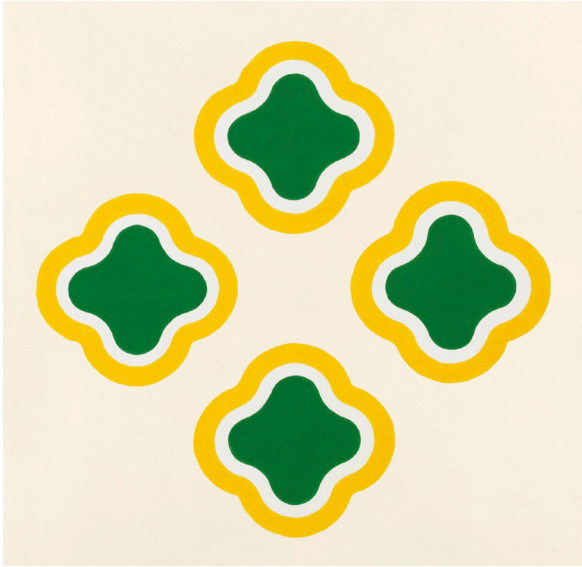


WADDINGTON CUSTOT

Press Release

Paul Feeley: *Space Stands Still*

12 April – 6 June 2021



Waddington Custot is pleased to present Paul Feeley: *Space Stands Still*, the first solo exhibition of Feeley's work in the UK for over 50 years. The exhibition shines a light on this significant but relatively overlooked artist who worked with Clement Greenberg and played a pivotal role in the careers of many seminal abstract artists, including Helen Frankenthaler.

This exhibition charts the development of Feeley's abstraction over the course of his brief but prolific career, presenting pieces from the 1950s through to those created just before his untimely death in 1966 at the age of 55. Over 20 works by Feeley, including oil on canvas paintings and three-dimensional sculptures in wood, are shown in the UK for the first time. The works are characterised by Feeley's distinctive approach to symmetry and pattern through curving shapes in vibrant colours. The central forms and repeated motifs, often in symmetrical clusters, are reminiscent of vertebrae and teeth, molecular structures or jacks.

Although often associated with Abstract Expressionism, Feeley broke with the movement in the 1940s. Speaking to Lawrence Alloway in 1964, the artist explained 'I began to dwell on pyramids and things like that instead of on jungles of movement and action... The things I couldn't forget in art, were things, which made no attempt to be exciting.' And so Feeley's work moved away from gestural abstraction and into 'a quiescent art of stability, poise, and space', as described by Douglas Dreishpoon in *Imperfections by Chance* (his 2015 essay on Feeley). This astute observation is echoed by Feeley's comment that in his paintings 'space stands still'.

The composition of Feeley's paintings and sculptural forms can be traced back to his polymathic fascination with myriad subjects, ranging from history archaeology and anthropology, to psychology, music, mathematics and architecture. For Feeley the genesis of these fields lay in classical culture, which for the artist and many of his peers, symbolised the longed-for return to order of those post-war years. Feeley's paintings from the early 1960s often bore the names of Roman generals. Three such works, *Germanicus* (1960), *Vespasian* (1960) and *Tiberius* (1961), all exhibit the use of two interlocking colours producing figure-ground compositions where 'the confluence of organic shapes creates an optical condition that flips back and forth,

from positive to negative and from negative to positive'. Feeley's aesthetic ploy reflects the interplay of the contradictory conditions intensely felt in America during the 1960s, 'between war and peace, joy and sorrow, wickedness and righteousness, masculinity and femininity'.

Upon his return to America, after his service as a marine in Japan from 1943–1946, Feeley was struck with contrasting emotions: elation to be alive and the great pleasure of returning to his studio, yet simultaneously feeling isolated and disconnected from the New York art world elite. His response was to envisage an alternate world that was 'calm, stable and symmetrical'. Feeley's balance of stillness and dynamic movement makes his work poignantly relevant in today's chaotic world.

A pivotal moment in Feeley's career, was his student-teacher relationship, and then great friendship, with artist Helen Frankenthaler. The two met at Bennington College in 1946, where Feeley was director of the Art Department. Upon graduating Frankenthaler became Feeley's route back to the New York art scene via her network of friends and mentors, including Barnett Newman, Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Tony Smith and Clement Greenberg. Feeley's sustained contact with this influential group allowed him to re-enter New York's art world in the latter half of 1955 with a solo exhibition at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery.

Both Frankenthaler and Feeley gained a great deal from their alliance. In 1968, Frankenthaler recounted to Barbara Rose that 'Paul had enormous vitality... his whole style was energy, curiosity, appetite', going on to describe him as 'a true artist, an inspired teacher'. Feeley too learned from Frankenthaler; his distinctive painterly texture came from his student's technique of thinning oil-based enamel paint before brushing it onto canvas.

Alongside Feeley's own artistic practice was his unwavering support of fellow artists and curatorial acumen. While at Bennington, Feeley and Greenberg organised 'prescient-mini-retrospectives' of Hans Hoffmann, Jackson Pollock and David Smith before these seminal artists had received substantial institutional recognition. Feeley went on to stage a further twenty exhibitions in the Carriage Barn space at Bennington, with shows by Josef Albers, Theodoros Stamos, Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, Helen Frankenthaler and Robert Motherwell.

1962 was a significant year for the artist in which he developed his organic, anthropomorphic figure-ground compositions into diagrammatical, hard-edged works. This is evident in *Alnitah* (1964) and *Arcturus* (1963) where the forms exist independently and are suspended in space. Not only do these paintings allude to the sky, clouds and stars, Feeley makes the connection literal, naming them after stars. Feeley developed this notion further, moving his imagery from canvas into three-dimensions. From 1965, until his death in 1966, the artist created vibrant wooden sculptures by interlocking two or three colourful panels into one undulating form. *El Rakis* (1965) and *Cor Caroli* (1965) demonstrate Feeley's successful translation of his powerful, yet poised aesthetic, into a realm that viewers can experience on both a visual and physical level.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Credit Line

Paul Feeley: *Space Stands Still* is at Waddington Custot from 12 April – 6 June 2021.
waddingtoncustot.com

Image

Paul Feeley, *Alnitah*, 1964, oil-based enamel on canvas, 151.1 x 151.1 cm. Courtesy the Estate of Paul Feeley and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York.

About Paul Feeley

Born in Des Moines, Iowa in 1910, Paul Feeley studied painting at Menlo College, Menlo Park, California and the Art Students League. After completing his training, Feeley began teaching, first at Cooper Union (1935–1939) and later at Bennington College. The artist remained at Bennington for 27 years (1939–1966) and founded its celebrated art department. Committed to the art of his peers, Feeley exposed his students—among them, Helen Frankenthaler—to many of the most significant artists of his time.

In addition, while at Bennington, he organized the first retrospective exhibitions of Hans Hoffmann, Jackson Pollock, and David Smith.

Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Feeley had solo exhibitions at many prominent institutions, including: Tibor de Nagy Gallery (1954, 1955, 1958, New York), Betty Parsons Gallery (1960, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1970, 1971, 1975, New York), and Kasmin Gallery (1964, London). During this period, his work was also featured in important museum exhibitions, such as Post Painterly Abstraction (1964, Los Angeles County Museum of Art), The Shaped Canvas (1964, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum), The Responsive Eye (1965, Museum of Modern Art), and Systemic Painting (1966, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum), among others. In 1968, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum mounted a memorial retrospective exhibition of his work. A full-career retrospective of Feeley's work recently took place at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery (2014–2015, Buffalo) and the Columbus Museum of Art (2015–2016), accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue

Feeley's work is featured in the collections of major museums across America, including: the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Baltimore Museum of Art; Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; the Columbus Museum of Art; the Detroit Institute of Arts; the Fogg Museum, Harvard University; the High Museum of Art, Atlanta; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Kemper Art Museum, Washington University, St. Louis; the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio; the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Buenos Aires; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Museum of Modern Art; the Neuberger Museum of Art, State University of New York, Purchase; the Phoenix Art Museum; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut; and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

About Waddington Custot

Waddington Custot was formed through the partnership of French art dealer Stephane Custot and long-time London art dealer, Leslie Waddington, in 2010. Located in Cork Street since 1958, formerly as Waddington Galleries, the gallery has a rich heritage and an international reputation for quality and expertise in works by modern and contemporary masters, with a particular focus on monumental sculpture.

The gallery has cemented its reputation over several decades for high quality and well-researched exhibitions of significant artists operating in the mid-twentieth century and beyond. Today, Waddington Custot represents heavyweight contemporary and modern artists and their estates including Peter Blake, David Annesley, Patrick Caulfield, Ian Davenport, Fabienne Verdier, Barry Flanagan, Allan d'Arcangelo, Jedd Novatt, Pablo Reinoso and Robert Indiana. The inventory includes works by important modern European artists including Jean Dubuffet, Pierre Soulages, Joan Miró, Nicolas de Staël, Josef Albers, Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, Fausto Melotti, and Antoni Tàpies. The gallery's long-standing focus on heavyweight American artists continues through strong relationships with John Chamberlain, Peter Halley, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella and John Wesley.

Gallery and Press Contact

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Exhibition:	Paul Feeley: <i>Space Stands Still</i>
Address:	Waddington Custot, 11 Cork Street, London W1S 3LT
Dates:	12 April – 6 June 2021
Opening Times:	Monday to Friday, 10am–6pm; Saturday: 11am–6pm
Admission:	Free
Travel:	Piccadilly, Green Park or Bond Street

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