



41 Jack Hamilton Bush

ARCA CGP CSGA CSPWC OSA P11 1909 – 1977

Across and Down

acrylic on canvas, on verso signed, titled, dated December 1966 and inscribed *André Emmerich N.Y. / Acrylic Polymer W.B. / 4210/7* on a label
80 x 112 in, 203.2 x 284.5 cm

PROVENANCE

André Emmerich Gallery, New York,
1967 – August 18, 1970
David Mirvish Gallery, Toronto
Barbara Krakow, Boston
James H. Henwood, XX Century Art,
Montreal
Acquired from the above by the present
Private Collection, Montreal, 1976

LITERATURE

Michael Fried, “Shape as Form: Frank Stella’s New Paintings,”
Artforum, November 1966, pages 18 – 27
Diary (1966 – 1967), Jack Bush fonds, E.P. Taylor Research
Library and Archives, Art Gallery of Ontario
IX Bienal de São Paulo, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo,
1967, listed page 11
Jean-René Ostiguy, *Jacques Hurlubise / Jack Bush: Canada
at IX São Paulo Bienal 1967*, National Gallery of Canada,
1967, listed, unpaginated

EXHIBITED

São Paulo, Brazil, *Jacques Hurlubise / Jack Bush: Canada at IX São
Paulo Bienal 1967*, traveling to the Galerie d’art du Centre cul-
turel de l’Université de Sherbrooke, Quebec, April 9 – 30, 1968
and the Rodman Hall Art Centre, St. Catharine’s, May 14 – June
1968, catalogue #28
Harcus-Krakow Gallery, Boston, *Jack Bush*, 1970



Jack Bush in front of his painting *Try Out* (1966), November 17, 1966
Photo: Mario Geo / *Toronto Star*
Courtesy of Getty Images, editorial #515099707



Jacques Hurtubise and Jack Bush paintings installed at IX São Paulo Bienal 1967, with *Across and Down* on the right
 Courtesy of the National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives

ACROSS AND DOWN is one of 16 paintings by Jack Bush that represented Canada at the IX Bienal de São Paulo in 1967. Along with Bush, the Canadian Section of the *Bienal* included the French-Canadian painter Jacques Hurtubise, making it a two-man exhibition. The paintings of each artist did not intermingle on the partition walls, but some shared sightlines. The bold abstract compositions of both artists made the primacy of modernist painting apparent that year. Paintings by Greg Curnoe held court for the following *São Paulo Bienal* in 1969, as well as works by Robert Murray and N.E. Thing Co.

Bush and his wife, Mabel, traveled to Brazil to attend the opening of the biennial. Their first visit to the exhibitions was on Sunday, September 17. They were not entirely impressed by the art on show, but their surroundings in this tropical clime proved most stimulating. In particular, the Bushes were delighted by the extraordinary gardens at the Colombian embassy, where they were invited to enjoy a reception party with drinks and dinner amongst the many other artists and cultural workers who

convened in São Paulo. Bush spent more time writing in his diary about the unusual flowers in the garden, and Mabel's delight in the spectacle, than he did about any of the art they saw on this trip. Yet this is true to form for the artist—nature's colours always inspired him, no matter how abstract his paintings were.

The IX São Paulo Bienal was called the “Pop Art Bienal,” but this kind of context contributes to the tenuous categorization of Bush's work as Op Art (e.g., Bush's *Pink with Border*, 1967, is now installed at the National Gallery of Canada in a room that describes its contents in relation to Hard-edge Abstraction and Op Art). Of course, the fantastic appearance of colour-popping stripes in paintings like *Across and Down*, and seemingly surface-bending stripes in lively paintings like *Try Out*, could be argued to be definitive of art made for optical effect, yet Bush's work remains rooted in the tenets of Colour Field art, which, in part, demands to be felt in the body and not just the eye. Often aiming to provoke physical sensations, Colour Field art is usually saturated in hue and reaches beyond the head-to-toe dimensions of

the viewer in an effort to achieve an all-over, immersive reception. This emphasis on subjective, emotional triggers means that preset colour theories or themes are ignored in favour of more immediate and spontaneous relationships with colour. Bush's abstracts are more visceral than cerebral.

From a distance, or in reproduction, Bush's striped paintings may appear to be perfectly straight, with a dead flat application of colour within hard-edged geometric schemes. However, get closer and the painting can be seen to bleed—one section of pigment creeps into the other without correction or, conversely, with unapologetic overcorrection by the artist. His stripes are not in fact opaque in hue like those in the classic works of Guido Molinari or Claude Tousignant. With Bush, there are variations in the saturation of the paint and there is no manifesto underlying his colour choices. His decisions are largely based on intuition and play, making jazz and ad lib processes more appropriate when describing Bush's methods.

Bush's own thoughts recorded in his diaries suggest that the striped paintings by Frank Stella made an impact upon his own compositions of stacked colour. Stella first asserted his critical capacity and painterly strength with his black paintings, composed of perfectly paced and spaced stripes, which he made between 1958 and 1960. Later, these brush-width stripes burst into brightly hued stripes, but they remained tight, in close proximity to the next stripe. Bush was exposed to Stella's boldly striped paintings through his association with the David Mirvish Gallery (DMG), which showed Stella in Bush's hometown, Toronto.

In the spring of 1966, the DMG held a solo exhibition featuring Stella's *Irregular Polygon* series. These shaped canvases continued with bright stripes that played with the perimeter of the canvas, but this time open fields of solid colour dominated the peripheral stripes. Bush enjoyed the exhibition and socialized with Stella, who was 30 years of age at the time; Bush was 57 in 1966. Bush was older than most of his closest painting peers, such as Jules Olitski, Kenneth Noland and Anthony Caro, who were all about 15 years his junior.

Stella, Olitski, Noland and Caro all passed through Toronto that spring. Like the stripes painted by these artists in 1966, each painter was unique but their convictions were harmonious. Practically speaking, these Colour Field artists shared notes on technique and media. For Bush, 1966 was a revolutionary year, in which he transitioned from using oil and Magna acrylic resin paints to the exclusive use of water-based acrylics. He was advised to try using a water tension breaker in his new acrylic paint. In the second week of April 1966, the same week that Stella's solo show opened at the DMG, Bush received the water tension breaker that he had ordered from Lenny Bocour.

Bocour was a dealer of sorts—a master maker of paints and the source for the best Colour Field artists. According to Bush, the water tension breaker allowed the pigment to absorb into the canvas rather than just rest on top. The effect is essentially a union of colour and surface, such that colour becomes surface. So while we read colour through sight, it was not necessarily employed by the Colour Field artists for optical effect alone. Colour could also express and play with vicinity—the vicinity between the paint and the surface of the canvas, as well as the edge of the canvas—as expertly demonstrated by Stella's *Irregular Polygon* series. Michael Fried's essay “Shape as Form: Frank Stella's New



Cover of *Canada at IX São Paulo Bienal 1967*, Jean-René Ostiguy, National Gallery of Canada

Paintings,” published in the November 1966 issue of *Artforum*, makes this point:

The literalness of the picture-surface is not denied; but one's experience of that literalness is an experience of the properties of different pigments, of foreign substances applied to the surface of the painting, of the weave of the canvas, above all of color—but not, or not in particular, of the flatness of the support.

Fried's article also underlines the significance of the “experience” of literalness; that is, for example, a modernist painting like Bush's *Across and Down* should inspire a viewer to enjoy the experience of the features of the painting, including the substance of, and on, the canvas and especially the hues. Colour Field painting characteristically aspires to be an object to encounter, not only a picture to look at.

We thank Dr. Sarah Stanners for contributing the above essay. Dr. Stanners brought the definitive Jack Bush retrospective to fruition with Marc Mayer at the National Gallery and the Art Gallery of Alberta (2014–2015). She launched *Jack Bush: In Studio* (2016) at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, where she served as Chief Curator from 2015 to 2018, overseeing 27 exhibitions and 8 publications on Canadian art. Dr. Stanners is now director of the *Jack Bush Catalogue Raisonné* and holds a status-only appointment as assistant professor at the University of Toronto, Department of History of Art.

This work will be included in Sarah Stanners's forthcoming *Jack Bush Paintings: A Catalogue Raisonné*.

ESTIMATE: \$400,000 – 600,000