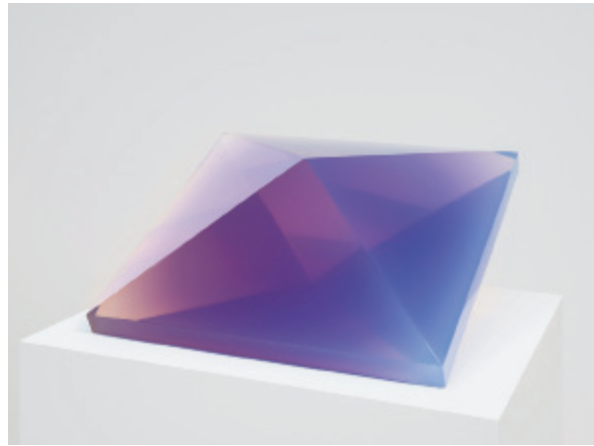


# Art in America

OCTOBER 2015

EXHIBITION REVIEWS



DeWain Valentine:  
*Double Pyramid  
Rose-Violet*, 1968,  
cast polyester resin,  
13¾ by 28¾ by 26  
inches; at David  
Zwirner.

## DEWAIN VALENTINE

David Zwirner

One of New York's top art-selfie locations in recent months was David Zwirner during DeWain Valentine's exhibition "Works from the 1960s and 1970s." The show marked the California Light and Space artist's debut at the gallery, as well as his first solo presentation in the city in more than three decades. On view in the photogenic show were some 20 enticingly smooth translucent sculptures in jewel-toned polyester resin.

The works came in several forms: circles, hard-edge rings, gemlike double pyramids, columns and a single curved wall. The freestanding circles and columns taper at the top, producing gradient and prismatic effects. Valentine plays up these optical effects by incorporating multiple colors into the objects. A saturated golden yellow at the bottom of the gorgeous *Circle Amber-Rose* (ca. 1970), an homage to Southern California's sunset hues, gradually fades to a pale pink at the apex. Other circular works contain smoky or swirling motifs in contrasting colors. The columns' upright rectangular forms refract light, their lavenders and grays splintering into shades of blue, red and pink.

Valentine's relative obscurity on the East Coast added an extra dash of cool to the exhibition. One couldn't help but wonder how East Coast Minimalism eclipsed the Light and Space variety for so long. In the press release, a recent quote by Valentine about the California landscape's influence on his work was followed in quick succession by a description of his 1966 innovation (done in collaboration with Hastings Plastics)—the development of a polyester resin, Valentine MasKast, that could be poured in amounts greater than 50 pounds. Valentine's dual focus on phenomenology and process recalls that of New York Minimalists. Robert Smithson's spirituality seemed to contradict his interests in geological and industrial history; Donald Judd's muscular art criticism, in its focus on process, diverged from his seductive objects; Carl Andre butched up his compositions by likening them

to the blue-collar labor of his bricklaying grandfather. The post-studio New York artists' concerns about production dovetailed with the New Left's interest in the politics of working-class labor.

Compared to their cerebral East Coast counterparts, the Light and Space artists evaded language in favor of an open-ended investigation of perception. But even more damning to their place in the canon might have been the narrative often appended to them, in which their aesthetics were linked to commercial objects such as cars and surfboards. Valentine's trajectory has been traced from his working at his father's boat shop in Colorado to his involvement in 1950s custom-car culture to his move to the commercially booming Los Angeles of the 1960s, where he accepted a job teaching plastics technology—not traditional sculpture—at UCLA. In L.A., along with other Light and Space artists, he courted aerospace and military-industrial technology to create his work.

This is what makes Valentine and his movement ripe for reevaluation now. Such work seems to herald the current flirtation between art and technology. And indeed, Valentine's almost glowing forms—likened to mandalas in a 1979 feature in this magazine—seem to have anticipated the Apple aesthetic of Zen acolyte Steve Jobs. The show's signature work, then, may be *Double Column Gray* (1975-76), consisting of two 12-foot-tall columns. Commissioned for the Baxter Travenol Laboratories' corporate headquarters in Deerfield, Ill., the columns were shown at Zwirner in their intended upright position for the first time. (They were laid on their sides in the original location because the ceiling height was lowered during the construction process.) If Minimalists often positioned their work outside of corporate concerns, Valentine's collusion with such interests makes his work—just like selfies it inspired—deeply contemporary.

—Wendy Vogel