

**Time Out**  
**New York**  
 JUNE 2-8, 2011 ISSUE 815 \$4.99 TIMEOUTNEWYORK.COM

**Art**  
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## Kimber Smith, "Paintings and Works on Paper"



**James Graham & Sons**, through June 30 (see Uptown)

An exhibition of the work of Kimber Smith (1922–1981) occasions a renewed interest in his paintings of the 1960s and '70s. Too odd and too unfinished-looking to garner Smith much attention at the time, they now seem very much of the moment.

Smith spent much of his early career in Paris, part of a community of expatriate American artists that included second-generation Abstract Expressionists Joan Mitchell, Sam Francis and Shirley Jaffe. By the time he returned to the United States, he had begun to develop a pictorial vocabulary of simple shapes—blobs, triangles, diamonds and arcs—based on real-world things: the spire on a church, the keys on his son's piano, the roses in his garden.

In two of the earliest canvases in this show—abstractions

from 1964 that look like off-kilter Paul Feeleys—these shapes take solid, totemic form. But by the 1970s, they begin to be rendered in a cruder fashion, more drawn than painted. Deployed across expanses of bare paper or canvas, they settle into uneasy alliances. In one composition, three awkwardly linked red and pink diamonds drop into a roiling sea of more pink; in a related gouache, two black diamonds jostle a string of black blobs. As the decade progressed, Smith's approach became ever more improvisatory, as in *Back from GH* (1979), a stack of rectangles suspended over a dancing line of inverted vees, surrounded by a portallike oval.

Smith's late paintings anticipate, among other things, Mary Heilmann's laid-back geometries and Chris Martin's eccentric abstraction. Whether they are appealing simply because of their currency or because the times have at last caught up to them remains to be seen. I'm putting my money on the latter.

—Anne Doran



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