam Francis, Arshile Gorky, Adolph Gottlieb, Philip Guston, Grace Hartigan, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Theodoros Stamos, Clyfford Still, Bradley Walker Tomlin, and Jack Tworkov.

[6] Jeremy Moon, "Vanguard American Painting" (unpublished manuscript, March 30, 1962), The Jeremy Moon Archive Collection. Moon described Pollock as "tough yet v beautiful – v American," and Rothko as "wonderful 'masculine' painting." He was less complimentary about de Kooning.

requirements stipulated that the paintings must be over 30 feet square. Twenty artists were exhibited, including Turnbull, Gillian Ayres and John Hoyland. Collectively, these artists responded to the ambition and innovation of American Abstract Expressionism, but also extended that legacy in unexpected ways. In the wake of unprecedented destruction and loss of life during World War II, many American painters working in the 1940s grew to believe that traditional easel painting no longer adequately conveyed the human condition. Artists associated with the so-called New York School were convinced that abstraction as a universal language most meaningfully evoked contemporary states of being. Many worked in large formats, not only to explore compositional issues relating to lines, color, shape and texture, but also to activate scale's metaphoric potential to evoke existential concerns of the self. If the Abstract Expressionists made art out of the flux of their own subjective, inner experiences, those shown in *Situation* embraced the expressive potential of abstraction – but with a certain detachment and growing objectivity. In so doing, they reaffirmed the language of abstraction, investing it with a startling assurance and clarity.

For Moon, the experience of seeing this show was profound. He recalled: "It was like getting the whole message of what modern painting was about suddenly fresh on your doorstep […] and once the sort of dam had burst it was just incredible – every other idea I had ever had – my interest in dance, jazz, my career, and various other things – all fell away and from there onwards there was no doubt in my mind what I was going to do."[7] In 1961, aged twenty-seven, he left his job in advertising to pursue painting full-time.[8]

Such was the courage of Moon's conviction that although he enrolled in the Painting Department at the Central School of Art, London, he remained a student there for only a fortnight before leaving, already confident in his own ideas and vision. The following year, his painting *Study for Painting with Crosses* and the sculpture *Three Cubes with Variations* – both created in his studio above an antiques shop in Notting Hill – were selected for *New Contemporaries*, an annual survey exhibition considered to be an important litmus test of contemporary practice in Britain. *Three Cubes with Variations* was awarded the 1962 Associated Electrical Industries Prize for Sculpture.

Moon intended viewers to experience instinctive, physical responses to his work's structure, color and space, rather than respond through contextual or interpretive analysis. *Trellis,* an early work, establishes many of the formal concerns that would preoccupy Moon throughout his career. Reminiscent of a portcullis, the painting demonstrates his commitment to an uncompromising geometric visual language, rejecting perspective and tonal modelling in favor of bright but flattened colors. Moon placed great emphasis on the tensions between the "figure" and the "ground" in his paintings, aiming to establish dynamism within otherwise flat surfaces. The use of a white grid and contrasting black circles at its collecting point has the effect of making both elements appear to float free of its yellow background.

Trellis is often considered the first example of Moon's use of the grid as an organizing principle. As with *Oriole*, *Hawk,* and *Red Chord* – all of which were painted the same year and displayed in Moon's first one-man exhibition at the Rowan Gallery – a simple basic grid is used to define the spatial structure of the painting. This working method is made apparent in a preliminary drawing for *Oriole*, where circles are positioned to form an inner rectangle at the end of long searchlight beams. In

[7] Moon, "Interview with Barry Martin": 3.

[8] Moon's decision to quit his job may also have been influenced by the premature death of his Uncle Peter. Robert Moon. Correspondent, email message to author, November 22, 2018.

another, the motif is tried out on graph paper as means with which to determine the placement of ellipses and other pictorial elements.

For Moon, the painting's composition was established at the drawing stage. His point of departure for a new work was always a combination of previous work, an instinctive idea, and trial and error. In *Garland,* a yellow undulating ring of twisted ribbon floats against a green background. In his next painting, *Eclipse*, the central wreath-like shape has been replaced by a black central ring, which is in sharp contrast to the ground composed of an alternating pattern of orange and yellow diagonal stripes. *Hoop-La* is one of a group of paintings made in 1965 in which Moon placed circular shapes on a flat monochromatic ground. The playful arrangement of the forms in a gentle arc-like shape, the choice of colors, and the title give the painting a distinctive light-hearted feel. The juxtaposition of red and blue creates a strong spatial illusion, despite the flat manner in which the color has been applied.

Writing in 1962, Moon contemplated his approach to composition: "I feel that at present each painting is a totally new experience with totally new problems. All ideas or developments which seem suspect (intuitive), or are less than 100% convincing intellectually I reject. […] Each picture must say something new and extend beyond what the previous one achieved."[9] He drew often, at any time of the day, and kept everything, even the smallest sketch or scrap of paper.[10] Ideas came to him continually and hundreds of drawings exist, many on sheets of typing paper or scrap material, ranging from rough linear pen and pencil sketches, several to a sheet, to larger colored drawings, mostly in pastel chalks. Collectively, they give a clear idea of the artist's progression towards a painting, clarifying the way in which he thought about several possible works simultaneously and revealing how revisions were often centered on color change. They also helped to establish what size and shape the canvas should be. He explained: "Each new picture must influence and be allowed to influence the next. That is why it is dangerous (for me) to try to paint more than about two canvases at a time."[11]

The idea of the "decorative" provoked debate in relation to painting during this period – and it was often used as a negative term. If the Abstract Expressionists saw painting as an existential endeavor with expression manifesting as abstract gesture, Moon felt that in order for painting not to fall into the realm of the decorative it had to take a moral stand. He described his art as purely visual, a position which he felt distinguished abstraction from design or decoration: "The point is that art is a moral activity […] and that the moral, ethical element in it simply derives from the attempt to be truthful and honest."[12] The paint thickness and application varies in his works, but he nearly always used masking tape. In *English Rose*, working with the weave of the canvas, one coat is applied very thinly, probably without primer. In some works, bleeding under the edges of the masking tape is deliberately left, whereas in others Moon would over-paint bleeds to keep a sharper edge. Pencil marks are sometimes visible on the edges of the stretchers, but not on the painted surface.

1963 would be an important year for Moon in many ways – and not least because it marked his first solo exhibition. Having recently opened the Rowan Gallery at 25a Lowndes Street, Belgravia, with

[9] Jeremy Moon, "Branded Imagery" (unpublished manuscript, March 30, 1962), The Jeremy Moon Archive Collection.

[10] See *The Tate Gallery 1976–8: Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions* (London: Tate, 1979). From as early as 1963 Moon also made available for sale works on paper.

[11] Jeremy Moon, "Notes for a lecture on Pollock" (unpublished manuscript, March 27, 1962), The Jeremy Moon Archive Collection.

[12] Moon, "Interview with Barry Martin": 9.

Diana "Wonky" Kingsmill, Alex Gregory-Hood approached Moon to arrange a studio visit. The Rowan attracted a coterie of forward-thinking contemporary artists and was the first to bring the work of Barry Flanagan, Paul Huxley, Phillip King, Mark Lancaster, Bridget Riley and William Tucker to the public – and to Moon's delight, he was offered a one-person show in August 1963, (alongside an exhibition of paintings by David Taggart on the gallery's first floor). This would be the first of eight exhibitions at the Rowan during his lifetime and consisted of nine paintings executed between 1961 and 1963.[13] On the exhibition card, Moon explained: "If one accepts the restrictions which the art of the immediate past places upon one's freedom as a painter now, it is only in the hope of securing a greater freedom later. There is talk today of 'a return to figuration' and of 'the re-appearing image' but when I think that I may reasonably hope to see the art of the 21st century, I can only believe in new images, new figurations and a new reality."[14]

Also in 1963, despite having no formal art education, Moon was offered a part-time lecturing post in the Sculpture Department at St Martin's School of Art. Frank Martin, who had been head of the department since 1953, was supportive of new approaches to sculpture and its teaching, and it was not out of character for him to have offered a teaching position to a painter who, through three-dimensional pieces and early experiments with spatial structure in his paintings, brought a fresh approach to the debates around painting-as-object. At St Martin's, Moon came into contact with influential and emerging artists. Anthony Caro, whose formal innovations are commonly associated with the department, was a tutor at that time. Phillip King, David Annesley, Michael Bolus, Tim Scott, William Tucker and Isaac Witkin, formerly students under Caro, all returned to teach in the department. This group became known as the "New Generation" – after the influential 1965 exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery – and revolutionized abstract sculpture in Britain by moving away from figurative and pastoral sculpture to urban, formal abstraction, fashioned in colorful new materials and based on a modernist conception of sculpture that owed much to the writings of the influential American critic Clement Greenberg. King later described the importance of his contact with Moon around this time: "We talked a lot about painting at a time when as a sculptor, painting seemed ahead. I have never had more important discussions about art with anyone."[15]

In addition to his teaching at St Martin's, Moon also took up a part-time position in the Painting Department at Chelsea School of Art, which would become his main place of work. This, alongside the opportunity to join the Rowan Gallery, offered welcome financial stability. He married Beth Bryant on August 9, 1963, and after honeymooning in Ireland, the couple rented a flat in King Henry's Road, Swiss Cottage, NW3.[16] Moon set up his studio in one of the rooms, and it was from here that he began to experiment with a new form of abstraction that was emerging: the shaped canvas.

---

[13] The nine paintings were *Spectre* (1961), *Oriole* (1962), *Hawk* (1962), *Red Chord* (1962), *Parade* (1962), *Garland* (1962), *Blossom* (1962), *Eclipse* (1962) and *Blue Figuration* (1963).

[14] Jeremy Moon, Exhibition card for *Jeremy Moon – Paintings '61-'63*, Rowan Gallery, London, August 8 – September 5, 1963. The Jeremy Moon Archive Collection.

[15] Phillip King in *Jeremy Moon: A Retrospective* 2001.

[16] This area of north-west London had long been associated with liberals, intellectuals, artists and writers. During the Moons' time there, Anthony Caro, Philip King and other artists connected with St Martin's and Chelsea School of Art lived close by, while a group of painters connected with the Situation exhibitions – including Bernard Cohen, Tess Jaray, Peter Stroud, and Marx Vaux – moved into a number of the townhouses on Camden Square. Other artists living locally included David Annesley, Michael Bolus, Patrick Caulfield, John Hoyland, William Tucker, Isaac Witkin, and Brian Young.

Although frequently described as a hybrid of painting and sculpture, the shaped canvas grew from issues internal to abstract painting and expressed the desire of many international artists to delve into real space.[17] Forms such as parallelograms, diamonds, rhomboids, trapezoids and triangles offered exciting alternatives to the conventional flat rectangular canvas. Ellsworth Kelly's multi-paneled paintings, Jasper Johns' *Flag* paintings and Robert Rauschenberg's *Combine* paintings of the late 1950s, and Frank Stella's shaped *Aluminum* paintings of 1960 all offer important precedents. In some accounts Barnett Newman is positioned as the "father of the shaped canvas" because of his tall, narrow stripe paintings of the 1950s.[18]

While Moon was not particularly interested in the metaphysical aspects of Newman's paintings, he was certainly impressed by his painting technique and discussed his work at length with Phillip King, who had met Newman on several occasions in New York.[19] Newman felt that it was important that painting had weight, and described his own method in a letter to Clement Greenberg as "heavy and solid, the direct opposite of a stain."[20] His approach may well have had a direct bearing on Moon's own painting technique, where equal emphasis is given to the whole surface and there is no obvious trace of the artist's hand. Moon would have had the opportunity to study Newman's *White Fire III, Untitled* (1964) first-hand when he visited international art collector E.J. ("Ted") Power in his flat in Grosvenor Square. Power played an important, if unpublicized, role in the British art scene, and kept abreast of developments among emerging British artists.[21] In 1964, he bought *La Danse*, the first of a number of paintings by Moon he was to own.

As American painting was an essential reference point for Moon and other European abstract painters, their development could, theoretically, be seen as an engagement with and critique of Clement Greenberg's reading of Kant's aesthetics, where painting was purely formal and medium-specific. Notoriously, for Greenberg, the essence of painting was the integrity of the picture plane, its flatness. This was an overly circumscribed characterization and the subsequent development of abstract art challenged this narrow formal purism. Moon's concern with the painting qua object questioned this definition of painting: his works deal with the painting in its totality, an object that exceeds the prescriptive essentialism of Greenberg. The Kantian privileging of the subject (the viewer) over the object (the painting) is disrupted, and the painting becomes a co-equal with the painter.

Moon made eight triangular paintings in 1964, including *Indian Journey*, *Free Flight* and *Green Sound*, all with diagonal bands of undifferentiated color. In the same year, he made *Testament*, an eighteen-foot work comprising four canvases, *Concord,* consisting of five rectangular canvases joined together to form a single, large stepped shape, and *Orange Queen*, which used a single stepped-shape canvas. From these latter two paintings, completed towards the end of the year, he moved on to experiment with inverted triangles, *No 1/65* and *No 5/65* using the form as a basis to create an irregular hexagon.

---

[17] Frances Colpitt, "The Shape of Painting in the 1960s,"' *Art Journal*, 50, no. 1 (1991): 52-56.

[18] See Frances Colpitt, "The Shape of Painting." Also, Walter Hopps, ed., *United States of America, VIII Sao Paulo Biennial.* California: Pasadena Art Museum, 1965. Exhibition catalogue.

[19] Phillip King, Conversation with author, July 25, 2018.

[20] Barnett Newman, Letter to Clement Greenberg (1955), in *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992: 203. Moon translated Newman's feeling that a painting should have weights as a sculptural value.

[21] Phillip King, Correspondent, email to author, October 16, 2018. Power also owned Newman's *White Fire* (1954).

Concord and *Orange Queen* exemplify Moon's fascination with the relationship between pictorial elements and the picture frame, and his interest in the sensory impact of unadulterated color – he considered his range of colors to be inseparable from the image. In both these works, there is a tension between the composition of ellipses, which give the illusion of migration across a flat field of color, and the way in which their forms awkwardly intersect with the edges of the canvas. Moon also switched to using Rowney Cryla Colour, a brand of acrylic paint which had only recently become available in the UK. Studying *Eagle*, his first acrylic painting, it is apparent that the synthetic medium suited his preference for a flat surface and large areas of undifferentiated color. In this work, Moon explores the foundations of the color wheel: the secondary colors are created by mixing in equal parts of two primary colors – blue, red and yellow – to create green, orange and purple.

Immersed in the culture of St Martin's by this time, Moon would have been acutely aware of the debates around sculpture, including the issue of three-dimensionality. Parallel to his shaped canvases, he produced a number of three-dimensional pieces: but rather than developing a more truly sculptural idiom, he held to the belief that painting needed to be understood as an object. Writing to the critic Robert Kudielka in 1967, he explained: "The first shaped paintings I did in 1964 were triangles and variation of triangles. At the time the move was largely intuitive, but one can say in retrospect that obviously it was one solution to the problem of how to get away from the static."[22] He would later describe how the move to working with a shaped canvas offered a solution to deal with the formal problem of the rectangular convention: "At the point I wanted to get back to the idea of space, light, and form […] the overall image of the painting is very sculptural […] I think that they are the most open pictures I have ever painted."[23] With *Petrouchka*, titled after the Stravinsky ballet, the five bands of color radiating from the bottom left-hand corner are suggestive of a prism refracting light.

In 1965, Moon embarked on a number of works that explored competing kinds of spatial depth. *Out of Nowhere*, for example, is a blue circular painting with eleven round holes cut into the surface, one of which bisects the canvas edge. The white circles of the wall behind give the impression of floating up across the surface, resulting in a strange push and pull between the literal and the pictorial. As with a number of artists of his generation, Moon's paintings were often understood as a response to American abstraction, particularly Frank Stella, whose paintings tend to derive their force from scale, shape and surface (as opposed to pictorial space), and Kenneth Noland whose works Moon found to be "inventive in formal terms as well as having some of the emotional power of the best abstract expressionist work."[24] He acknowledged that it was "natural for a young painter to respond to art of his own time," but posited that the best work being produced neither rejected America or followed

[22] Jeremy Moon to Robert Kudielka (draft letter), February 1967, The Jeremy Moon Archive Collection.

[23] Transcript of an interview with Jeremy Moon by Christopher Ernill, conducted during research for Ernill's thesis, "Painting Serial 6: Jeremy Moon," Dip.A.D., Chelsea School of Art (unpublished manuscript), [ca. 1971].The Jeremy Moon Archive Collection. Moon's views chimed with the sentiments of the seminal exhibition *The Shaped Canvas* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 1964, curated by Lawrence Alloway and including works by Paul Feeley, Sven Lukin, Richard Smith, Frank Stella, and Neil Williams. According to Alloway: "A shaped canvas is not a sculpture. It may be three-dimensional, in that it carries projections or is opened up, but retains connections with the paintings we are accustomed to, flat right-angled planes on the wall […] A shaped canvas is one-sided, as is any painting, so neither the transparent structure of constructivism nor the literal three-dimensionality of sculpture is approached." Press release issued by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 30th November 1964.

[24] From Moon's response to questions from The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, US, ahead of the exhibition *London: The New Scene*, a copy of which he forwarded to Alex Gregory-Hood, Jeremy Moon to Alex Gregory-Hood, 11 September 1964, The Jeremy Moon Archive Collection.

its leads, but rather "developed along parallel lines to that of some younger American artists."[25] It was perhaps with this in mind that several of his shows at the Rowan Gallery were scheduled to coincide with exhibitions in London by Noland and Jules Olitski .

On moving to Kingston-upon-Thames in 1966, Moon built a studio at the bottom of his garden. Once established in this space, he painted nineteen canvases over the course of the following year. Six of these, including *Arabian Nights* and *Origami*, were Y-shaped, the canvas formed of a central triangle with a square attached to each side. In subsequent paintings this shape was inverted and truncated – a configuration which would become Moon's preference for his shaped canvases. In a statement in *Studio International,* Moon explained: "The shapes I'm using now – although they might seem strange at first – are just extensions of the square. The cut down version of the three joined squares is the best shape I've worked with yet. If you could turn a square inside out and still have something to paint on, I feel it might look like this."[26] Initially, in works such as *Moth*, the emphasis was on their bilateral symmetry; but as the series developed, this centrality was destabilized to encourage the eye to move across the surface, so that the painting is a kind of constant flow.[27] By the time Moon painted *Blue Rose*, one of the main considerations was the use of three colors instead of two, with the three colors both touching at the center and separately occupying the three edges or extremities. Rather than running the colors across the canvas, as in *Arabian Nights* with its pink, orange and yellow bands, the bands are arranged along its contours.

Moon later described his "incredible love/hate relationship with the shaped canvas" and how this would become "a strange double-sided time with grids and rectangular paintings."[28] From 1968 to 1971, the grid would become the central motif in his paintings. Closely aligned to modernist abstract painting, the grid offered a way to steer clear of symbols and representation, and to emphasize the flatness of the picture plane while experimenting with various configurations. For Moon, it presented the opportunity to extend his investigations into the status of the painting as object, and to experiment with different shapes and placements of fields of color. Over time, his use of the grid evolved, changing in scale and proportion so that the painting's expressive force is derived from its intensity and color, scale and abstract form. Coinciding with this shift, the number of paintings with a narrative title started to diminish, and Moon's practice of numerical labelling began to play an increasingly important role.

Moon's preoccupation with the grid may have developed in part from his use of different widths of masking tape, the process of painting also suggesting a way of working – but it would be wrong to describe his use of the grid as systematic, as there is no strict mathematical system at work. Each painting is refreshingly personal. Looking closely at the canvas, one can see how he used a pencil to define the grid before painting it in. Every decision about color or lineation prompts or challenges that which follows, creating an overall sense of movement. This can be seen in paintings such as *Flamingo* and *No 1/71*, where the off-centered composition of the grid provides a way to again emphasize again Moon's interest in the picture as an object, while extending his investigations into pictorial abstraction. In these works, Moon found – similarly to his shaped canvases of the mid-1960s – another way to challenge the integrity of the traditional painting on canvas and its frame.

---

[25] Ibid.; Jeremy Moon, Lecture notes [undated; ca. 1964-1971], The Jeremy Moon Archive Collection.

[26] "British artists at the Biennale des Jeunes in Paris, September 28 – November 3: Jeremy Moon," *Studio International*, 174, no. 82 (September 1967): 86.

[27] Neil Clements, "The Ivory Tower and the Control Tower: Formalist Aesthetics and Cultural Affiliations in British Abstract Art, 1956-1968," PhD thesis, Glasgow School of Art, 2017, p.213.

[28] Moon, Interview with Christopher Ernill.

Battenberg I, with its yellow latticework and pink, brown and lime colors, is one of a number of fan-like canvases formed by two planes that abut at a 45-degree angle in the center. The painting is divided into two grids that exactly mirror each other in terms of shape but not of tone. It draws attention to the diagonal axis in such a way that the symmetry is thrown off kilter, and is very much about the relationship of the two parts to each other, and how they relate to the perfect squares at the edges of the artwork. With *Caravan II,* two yellow diagonal grids are juxtaposed to create a spatial illusion in which the grids seem to both overlay and not overlay the other.

After destroying a number of paintings in the summer of 1969, Moon experimented with breaking the grid into smaller, carefully balanced components. In a number of experiments with cross motifs, multicolored elements float in the form of small grids, crosses and squares, intended to contradict or challenge the verticals and horizontals of the canvas. Moon described one of these, *No 4/70,* as the result of an ambition "to see whether it was possible to introduce back into abstract painting the idea of composing elements."[29] These experiments paved the way for works that used a more dominant lattice framework. The play between surface and spatial illusion is addressed differently again in *No* 9*/71*. Here, the white ground is divided by vertical black and horizontal yellow lines. However, the vibrant contrast of the black and yellow means the picture resists being read as a two-dimensional grid: instead, the lines appear to float. The pictorial possibilities of the grid are explored further in *Untitled ['72],* a large painting, over three meters in width, with a palette limited to black and white. The spatial complexity of the picture rests in the manner in which the grid is fragmented into an array of square details positioned at angles to one another, creating a complex all-over arrangement with a kaleidoscopic effect.

While Moon was primarily motivated by formal considerations, he described his way of working as "intuitive", and often insisted that he didn't know what he was going to do next.[30] Ideas came to him continually and so it is difficult to predict how his long-term career would have developed. Around 1972, his focus returned to the shaped stretcher. With works such as *No 3/73*, emphasis is placed on unusual or asymmetrical supports and, as Norbert Lynton noted, there is the sense that "the edges, the shapes as a whole, become so important that one is almost tempted to read them as wall sculptures."[31] *No 3/73* was exhibited alongside a green and white floor-based painting, 3*D 1 72*, at the last show in Moon's lifetime at the Rowan Gallery in May 1973. Together, these paintings indicate an ambition to extend painterly space into an architectural equivalence. Most tellingly, the thirteen floor-based parts of *3D 1 72* fit along the contours of a distorted, fractured grid. Here, Moon seems to be thinking in sculptural terms of the feeling of cutting into a surface, whether as paint on canvas or three-dimensionally as sculpture, again showing the grid used to fresh effect.[32]

Studying the paintings in the last Rowan show, one cannot help but be struck by the richness of Moon's oeuvre, the seemingly endless variations on this theme, and how the work appears uncannily contemporary in the second decade of the twenty-first century. This is all the more poignant when we know that a motorcycle accident led to his untimely death six months later, aged thirty-nine. Richard Morphet, at that time curator at the Tate Gallery and later Keeper of its Modern Collections, summed it up well: "While every new work he showed was instantly recognizable as being by him, it also had a quality of surprise in terms of formal concepts and of the startling freshness of the statement each work made. For me his art seemed to point in several directions

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Norbert Lynton, "Jeremy Moon," *Art International*, 20, no. 7–8 (September 1976): 43.

[32] See *The Tate Gallery 1976-8: Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions* (1979).

simultaneously, including the radiant and inventive use of color (inseparable from the immaculateness of its expression); an almost sculptural sense of forms in interrelation and in space; and the paradoxical co-existence of suggested three-dimensionality with very powerful insistence on the frank flatness of the picture surface. I am sure he would have gone on to do extraordinary new work, but with such lively imagination it is impossible to know what direction(s) it would have taken."[33]

[33] Richard Morphet, Correspondent, email message to author, February 5, 2019.