

IN MOTION:
AGAM AT SUNNYLANDS

2020/2021 Season

Katherine Hough and Frank Lopez



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3 x 6 Double Frame Interplay (detail)

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Square Waves (detail)

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The Annenbergs: Collectors of International Art

Soon after its completion in 1966, Walter and Leonore Annenberg's estate near Palm Springs became a national and international gathering place. They invited leading figures in art, business, politics, and entertainment to Sunnylands for intimate weekends of thoughtful conversation and relaxation. When establishing The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands, the couple envisioned the preservation of their midcentury modern house with its 200 parkland acres as a way to continue its storied history and its role in fostering international agreement. Today, the Trust continues to work on global issues and strives to assist policy makers in finding solutions to some of the world's greatest challenges.

As ambassadors and philanthropists, the Annenbergs had a special understanding of cultural diplomacy—that intersection of art, culture, and international relations that can connect people throughout the world. They filled their home and grounds with a variety of fine and decorative artworks from Asia, Europe, Canada, Mexico, and the United States. A discovery for many people will be their collection of artworks by Israeli artist Yaacov Agam, whose sculptures and paintings played an important visual role in gatherings on the terraces at Sunnylands. Agam had attracted the attention of French president Georges Pompidou, whose 1972 commission of an entire room of Agam's art for the Elysée Palace in Paris would have appealed to the Annenbergs' sensibilities.

The Annenberg collection of Agam works was the result of their connection with the Palm Springs Desert (now Art) Museum. From 1972 to 1976, Leonore Annenberg was president of the museum's board of trustees and oversaw the opening of its new E. Stewart Williams building with an inaugural Agam exhibition. The Annenbergs were fascinated by Agam's works, buying the sculpture *Square Waves* from the museum exhibition, and later commissioning Agam to provide outdoor paintings for their home. Other desert art collectors, also influenced by this early exhibition, purchased and then donated works to the Palm Springs Desert (now Art) Museum, which as a result has a significant Agam collection.

It seems fitting then to combine the Sunnylands and museum collections in a single exhibition that highlights Agam's range of work. The Trust collaborated with the Palm Springs Art Museum on *In Motion: Agam at Sunnylands* for the 2020/2021 season at Sunnylands Center & Gardens. This catalog documents the shared twentieth-century history of the two entities and features their new twenty-first-century collaboration.

Ambassador David J. Lane (retired)

President, The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands

IN MOTION: AGAM AT SUNNYLANDS

Reflecting Space (detail)
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In Motion: Agam at Sunnylands

Yaacov Agam

Yaacov Agam is one of a select number of Israeli artists who are internationally renowned. His art can be found in many private and museum collections as well as in public buildings and outdoor spaces worldwide.

Agam was born in Rishon LeZion, Palestine (now Israel) on May 11, 1928, into an orthodox Jewish family as the son of the rabbi and kabbalist Yehoshua Gipstein and his wife Yocheved. Agam's religious upbringing influenced his artistic view and creative output. He studied at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem under Mordecai Ardon in 1946, and then moved to Zurich where he met the artist and teacher Johannes Itten, who was promoting Bauhaus ideas. While in Switzerland, Agam met architect, painter, sculptor, and theoretician, Max Bill, and the two became friends. Both Itten and Bill influenced Agam's work. Later, Agam attended the Atelier d'Art Abstrait and the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris. The artist has worked primarily in Paris and Israel since 1951, and continues his work today in Israel.

Agam's first opportunity to gain recognition in the art world came in 1953 with his solo exhibition entitled *Peintures en Mouvement (Paintings in Movement)* at the Galerie Craven in Paris. Following this initial exhibition, Agam showed his work along with other originators of kinetic art including Alexander Calder, Jesús Rafael Soto, Jean Tinguely, and Victor Vasarely, in *Le Mouvement (The Movement)* at the Galerie Denise René in 1955.

Agam produced many public commissions, including a moving salon environment (1972–1974) at the Elysée Palace in Paris for French president Georges Pompidou. In 1977, he designed the world's largest menorah: a 32-foot, 4,000-pound structure at Fifth Avenue and 59th Street in Manhattan, based on the original menorah in Jerusalem's Holy Temple. Then, Agam was asked to make a work of art to commemorate the peacemaking efforts between Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Beersheba, Israel. For that commission, he created the *Star of Peace* (1979), an historic and symbolic kinetic sculpture, which appeared from one direction to be the five-pointed star of Islam, from another the six-pointed Star of David, and from a third a new star formed from their fusion. This artistic image symbolized peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Jews.

Opposite

Agam standing in front of *Situations*. c.1978

Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.92

Photographer unknown.



Other public projects include the 1986 “Fire and Water Fountain” in Dizengoff Square in the center of Tel Aviv. The next year, he produced a memorial for the victims of the Holocaust at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. More recently, he created the monumental sculpture, *Peaceful Communication with the World*, for the 2009 World Games in Kaohsiung, Taiwan.

Agam has been widely recognized for his importance as a trailblazer in the kinetic art movement. He has been the subject of numerous solo and group exhibitions at many institutions: Musée National d’Art Moderne, Paris (1972); Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (1973); Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (1973); Tel Aviv Museum of Art (1973); Skirball Museum, Hebrew Union College, Los Angeles (1973); The Jewish Museum, New York (1975); Palm Springs Desert (now Art) Museum (1976); Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City (1976); South African National Gallery, Cape Town (1977); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (1980); Isetan Museum of Art, Tokyo (1989); and Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires (1996).

In addition, Agam received several honors and awards, including an honorary doctorate of philosophy from Tel Aviv University in 1975. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) awarded him the 1996 Jan Amos Comenius Medal for the Agam Method for the nonverbal visual education of young children. He received the prestigious Warrior for Truth award from *The Algemeiner Journal* in 2017.

The Yaacov Agam Museum of Art (YAMA) in Agam’s birthplace of Rishon LeZion, Israel, opened to the public in 2017. This museum is dedicated to movement in art, featuring Agam’s body of work, and representing his many different styles in a range of media.

Agam’s Credo

In 1964, Agam laid out his artistic credo, which remains unchanged:

“The driving force and the source from which I draw my inspiration stem from my desire to give plastic and artistic expression to the ancient Hebrew concept of reality, which differs in its essence from that of all other civilizations, and which, to my mind, has never found its true artistic expression.

Although I have struggled with universal plastic values in order to put my experiments within the framework of a common language, I must stress on me again that the key to my work is the attempt to give plastic definition to the concept of Hebrew realism beyond the limits of religion and to open the gateway which leads to reality.”¹

Opposite

Reflecting Space. 1978

Yaacov Agam

Gold-plated brass, edition 3/9

33¾" x 28" x 27"

Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.86

The gold-plated brass elements of this transformable kinetic sculpture can be rotated to interact with the surrounding space and light. Exhibited in 1980 at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, this piece was acquired by the Annenbergs from the exhibition. Agam and the Annenbergs collaborated on the custom-designed teakwood pedestal.



Reconciling Art with Life

For nearly seven decades, Yaacov Agam has made a remarkable contribution to the history of art. From stationary art forms to dynamic multi-dimensional experiences, Agam transformed the traditional methods of creating art. By challenging the accepted idea of art as a fixed image, Agam used unconventional approaches to produce moveable works. Introducing the notions of time and movement as a foundation for his art practice, he pioneered, developed, and advanced new concepts for kinetic artworks, influencing subsequent generations of artists.

Beginning with transformable artworks and the participation of the spectator, he also experimented with the forces of light, air, water, sound, and fire. From small-scale paintings and sculptures to monumental experiences, he revealed his feelings about life, religion, music, intellectual matters, and beyond-this-world phenomena. Agam demonstrated an ability to manipulate a number of complex technological processes that extended and redefined his vision.²

In the extensive monograph titled *Agam* (1990), art critic Frank Popper carefully analyzed and surveyed the development of Agam's techniques and experiments, as well as his philosophical attitudes and religious beliefs. Enhancing the audience's insight into Agam's work, Popper confirmed that the artist's motivation for his art and life is revealed through his religious beliefs and his aesthetic sensibilities.³ Through his art practice, Agam realized two endeavors: (1) "his [own] dynamic interpretation and celebration of the force of life and (2) his [own] total commitment to the participation of the public in the creative process."⁴

Origins of Kinetic Art

In his landmark study, *Origins and Development of Kinetic Art* (1968), Popper proposed that the first artists to apply the term "kinetic" to visual art were the Russian brothers Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner. Gabo first exhibited a single steel rod set in motion by an electric motor that he titled, *Kinetic Construction (Standing Wave)*.⁵

According to [Gabo, the sculpture] was initially produced for students in 1919-20 as a demonstration of the constructive ideas expressed in his Realistic Manifesto...Written by Gabo and published jointly with Pevsner in August 1920, the manifesto proclaimed the need for art to connect with the political and industrial transformations of the era by establishing a more active relationship to space and time.... Although Gabo often emphasized the work's genesis as a demonstration model, it was exhibited as a work of art, appearing in Moscow in 1920 as well as in the landmark First Russian Art Exhibition (Erste russische Kunstausstellung) in Berlin in 1922.⁶

Early painters who are generally regarded as forerunners in kinetic studies—including Josef Albers, Jean (Hans) Arp, Robert Delaunay, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and Piet Mondrian—created virtual movement in their artworks through their use of color, line, and volume on a two-dimensional surface. A number of Paris-based sculptors, such as Marcel Duchamp and László Moholy-Nagy, along with American Alexander Calder, investigated ideas about sculptural movement and introduced the "notion of play" in their works of the late 1920s and early 1930s. While "mobiles" is a common term today, it originated with Duchamp who coined the term for Calder's three-dimensional moving sculptures in the early 1930s.⁷

Opposite

3 x 6 Double Frame Interplay. 1976
Yaacov Agam
Gold-plated brass, edition EA 0/9
24" x 23" x 23½"
Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.88

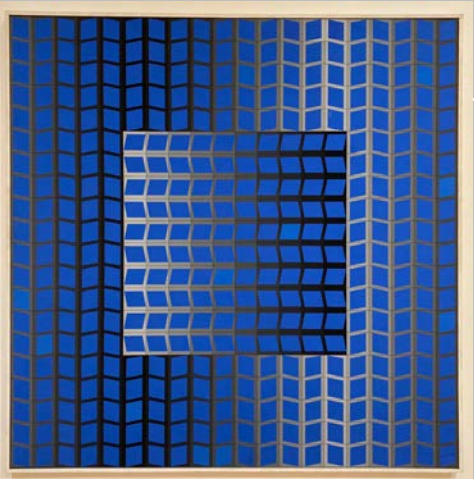
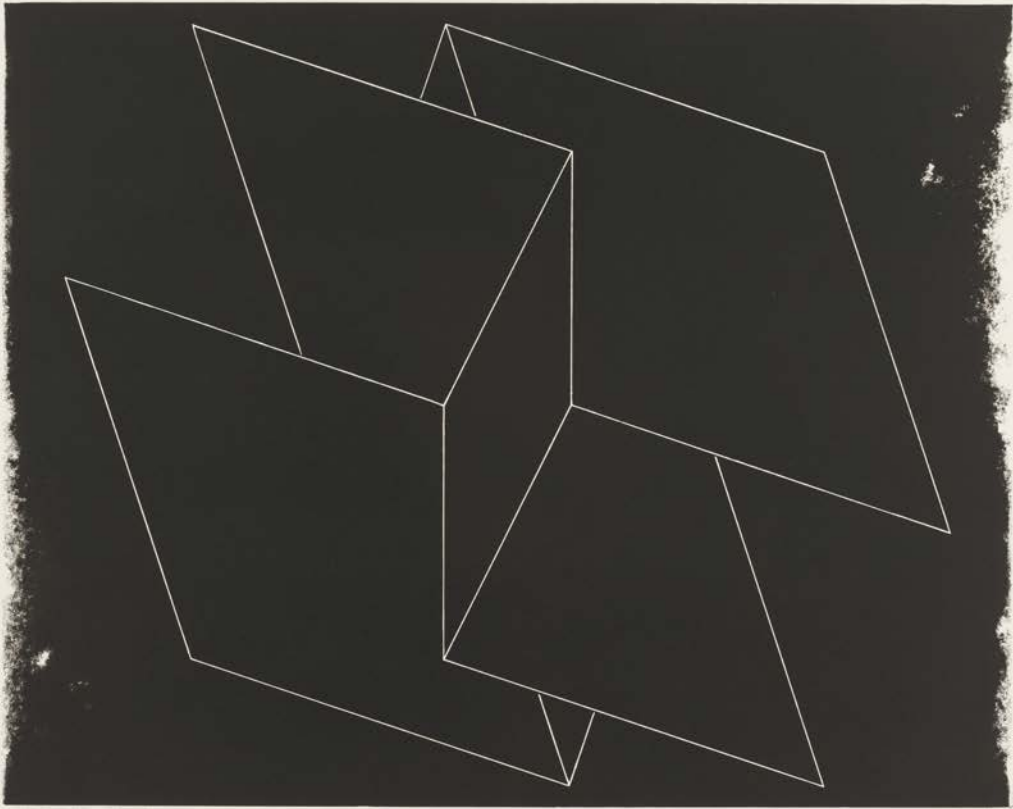


There are several ways the term “kinetic” may be used when applied to art. Understanding these concepts will help in assessing the impact kinetic concepts had on the history of art. The term kinetic is linked to the absence of fixed forms in artworks in key ways: stable, passive, active, and interactive.

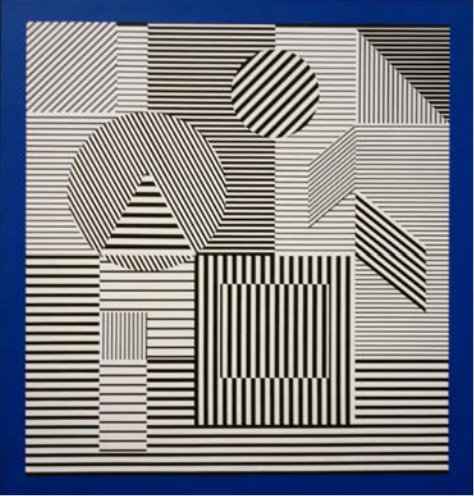
Stable kinetic art doesn't physically move but it may stimulate physiological reactions in the viewer through “virtual movement” by the artist's use of color, line, and volume. Good examples are optical works by Victor Vasarely or studies by Josef Albers.

Interlinear N 65. 1962
Josef Albers
Lithograph, Tamarind Impression
22" x 30"

Collection Palm Springs Art Museum, gift of Dorothy J. and Benjamin B. Smith, 43-1986
© The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2020



Zett-Kek. 1966
Victor Vasarely
Tempera on linen
56" x 56"
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum,
gift of Mr. and Mrs. William H. Wise, 77-1979
© 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris



Sence-2. 1960
Victor Vasarely
Oil on linen
39½" x 42"
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum,
gift of Mrs. Yvonne Jurmann, 529-1986
© 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Passive kinetic art challenges the viewer to take physical action. The artwork creates the visual perception of movement only as long as the viewer is moving, while appearing to stop if the viewer remains absolutely still—like an Agam polymorphic painting or a Jesús Rafael Soto relief.

Four Modulations (Cuatro modulaciones). 1969
Jesús Rafael Soto
Paint on metal and wood
60¾" x 60¾" x 6⅞"
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum, gift of the Estate of Sigmund E. Edelstone, 18-1984
©Estate of Jesús Rafael Soto, © 2020 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris



What is Kinetic Art?

Active kinetic art is recognizable because it self-generates detectable movement from wind, electricity, magnetism, water, or another energy source. The viewer can interact with the artwork directly, but motion is generated with or without an actual spectator present. An Alexander Calder mobile moving in a breeze is one example.



Lizard (Lézard). 1968

Alexander Calder

Paint on metal
104½" x 165" x 31¼"

Collection Palm Springs Art Museum, gift of Gwendolyn Weiner in honor of Harold Meyerman, 80-2011
© 2020 Calder Foundation, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



1950s

Agam Arrives in Paris

By the time Agam arrived in Paris at the age of 23 in 1951, he was aware of and may have been influenced by the work of the artists noted earlier, now considered kinetic forerunners. To better understand Agam's contributions to the history of art, it is important to know that he had a vital role in further developing kinetic art early in his career. Agam's career was launched in 1951, soon after he moved to Paris following his time in Switzerland (1949–51). In Paris, while earning a modest living as an art teacher, Agam became acquainted with many inspirational figures in the then-current art circles.

One important influence was Robert Lebel who wrote about surrealism and introduced Agam to surrealist artists, including Salvador Dalí and Roberto Matta.⁸ Although unable to speak with these artists due to a language barrier, Agam was bold enough to attend their salons where he generously showed a few of his innovative artworks. The surrealist artists he befriended were impressed with his art and soon came to understand that Agam was challenging and overturning the accepted notion of art as a fixed image.



Above
Agam is seen with French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in 1980.
Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.4263
Photographer unknown.

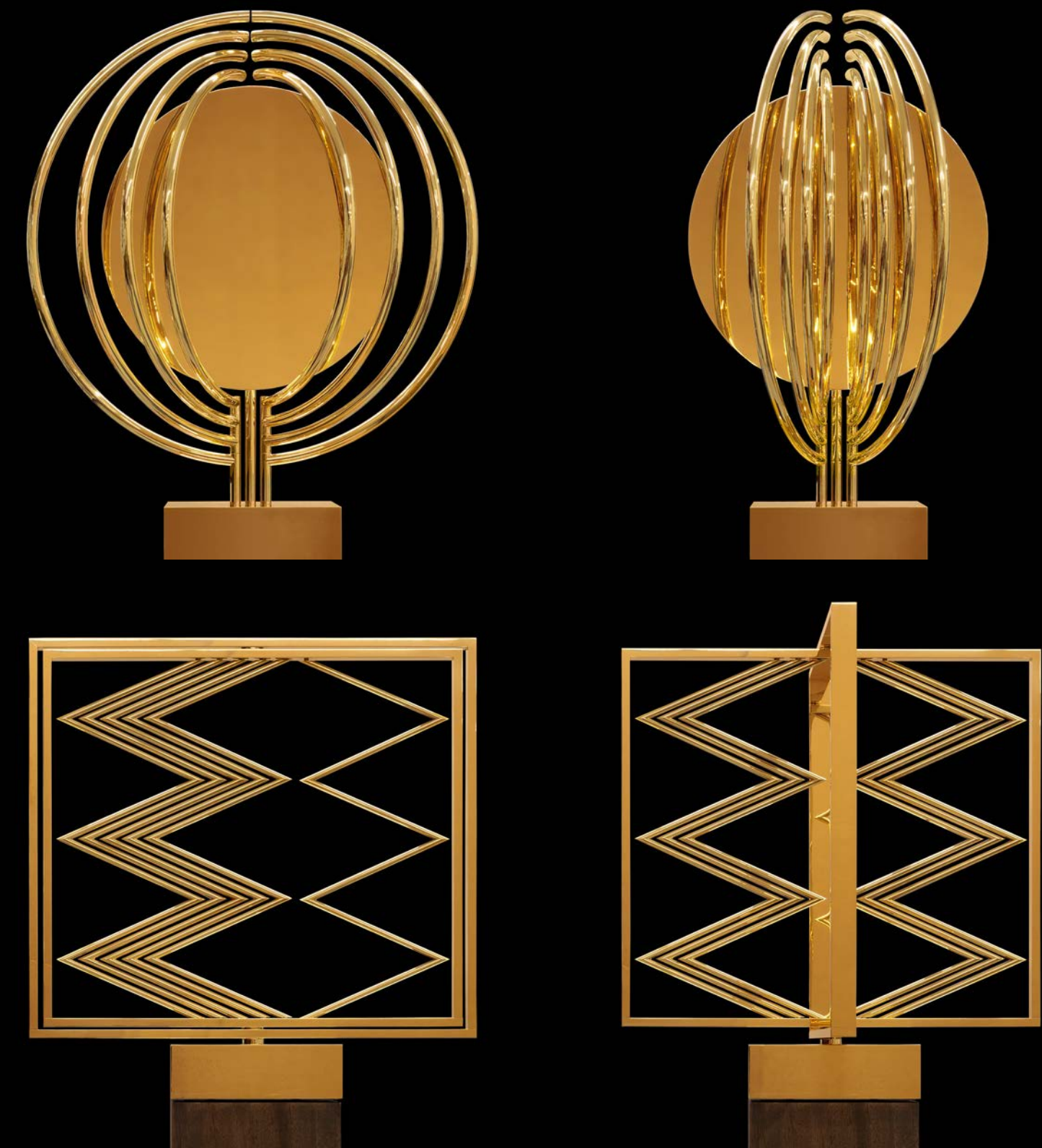
Interactive kinetic art requires direct interaction from the spectator. The artwork does not move on its own, but requires that it be activated through physical contact or intervention from a spectator—such as an Agam steel sculpture with moveable elements that are manipulated by a viewer.



Reflecting Space
See page 10.

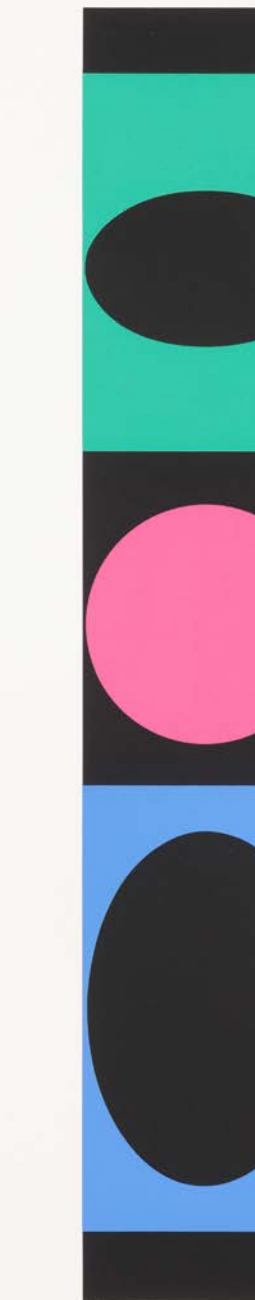
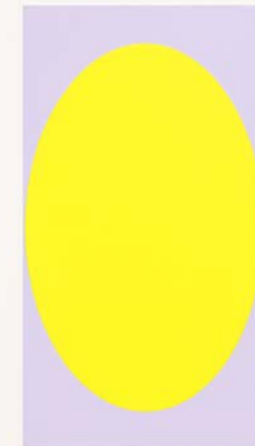
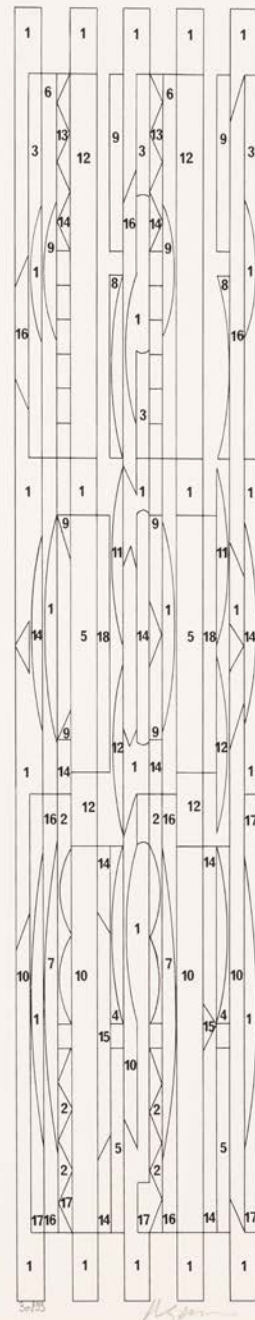


3 x 6 Double Frame Interplay
See page 12.



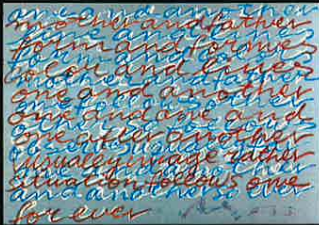
This series includes nine images plus the color key and frontispiece. In this suite of serigraphs, the outside images evolve and transform through a process of addition, subtraction, and multiplication.

+ - x 9 (Plus Minus Times Nine). 1980
Yaacov Agam
Serigraph, edition 30/99
27 1/4" x 7 1/4" each
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum,
gift of Mr. Morris Blinder,
45-1982.1-11



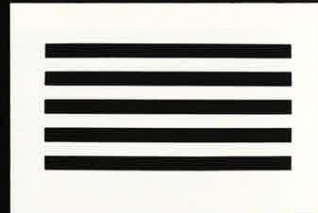
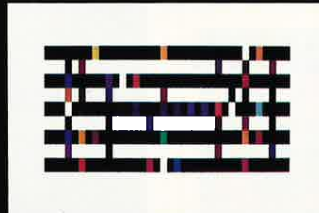
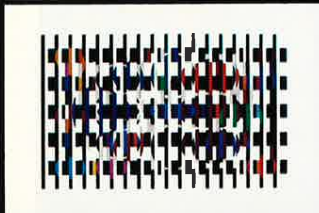
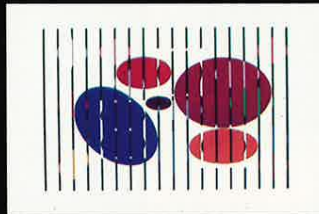
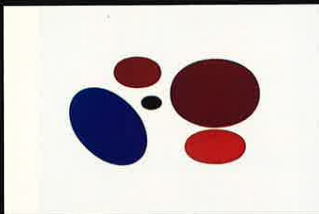
AGAM

ONE AND ANOTHER



one and another
mother and father
line and lines
form and forms
form and colors
color and lines
mother and father
one and another
one follows other

one and one and
other so follows
one after another
observes usually far
visually images rather
one and another
situation follows one
and another so ever
for ever — Yaacov Agam 1977



Above

The series *One and Another* was advertised in publications such as *ARTnews* in the late '70s.

ARTnews, March 1978

In this portfolio of serigraphs, Agam created an artwork that reflects his intense interest in life. By leading viewers slowly and gradually through the images, giving them the pleasure of discovering the composition themselves, Agam allows the audience to become intimately involved with his art.

First Solo Kinetic Exhibition

Beginning in 1952–53, Agam adopted the term “kinetic” to describe his own artworks. Today, scholars acknowledge his moveable reliefs as direct predecessors of kinetic art. “In particular the *Meta-mécaniques* of [Jean] Tinguely, the mobile planes of [Pol] Bury, and the *Assemblages mouvants* of Agam,” all of whom were friends executing their early creations in Paris in 1953, were the predecessors of the new art movement.⁹

Agam’s first solo exhibition, entitled *Peintures en Mouvement*, was at Galerie Craven in Paris in 1953. This showing, considered the first one-person exhibition in art history devoted exclusively to kinetic art, included 45 Agam artworks forming two series.

The first series of transformable pictures did not have a predetermined structure, but contained abstract and geometric moveable elements that encouraged the viewer to rearrange the individual mobile elements on the picture to create their own designs. The second series of polymorphic paintings consisted of fixed designs that the artist painted on parallel wedge-shaped strips. Distinct patterns on opposite sides of the prism strips merged and changed according to the angle from which the work was viewed as the spectator physically moved in front of the relief painting and then to the extreme left and right sides of the work.

The group of surrealist artists whom Agam had met earlier (Max Ernst, Roberto Matta, Jean (Hans) Arp, and Wifredo Lam) enthusiastically showed their support for this young and emerging talent on the Paris art scene by attending the opening of his exhibition at Galerie Craven. These surrealists commenced long-term friendships with Agam who later referred to them as an influence on his work. This enduring admiration was cemented when Ernst purchased one of Agam’s transformables from the exhibition.¹⁰

Agam was a sudden sensation, and the exhibition brought tremendous attention to this new trend in art. The intellectual Parisian art crowd, including famed gallerist Denise René, looked at Agam’s work seriously. Agam believed that “it was this show that constituted the determining factor in the idea of *Le Mouvement* exhibit at Denise René’s in 1955.”¹¹ In order “for the international impact of Kinetic Art to become so extensive, Denise René’s groundbreaking 1955 exhibition *Le Mouvement* could have taken place only at a gallery in Paris, where so many of its [artists] also lived.”¹²

Above right

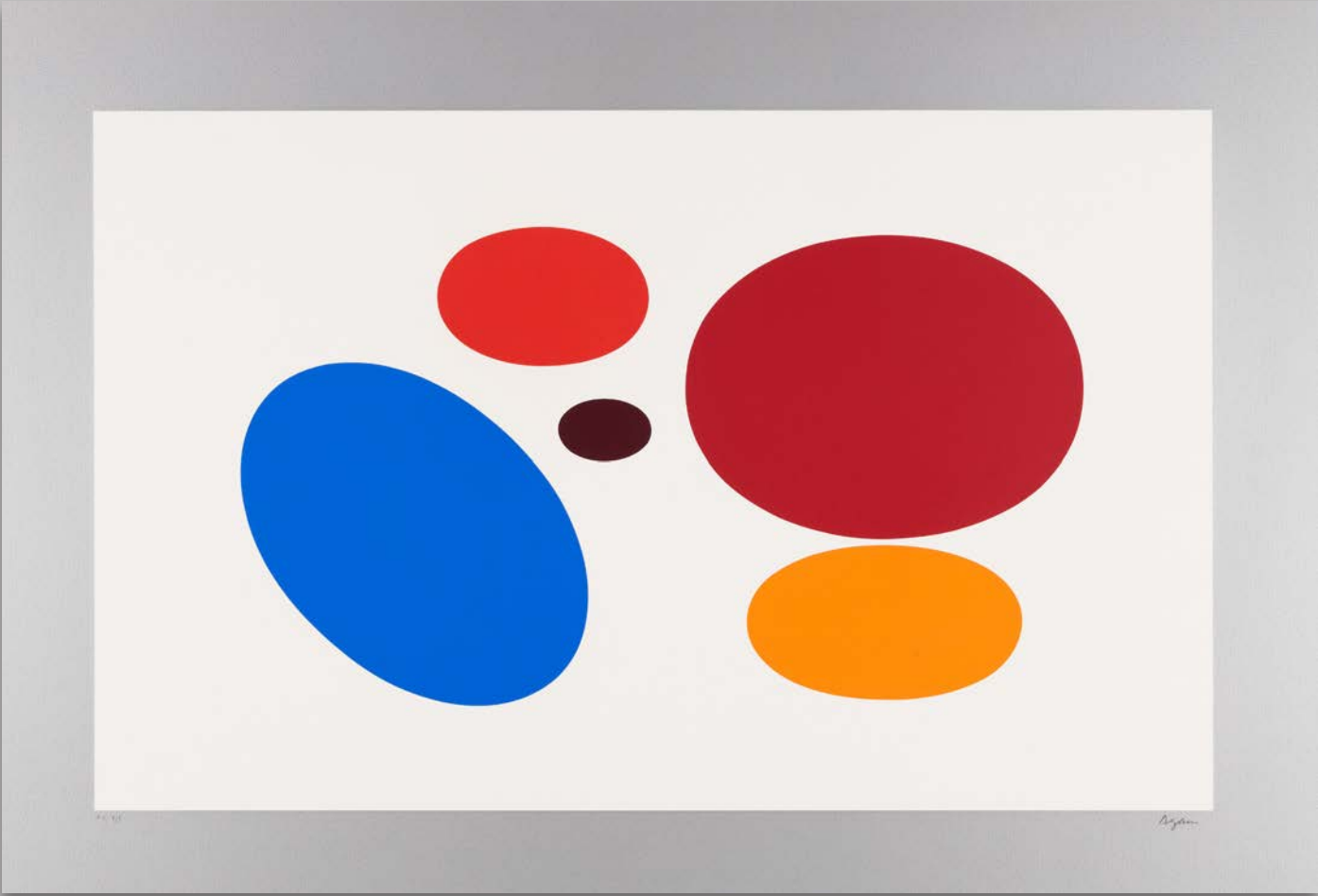
A 1953 example of Agam’s transformables, *Signes pour un langage* (*Signs for a Language*), as reproduced in the volume *Homage to Yaacov Agam*, published by Leon Amiel Publisher, Inc.

Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.001777.



Transformables

Agam altered the pictorial structure of his paintings and reliefs by placing wood or metal elements that could be moved around the perforated wood surface. The viewer was invited to participate and compose a unique picture by inserting the elements wherever they wanted. This was a magical way to think about art and take an active role in the creative process. Agam spent his lifetime demonstrating how the viewer perceives color, light, space, and movement without actually seeing a fixed image. By shifting the gaze of the spectator, Agam created the illusion that what was moving was the image.



One and Another. 1977
Yaacov Agam

Serigraph, edition HC 8/9
24" x 35"
One in a suite of seven prints

Collection Palm Springs Art Museum,
gift of Martin Lawrence Limited Editions, 34-1978.5

In 1977, Agam said: “So, in *One and Another*—viewing it and studying it reveals the process of the structure of any work of art by different steps of elaborated composition which, through observation, puts you in the most intimate relationship to visual orchestration, a symphony of color, shape, and structure.”¹³

Agam's participation in the European art world was growing. For three continuous years beginning in 1954, Agam participated in the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles where he exhibited alongside the Latin American faction of this group, including Jesús Rafael Soto from Venezuela. Both artists showed their abstract, geometric, and constructive productions that also “attracted the attention of Denise René and Victor Vasarely.”¹⁴ During this time, Agam was interacting with artists who shared similar sensibilities—especially Soto and Tinguely. Agam's determination and hard-working attitude earned him respect as an innovative artist even though he was a relative newcomer on the Paris art scene.

Groundbreaking Exhibition at Galerie Denise René

Another important opportunity for Agam came after he met Vasarely who was the partner of gallerist Denise René. That couple was recognized as Paris' most keen and passionate promoters of postwar abstract art. They befriended Agam and many prominent artists, influential collectors, and intellectuals of their generation, and hosted lively salons. As an emerging artist on the Paris scene, Agam participated in the debates between abstract and figurative artists in René's Paris gallery.

The Galerie set the pace for art world insiders and became a natural gathering place to exchange similar ideas on an international scale. This interaction led to a sense of camaraderie that developed between René and her artists, which included Agam.¹⁵

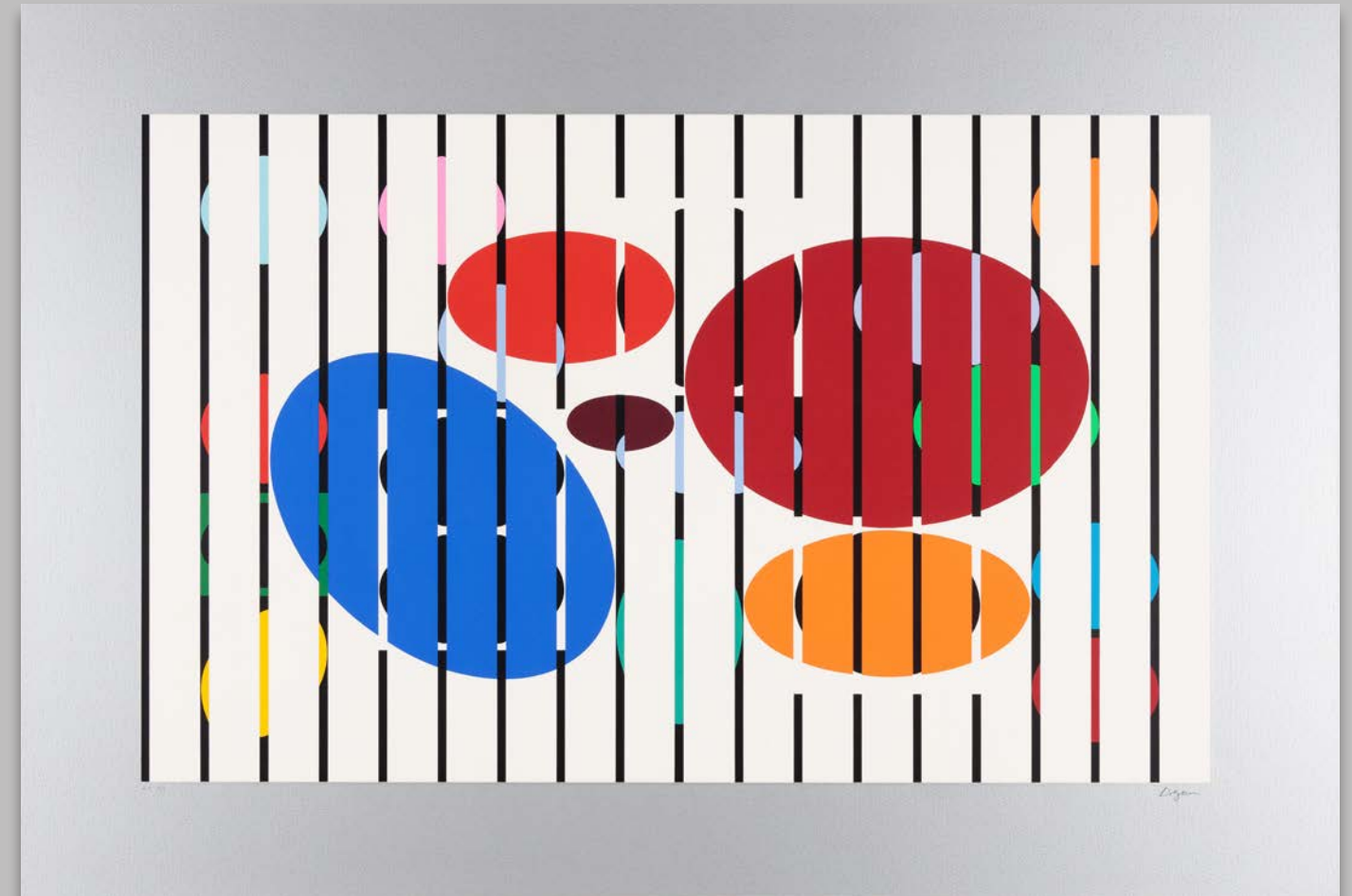
In 1955, Galerie Denise René presented the group exhibition *Le Mouvement* that propelled a new thinking about kinetic art. Organized by René, artist Vasarely, and art historian Pontus Hultén, the landmark exhibition introduced relatively unknown younger artists Agam, Soto, Bury, and Tinguely while showcasing their emerging artworks alongside those of well-established masters Calder, Duchamp, and Vasarely. Agam had 18 works in the show, each one requiring an active participation on the part of the viewer, either by the modifications of the composition of the work or movement resulting from the viewer's change of position.

Soto and Agam became two leading representatives of the burgeoning movement. As art historian Dan Cameron explains,

The work demonstrates Soto's singular ability to transform the flat two-dimensionality of Vasarely's optical compositions into an immersive sculptural experience in which the visual experience was literally projected outward, away from the surface of the wall. This made him a formidable counterpart to the Israeli-born Agam, who moved to Paris from Zurich



Le Mouvement/
The Movement—Paris
1955, New York, April
1975, anniversary
exhibition catalogue,
Editions Denise René.



One and Another. 1977
Yaacov Agam

Serigraph, edition HC 8/9
24" x 35"
Two in a suite of seven prints

Collection Palm Springs Art Museum,
gift of Martin Lawrence Limited Editions, 34-1978.3

a year after Soto arrived from Caracas and followed a similar career path. The two shared the honor of being the two artists in *Le Mouvement* whose work was considered a genuine discovery, even by seasoned Parisian audiences.¹⁶

The word “kinetic”—used to describe the visual movement in artworks—became a commonly accepted term on the art scene after it was published in *Manifeste jaune* (The Yellow Manifesto) on the occasion of *Le Mouvement* exhibition. The exhibition popularized a new generation of artists, brought unprecedented exposure to kinetic art, and championed the movement internationally as an innovative and formidable presence within the European art world of the late 1950s and early 1960s. From this historic event came the experiments of the next generation, including those by Agam.

Scholar Hultén’s curatorial career was centered around the idea of movement in art, and not too long after *Le Mouvement*, he included Agam’s work in many other exhibitions that he organized, including *Rörelse i konsten* (*Movement in Art*), 1961, also referred to as *Bewogen Beweging* (*Moving Moment*). This traveling exhibition was a monumental undertaking that included 233 works by 83 artists from 18 countries that was shown at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; Moderna Museet in Stockholm; and Louisiana Museum of Modern Art near Copenhagen. The inclusion of Agam’s work in this exhibition endorsed his contributions as a major innovator on an international scale.

It is imperative to recognize that René exhibited Agam’s work in solo and group shows throughout her almost 60-year career. Her gallery continues to thrive today—still featuring Agam’s artworks. In addition to her role as one of the foremost champions of kinetic art in Europe, René is credited with introducing the kinetic work of Latin American artists to an international and prestigious audience.

Over the years, it has become clear that most of the artists in international exhibitions of kinetic art became known through activities at René’s Paris gallery. Twenty years after *Le Mouvement*, Agam stated in his 1975 essay, “In my opinion this exhibit marked the coming of a major revolution in the history of art. It reconciles Art with Life through the active participation of the viewer and through his awareness of living in time. What was begun in 1955 has been and will be continued by rising generations breaking with the past...”¹⁷



Manifeste jaune
(The Yellow Manifesto)
leaflet to accompany
the exhibition catalogue,
Le Mouvement, Paris
1955. Text by Roger
Bordier, Pontus Hultén,
and Victor Vasarely,
published by Galerie
Denise René, Paris,
Reprinted 1975.



One and Another. 1977
Yaacov Agam
Serigraph, edition HC 8/9
24" x 35"
Three in a suite of seven prints
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum,
gift of Martin Lawrence Limited Editions, 34-1978.2

Paris: A Cultural Center

By the mid-1960s, kinetic art was an international phenomenon, comprising the activities of individual artists from throughout the world as well as interconnected groups formed in Paris. Agam and other foreign artists had been attracted to Paris because of the cultural and political climate, engagement with similar artistic ideas, and an encouraging art market. Their artworks sold to a growing market of private collectors, companies, institutions, and museums. The universal language of geometric abstraction united artists arriving from different places who spoke different languages.

Between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s, a great number of South American artists interested in kinetic art traveled to Paris, and many remained there for the rest of their lives. While kinetic art evolved simultaneously in both Europe and throughout South America, several exhibitions and art groups formed in Paris made that city the point of origin for the new international art movement. With this official recognition, kinetic art achieved considerable popularity.

Agam was invited to participate in many art exhibitions, salons, and interconnected art groups in which he was indeed an “influencer.” The intellectual Parisian entourage perceived Agam as one of the pioneer creators of the kinetic movement in art.

Nouvelle Tendance (New Trend)

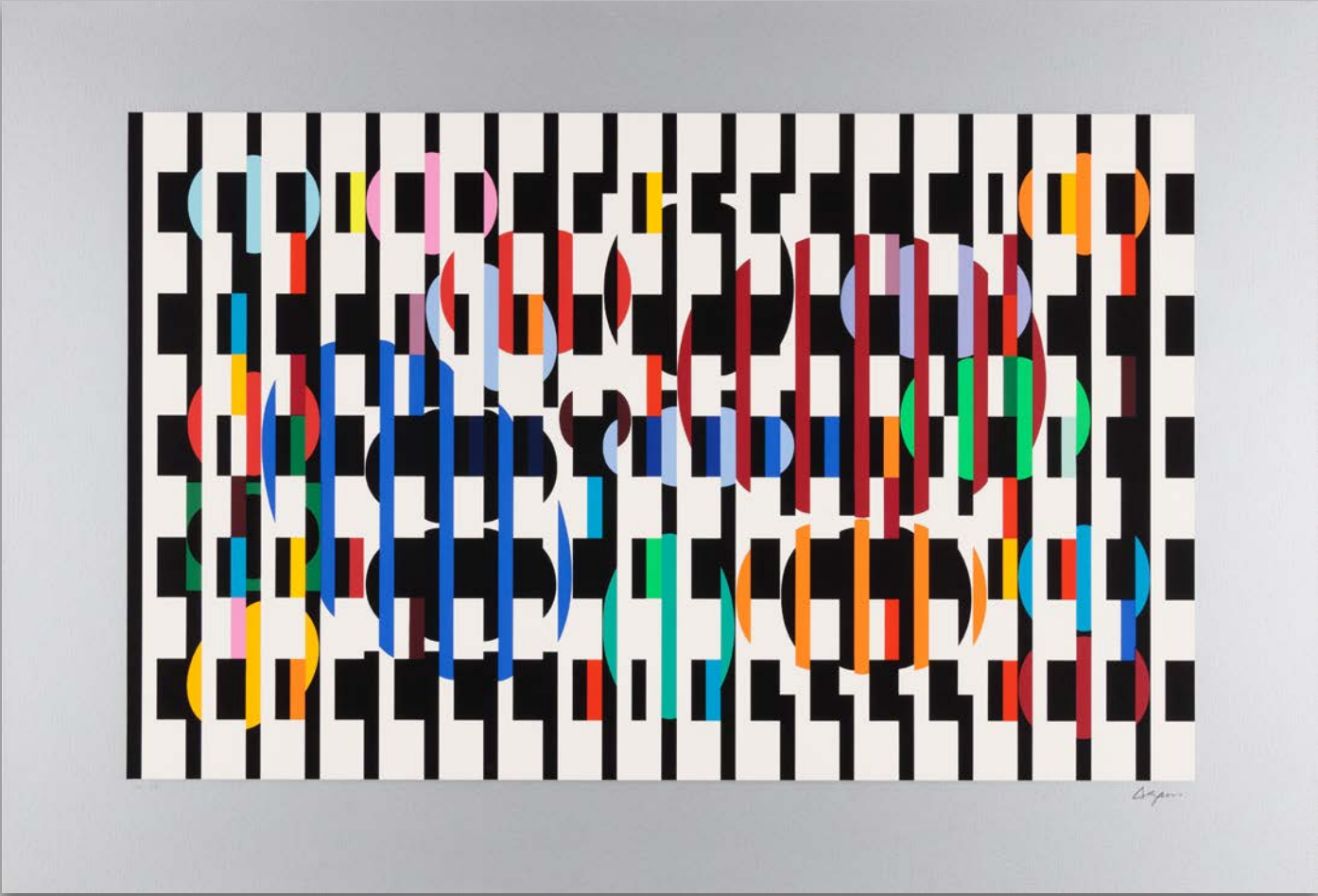
Agam’s and Vasarely’s ideas about perception and virtual images linked them to many other artists undertaking a purely optical study of movement. New ideas were taken up and developed by these younger artists who formed a group called *Nouvelle Tendance* (New Trend).

Founded in Yugoslavia in 1961, the new movement stimulated international artists to participate in a series of exhibitions at European galleries and museums. This group focused on psychological and physiological aspects of movement by means of spectator participation. They discussed and studied how a complex visual kinetic experience developed in response to the activity of the viewer.

All of this was conducted with a new artistic spirit, relative to the challenges of what was actually visual and what was an optical illusion. In 1964, the exhibition *Nouvelle Tendance* opened in Paris at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs and brought together more than 50 artists from 11 countries. Agam, in his mid-30s by then, showed his transformables and polymorphic paintings and was considered one of the inspiring stars of the group.



Below
Dessin spatial (Spatial Design)
is an 1966 example of a transformable painting with mobile metal elements. As reproduced in the volume by Frank Popper.
Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.004377



One and Another. 1977
Yaacov Agam
Serigraph, edition HC 8/9
24" x 35"
Four in a suite of seven prints
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum,
gift of Martin Lawrence Limited Editions, 34-1978.1

Kinetic Art in America

While kinetic art achieved considerable popularity in much of Europe and Latin America, it had few aficionados in the United States. There were only a handful of iconic 20th-century American sculptors (Calder, George Rickey, and Richard Lippold) who embraced kinetic concepts. For two-dimensional artists, the teaching of Josef Albers was an important contributor to an acceptance of kinetic ideas.

However, a blockbuster exhibition, *The Responsive Eye*, organized by The Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1965, introduced kinetic and optical art to American museumgoers. The exhibition included 120 artworks by 99 artists from 15 countries and documented widespread and powerful new directions in contemporary abstract art. The show traveled to several American cities—including Seattle, Washington, and Pasadena, California—introducing the work of many artists to the West Coast for the first time. As art scholar William C. Seitz stated in the accompanying catalog, “*The Responsive Eye* is concerned not with only one tendency, group, or country, but with groups and individuals representing tendencies from over fifteen countries.”¹⁸ One unifying curatorial theme revealed that all artworks served “as generators of perceptual responses in the eye and mind of the viewer.”¹⁹

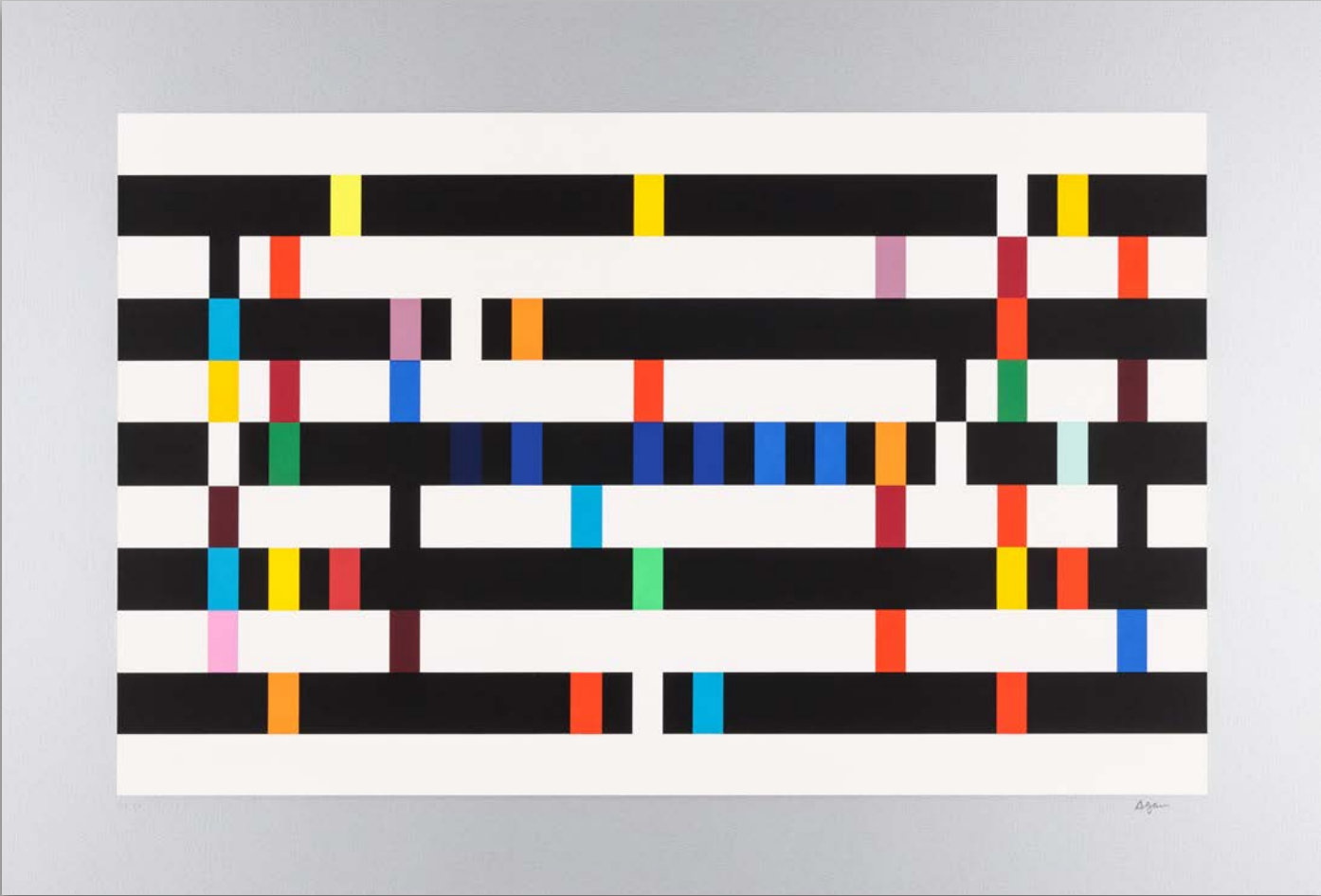
The exhibition prominently included a monumental work by Agam, *Double Metamorphosis II* (1964), an impressive metapolyomorphic painting nearly nine-feet tall by more than 13-feet wide. Agam’s “meta” works are more complex than his “poly” paintings as they contain a number of individual themes painted on parallel triangular reliefs that visually transition through even more radical modifications as viewed from different standpoints. The “poly” paintings consisted of only one theme within fixed designs the artist painted on parallel wedge-shaped strips.

Museum curators, gallerists, and collectors interested in new abstract art, who had not previously seen Agam’s work in Europe, had a chance to see his innovative work alongside many American giants—thus providing greater interest and appreciation for Agam’s artworks.

Back in Paris in 1967, another landmark group exhibition that included Agam’s work was *Lumière et Mouvement* (*Light and Movement*). This exhibition brought together at the Musée d’Art Moderne de Paris the newest art works by 39 artists (14 were Latin American) who resided in France. As a result of this European show, even greater attention was given to Agam as a worldwide influencer.



Above
Made of stainless steel,
George Rickey’s *Crucifera III*
(1964) moves with the wind.
© 2020 George Rickey Foundation,
New York/Artists Rights Society (ARS),
New York



One and Another. 1977
Yaacov Agam
Serigraph, edition HC 8/9
24" x 35"
Five in a suite of seven prints
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum,
gift of Martin Lawrence Limited Editions, 34-1978.4

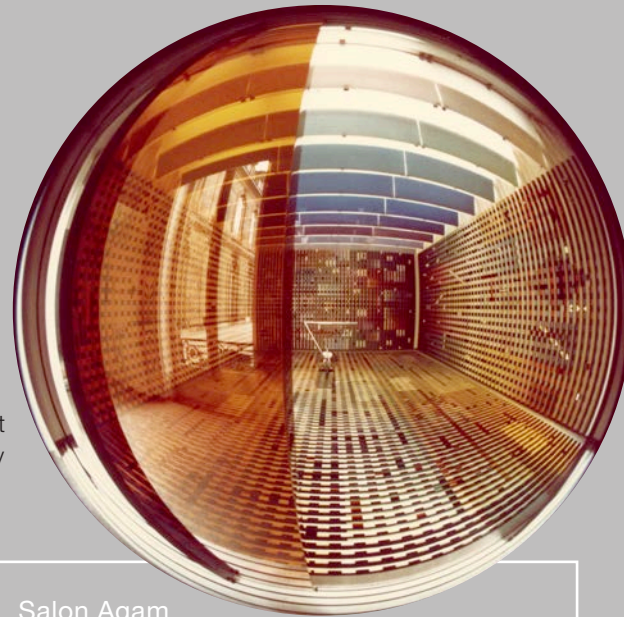
Transformable Transformables

By 1968, Agam expanded his atelier and began designing interactive transformable sculptures, fabricated of Inconel®, a material similar to steel used in the aerospace industry. The impressive three-dimensional objects encouraged hands-on action by the viewer to rearrange moveable elements of the sculptures that ranged in scale from tabletop to architectural size. These new works allowed for infinite possibilities and configurations of abstract shapes that harmonized beautifully with the environment, especially the landscape, when installed outdoors.

In 1971, Galerie Denise René opened a new space in New York City and, of course, selected Agam for the inaugural show—*Yaacov Agam: Transformable Transformables*. Agam stated in the accompanying exhibition catalog, “I have endeavored to make of sculpture a contribution to the understanding of the world, not as an existence but as possibility. The active participation of the viewer can add a dimension of expression, communication and reciprocity.”²⁰

In the early 1970s, Agam created a large number of public art commissions and greatly expanded his art works to boost viewer participation even more by including spectacular light and sound effects. He not only encouraged the spectators’ participation while looking at his works, he invited the viewers to actually walk into and through the artwork that was a room-sized art environment—immersing themselves in new art sensations.

Georges Pompidou, president of France from 1969 to 1974, was a major collector of abstract art who became fascinated by Agam—adding his works to his private collection alongside those by Kandinsky, Klein, Tinguely, and many other artists of that generation. The discerning admiration extended to Agam blossomed into friendship. Commissioned by Pompidou, Agam’s 1974 salon installation at the Elysée Palace in Paris contained an all-encompassing kinetic environment appealing to all the senses—the viewer’s perception of the boundaries of the ceiling, walls, and floors covered with colorful imagery seemingly shifted and pulsated with the movement and change in the position of the visitor.



Salon Agam

Agam’s kinetic salon, created between 1972 and 1974, was installed in the antechamber of the private apartments of French president Georges Pompidou at the Elysée Palace in Paris. In the space, walls were covered with lenticular imagery, transparent doors were included, and a kinetic sculpture in polished steel called *Flying Triangle*, placed on a kinetic carpet, completed the installation. The result was a modern anteroom that shifted according to the viewer’s position and angle.

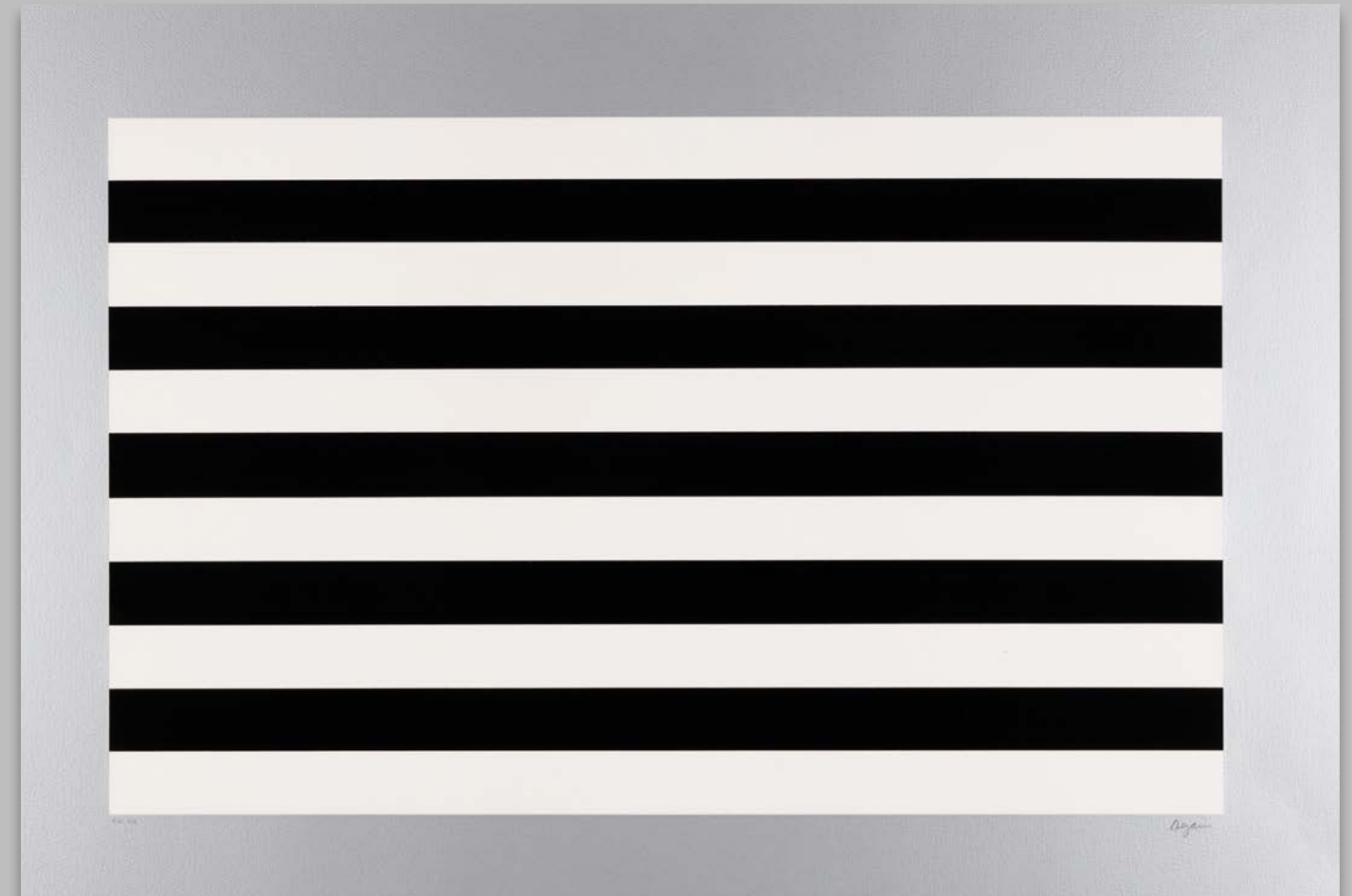
President Pompidou died in 1974, before the salon was completed. The entire work was acquired and then exhibited at the Musée National d’Art Moderne at the Georges Pompidou Center in Paris between 1979 and 1984, then later from 2000 onwards. The patronage by President Pompidou propelled Agam to international art stardom.

Above

A fish-eye lens captures the complexity of the antechamber, as seen in a photograph in the Sunnylands Archives.

Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.4263

Photographer unknown, date unknown.



One and Another. 1977

Yaacov Agam

Serigraph, edition HC 8/9

24" x 35"

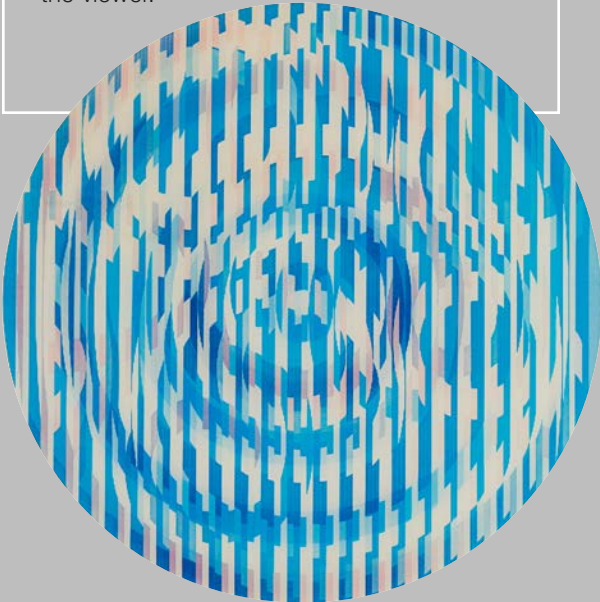
Six in a suite of seven prints

Collection Palm Springs Art Museum,
gift of Martin Lawrence Limited Editions, 34-1978.6

Agamograph

“Agamograph” is the term invented by Agam for the process he developed in 1971. When viewers observe an Agamograph, they cannot see the same image from different positions or angles. Each time they move, the artwork is transformed. The artist invites the audience to see the totality of his work by changing positions and interacting with it in space and time.

Regarding Agam’s graphics, lenticular technology is used to create his limited edition Agamograph series. In this technology, the multiple images are combined together and printed flat on the paper. Next, the lenticular screen is placed on top of the printed graphic image creating the visual effect that allows the viewer to see only one image at a time, depending on the position of the viewer.



Agam in Los Angeles

Agam’s effervescent artistic career was showcased by solo exhibitions in many countries. In 1973, the Skirball Museum, Hebrew Union College mounted a solo exhibition of Agam’s work—his first solo show in Los Angeles as well as on the West Coast. The artworks for the Skirball exhibition included recently completed pieces as well as loans assembled from art collectors in the Los Angeles area. This exhibition revealed the abstract images inspired by historic symbols of Judaism and related to the Jewish view of life and art in Agam’s work.

Agam saw a spiritual significance in abstract art and in color harmony. As explained in the Skirball exhibition catalog, “For Agam, the son of a rabbi and a student of the *Kabbalah*, abstract symbols, unlike graven images, are ‘contrary to those idols against which we have so long had to defend ourselves’.... It is easy to understand how the purely symbolic images which abound in Jewish iconography—the *Magen David*, the *Menorah*, and the Ark of the Covenant—became Agam’s natural heritage.”²¹

Agam combined these spiritual symbols with geometric elements like the circle, square, and ellipse in two-dimensional works as well as with cylinders, cubes, and other fundamental shapes in three-dimensional pieces. He also employed a series of terms borrowed from classical music to address concepts of time, duration, change, and continuity. “Agam seeks to fuse in one work several distinct themes or designs with a series of contrapuntal relationships aimed at deepening the harmonic richness of the experiences which a work generates.”²²

Untitled. No date
Yaacov Agam

Agamograph, lenticular plastic with laminated color silkscreen
14" x 15"

Collection of Diane Deshong

This piece was a gift from Agam who wrote: “To Ambassador Walter Annenberg, Agam.”

Agam in Palm Springs

Agam made the first of his many visits to Palm Springs, California, in 1963 to visit his uncle, Dr. Samuel Reinhard, who had retired to the desert community. New prospects and doors opened for Agam on many return trips to Southern California over the next 40 years.

Many of the individuals who loaned artworks for the Skirball exhibition had second homes in the Palm Springs desert communities and were supporters of the Palm Springs Desert (now Art) Museum. Nationally known collectors, Luella and Samuel Maslon of Rancho Mirage, were among that group and were instrumental in bringing even more attention to Agam. It was a natural progression that Agam was selected by the Board of Trustees (led by its president Leonore Annenberg) to be the subject of the major inaugural exhibition opening the new Palm Springs Desert (now Art) Museum facility in 1976.

With loans from major collections throughout the United States, the *Agam in Palm Springs* exhibition also included eight transformable paintings on loan from Galerie Denise René. Dating from 1952 to 1966, some of those very same paintings may have been included in the exhibitions that launched Agam’s career at Galerie Craven in Paris in 1953 and Galerie Denise René in 1955. René’s generous participation in the Palm Springs exhibition revealed her continuous support and great admiration for Agam’s lifetime of work.



Agam signing exhibition poster, January 1976.

Collection Palm Springs Art Museum
Photo by Paul Pospesil.
Courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society
All Rights Reserved.

1970s

Temple Isaiah Jewish Community Center

Founded in 1947, the Temple Isaiah Jewish Community Center in Palm Springs owns a collection of Agam artworks. Significant and striking, the eternal light and ark are the central focus in the Bochner Sanctuary with Agam-inspired colored upholstered pews. Agam designed and signed the ark—a glass and acrylic creation that sets the color tone for the sanctuary, its furnishings, and Torah scroll covers. Five framed Agam works are displayed on the sanctuary's south wall with the inscription "Presented to Temple Isaiah in honor of Rabbi and Mrs. Joseph Hurwitz by Agam 1976." Agam likely visited the temple and/or Rabbi Hurwitz during the opening of the Palm Springs Desert (now Art) Museum in 1976.

Agam once said, "My ideal synagogue would use architectural innovations to create a sacred space that would truly satisfy our needs....The most daring innovations in technology and electronics should be employed to enhance our worship experience."²³ He implemented this philosophy at the Temple Isaiah Jewish Community Center where the eternal light is controlled by computer and the ark is engineered so that the Torah scrolls can disappear for non-religious activities.



Left

Eternal light and ark. c. 1987
Yaacov Agam

Glass and acrylic
12' 9" x 58" x 58"

Collection Temple Isaiah
Jewish Community Center

Above

Shalom. 1976
Yaacov Agam

Five serigraphs
53¾" x 19¾" each

Collection Temple Isaiah
Jewish Community Center, Palm Springs

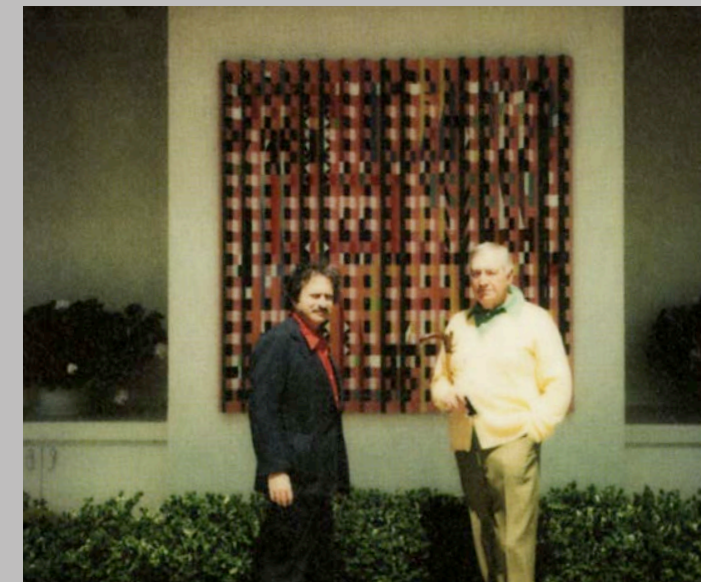
Agam and The Annenbergs

American ambassadors and philanthropists, Walter and Leonore Annenberg, are recognized as world-class art collectors and patrons. Their collection of over 50 Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings was bequeathed to New York City's Metropolitan Museum of Art upon Walter's death in 2002. In 1963, the Annenbergs commissioned the acclaimed architectural firm of A. Quincy Jones and Frederick Emmons to design a winter home in Rancho Mirage, California. Completed in 1966, the 200-acre estate included a private golf course, as well as interior furnishings created by Hollywood decorator William Haines. The Annebergs were astute collectors of art—sculptures, paintings, Chinese porcelain and cloisonné objects, and other decorative arts by many renowned artists. One such notable artist is Yaacov Agam, known for his pioneering of kinetic art.

Between 1976 and 1981, Leonore and Walter either purchased or received as gifts 16 works by Agam, of which nine remain in the Sunnylands collection. There is no definitive answer to the question of why the couple collected so many examples of the contemporary art of Yaacov Agam. Perhaps a number of elements—artistic, political, and religious—combined to capture their interest. They decorated their California residence and

Walter's business offices in Pennsylvania with artwork by Agam, as it was modern, colorful, unique, and served as a conversation piece. The Sunnylands outdoor entertainment area displayed several Agam works that promoted casual conversation and engaged guests with kinetic art.

Another aspect of Agam's appeal may have been his connection with several heads of state who owned his work. Agam never failed to take part in international events, and that activity also paralleled Walter's interest in political and historical events. Agam's appeal in the California desert, where many of the art collectors were Jewish, may also have been related to his concept of Hebrew realism. The story of how Walter, Leonore, and Yaacov met in Palm Springs, California; the commissioning and collecting of Agam art by the Annenbergs; and the long-lasting relationship began in 1976.



Right

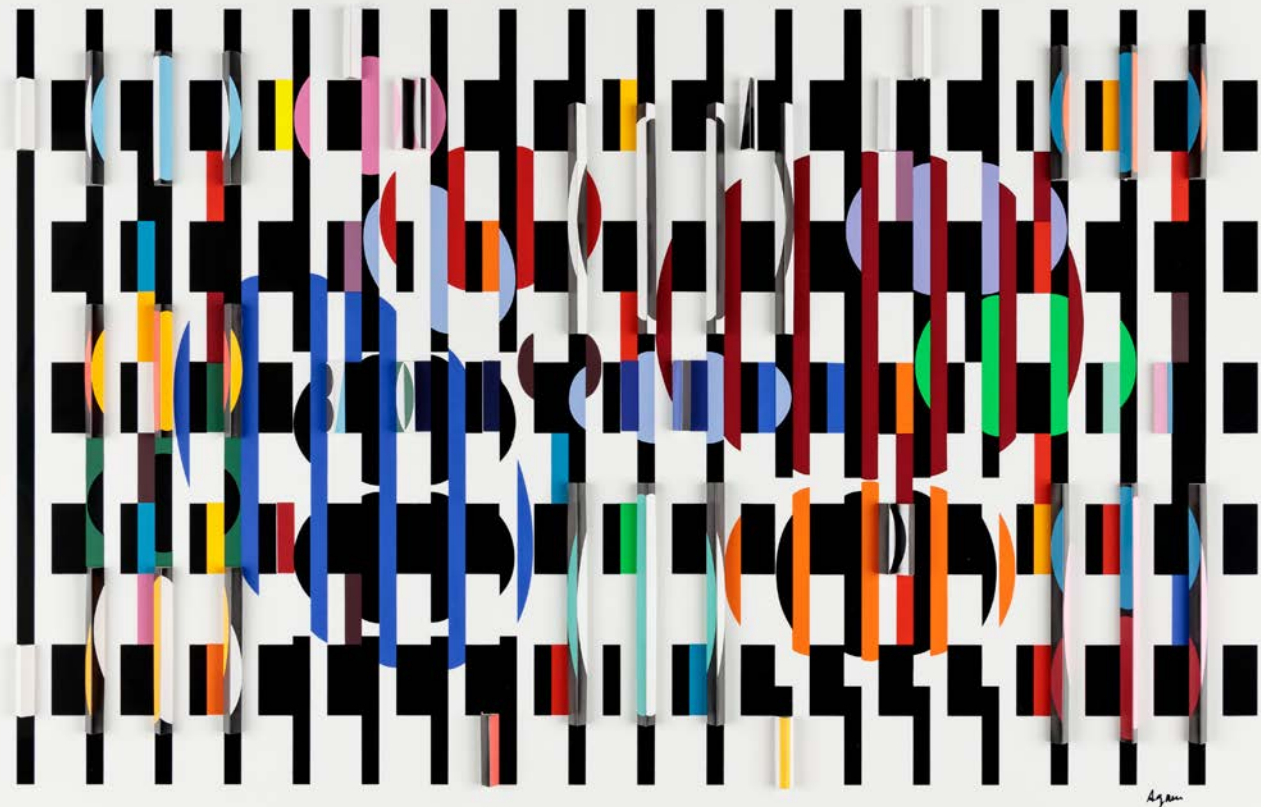
Photo of Yaacov Agam and Walter Annenberg in front of the outdoor painting *Sunnylands*, as reproduced in *Agam: Beyond the Visible* by Sayako Aragaki.

Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.002534
Photographer unknown, date unknown.

Opposite

Agam's *Sunnylands* on the upper terrace of the historic residence, 2007.

Sunnylands Collection, 2011.1.6
Photography Julius Shulman & Juergen Nogai, © Juergen Nogai.



Polymorph

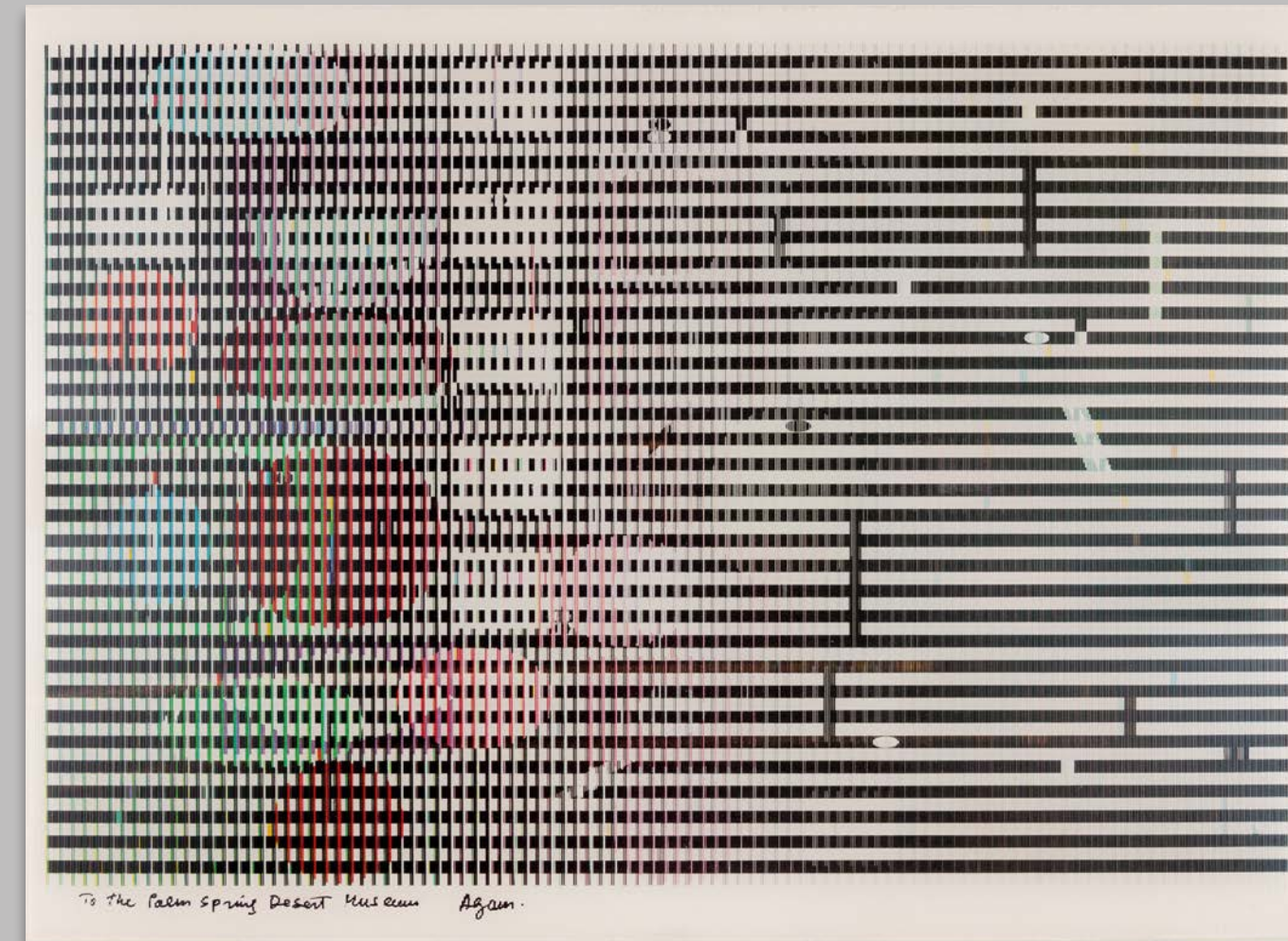
Made up of numerous triangular pillars, these three-dimensional paintings are notable for their changing color and shape. Different hidden images may appear, transform, and disappear when viewing these works from multiple angles.

Solo Relief on Visual Orchestration. 1982
Yaacov Agam

Three-dimensional polymorph (acrylic multiple),
edition 31/180
25" x 35½"

Collection Palm Springs Art Museum,
gift of Thomas and Susan Werman, 574-1986

IN MOTION: AGAM AT SUNNYLANDS



To The Palm Springs Desert Museum. 1981
Yaacov Agam

Agamograph, lenticular plastic with laminated color silkscreen
11¾" x 16¼"

Collection Palm Springs Art Museum, gift of the artist, 2-1981

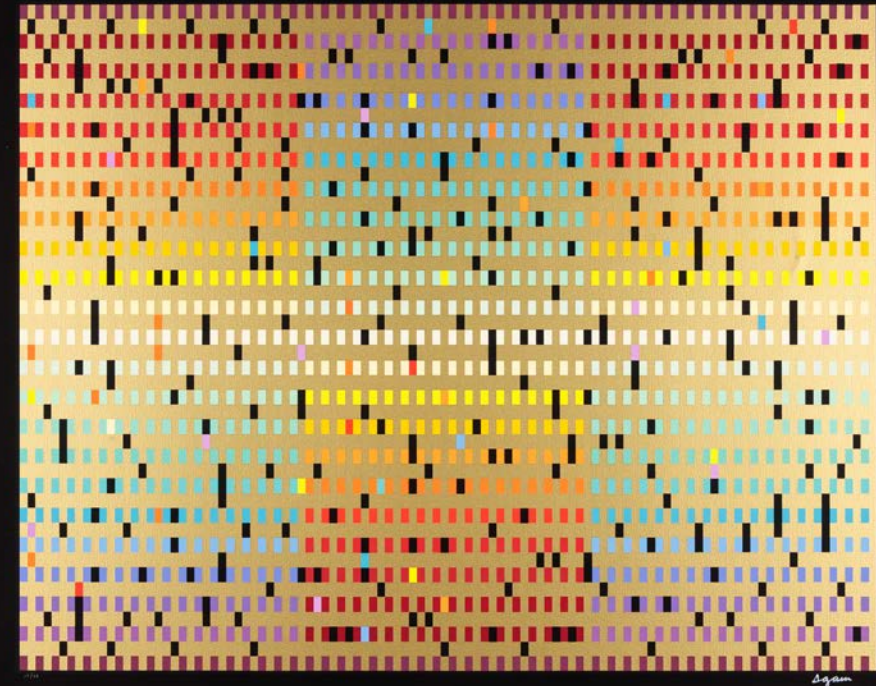


Untitled. 1976
Yaacov Agam

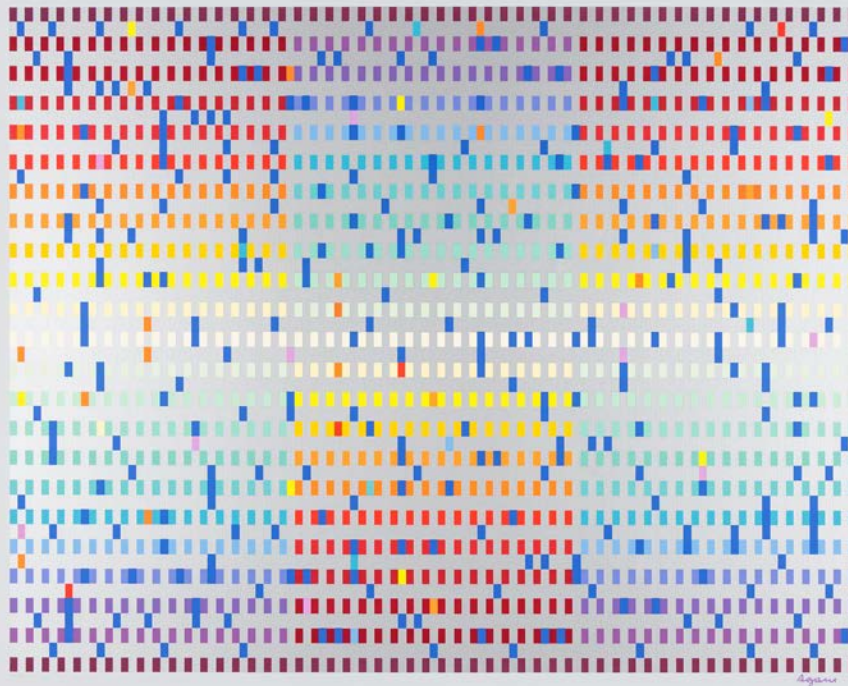
Serigraph, edition 1/99
28" x 40"

Collection Palm Springs Art Museum, Museum purchase, 90-1975

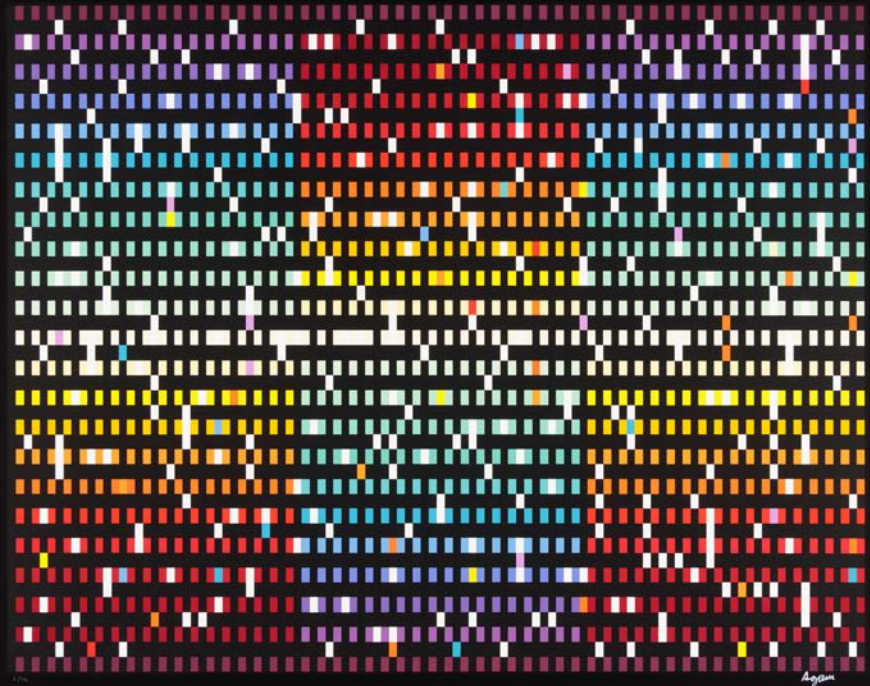
In Judaism, the sanctuary lamp is known by its Hebrew name, *Ner Tamid* (Eternal Light), and hangs above the ark in every synagogue. The light is always burning and is symbolic of the light of truth and the presence of God.



Tikva (Hope)
from the *Ner Tamid* or *Eternal Light* suite. 1990
Yaacov Agam
Serigraph, edition 14/36
30½" x 37½"
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum,
gift of Albert P. Scaglione, R1991-4.27



Shalom (Peace)
from the *Ner Tamid* or *Eternal Light* suite. 1990
Yaacov Agam
Serigraph, edition 21/36
30½" x 37½"
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum,
gift of Albert P. Scaglione, R1991-4.28



Ner (Light)
from the *Ner Tamid* or *Eternal Light* suite. 1990
Yaacov Agam
Serigraph, edition 2/36
30½" x 37½"
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum,
gift of Albert P. Scaglione, R1991-4.29

A myriad of colors undergo a gradual metamorphosis against a shimmering gold background in this series. The serigraphs with black borders as part of the design exemplify Agam's mastery of luminescence and the color spectrum.

Top row, left to right

Zahav Ner Achad. 1990
Yaacov Agam
Serigraph, edition 6/27
16½" x 15"
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum, gift of Albert P. Scaglione, R1991-4.9

Zahav Ner Schniem. 1990
Yaacov Agam
Serigraph, edition 11/27
16½" x 15"
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum, gift of Albert P. Scaglione, R1991-4.10

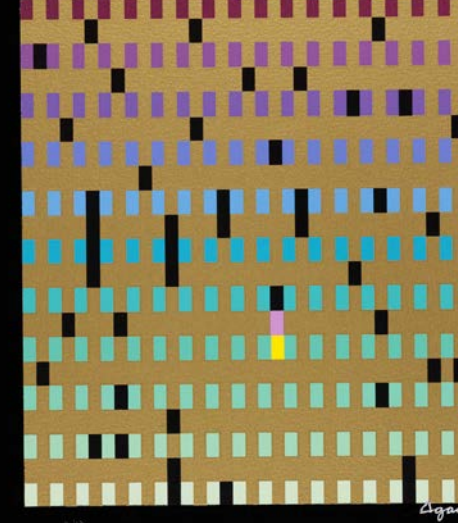
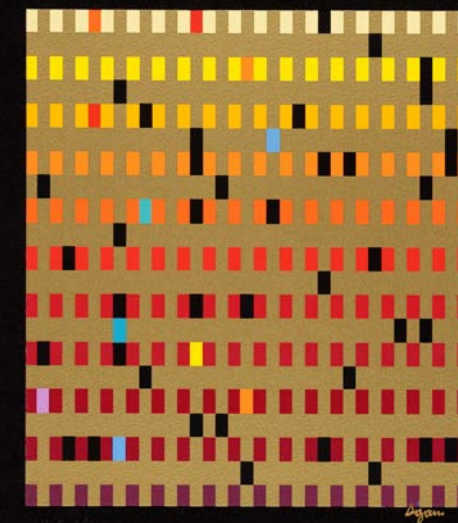
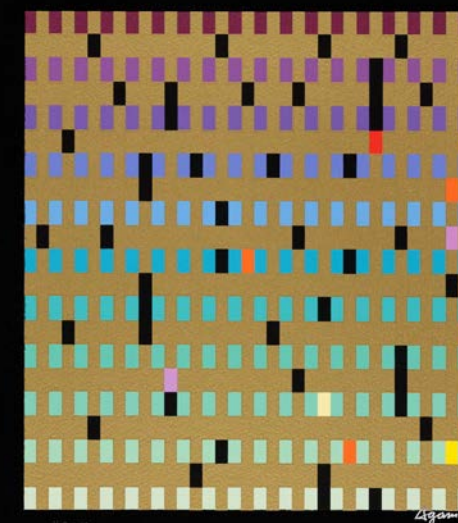
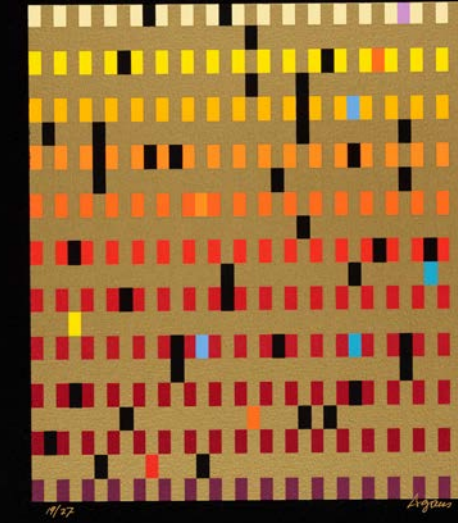
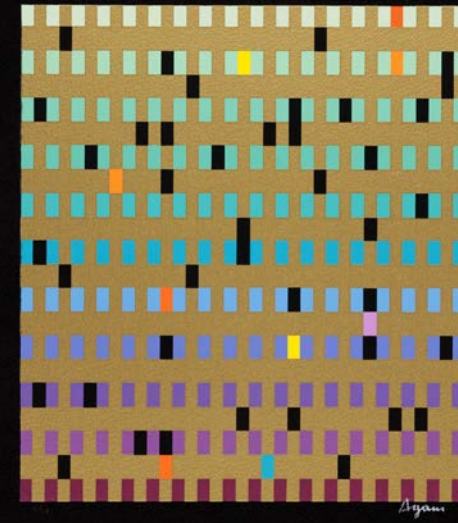
Zahav Ner Shalosh. 1990
Yaacov Agam
Serigraph, edition 19/27
16½" x 15"
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum, gift of Albert P. Scaglione, R1991-4.11

Bottom row, left to right

Zahav Ner Arba. 1990
Yaacov Agam
Serigraph, edition HC 2/8
16½" x 15"
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum, gift of Albert P. Scaglione, R1991-4.12

Zahav Ner Chamesh. 1990
Yaacov Agam
Serigraph, edition HC 4/6
16½" x 15"
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum, gift of Albert P. Scaglione, R1991-4.13

Zahav Ner Shesha. 1990
Yaacov Agam
Serigraph, edition 4/27
16½" x 15"
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum, gift of Albert P. Scaglione, R1991-4.14





Palm Springs Desert Museum

As early as 1970, the Palm Springs Desert (now Art) Museum began to increase its programming to include additional art presentations while continuing its natural science exhibitions. It became apparent that the increased activities required additional exhibition space and that the former Tahquitz Drive location could not meet the museum's growing space requirements. The museum's leadership began planning and raising funds for a new home with the official groundbreaking taking place on January 5, 1973.

A museum trustee from 1966 to 2009, Leonore Annenberg was president of the board of trustees from 1972 to 1976, and then an honorary trustee until her death. As board president, she presided over an expansion period for the museum and was instrumental in spearheading a capital fundraising initiative to construct a 75,000-square-foot museum building at the base of the San Jacinto Mountains. Desert midcentury modernist architect E. Stewart Williams designed the \$5.5 million facility. The Annenbergs were the lead funders for the project and were given naming rights to the Annenberg Art Wing and the 433-seat Annenberg Theater, with interiors by Palm Springs designer Arthur Elrod. The new museum building was a milestone achievement for the institution (established in 1938) and the flourishing Palm Springs area.

During the week of January 24 to 31, 1976, several museum dedication festivities took place, including the ceremonial ribbon-cutting grand opening celebration at which Leonore officially welcomed thousands of people to the museum. Speakers included Leonore, Palm Springs mayor William Foster, singer Dolores Hope, California attorney general Evelle Younger, director of the American Association of Museums Dr. Richard McLanathan, and other distinguished guests.



Above

Museum trustees Luella Maslon, Walter N. Marks, Leonore Annenberg, and others at the groundbreaking ceremony, January 5, 1973.

Collection Palm Springs Art Museum
 Photographer unknown.

Opposite

California attorney general Evelle Younger, board president Leonore Annenberg, and Palm Springs mayor William Foster at the ribbon-cutting ceremony, January 24, 1976.

Collection Palm Springs Art Museum
 Photographer unknown.



As a salute to the formal opening of the museum, members of its board of trustees exhibited examples of art from their private collections for the *Collectors' Choice Show*. Works from the collections of Leonore and Walter Annenberg, Olga and Joseph Hirshhorn, Doris and Walter N. Marks, Luella and Samuel Maslon, Martha and Hal Wallis, Lucile and Ted Weiner, and other trustees were featured.

Below
The maquette of *Line Volume* (1971) by Agam on inside table with full-size sculpture outdoors.
Photo by David Glomb, 1998



Luella and Samuel Maslon were modern art collectors and patrons. They commissioned the prominent modernist architect Richard Neutra to build a home for them in Rancho Mirage, California, on the 12th green at Tamarisk Country Club, only a few blocks from the Annenberg residence. Their 1962 midcentury residence (demolished in 2002) was filled with a blue-chip art collection and included a 10-foot chrome outdoor sculpture by Agam called *Line Volume* (1972). Luella became a museum trustee in 1970, worked with Leonore on the board, and later was an honorary trustee. The Maslons loaned their Agam painting, *Derech* (1968), for the 1973 *Agam in Los Angeles* exhibition. They personally knew Agam and believed that his international stature had great potential to attract visitors to the new museum. In 1974, the Maslons, museum executive director Frederick W. Sleight, and Agam entered into discussions for a special Agam exhibition for the museum's 1976 opening.



Above
Brochure cover for 1976 exhibition.
Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.004315

Left
Barbara Sinatra, Leonore Annenberg, Frank Sinatra, and Frederick W. Sleight in front of *Touch Me* (1970), Sinatra Sculpture Garden dedication, fall 1975.
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum
Photo by Paul Pospesil
Courtesy of Palm Springs Historical Society
All Rights Reserved.



Above

Agam exhibition, January 1976.

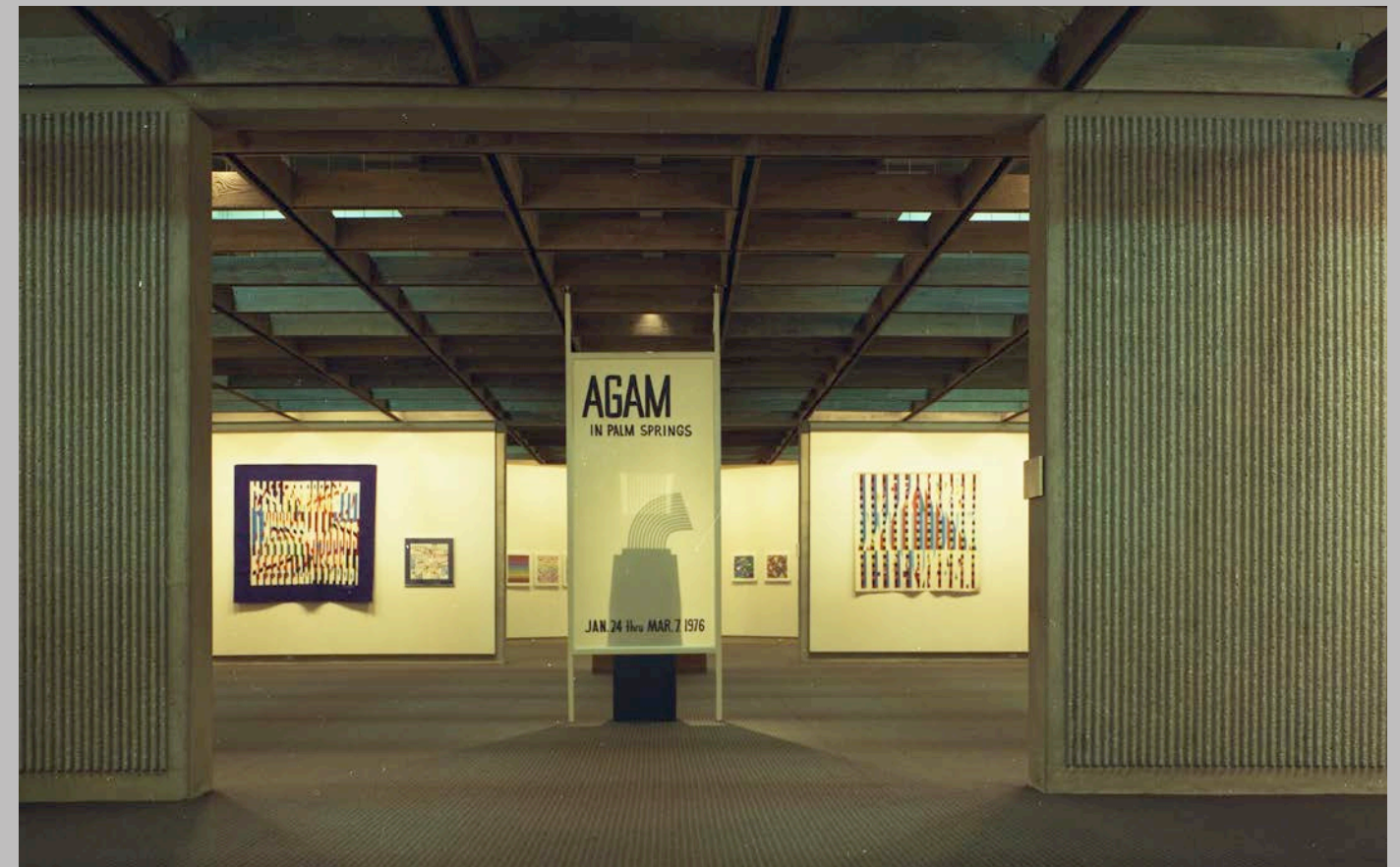
Collection Palm Springs Art Museum
 Photographer unknown.

Opposite

Agam exhibition, January 1976.

© J. Paul Getty Trust, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10)
 Photo by Julius Shulman.

Under the museum leadership of director Sleight, the inaugural exhibition featured in the new building, *Agam in Palm Springs*, was installed from January 24 through March 7, 1976. The Agam exhibition brochure lists 92 Agam artworks divided into 10 categories: paintings, sculptures, jewelry, modules, porcelains, tapestries, gouaches, serigraphs, Agamographs, and transformable paintings. The Disney and Kemper Galleries, within the new 10,000-square-foot Annenberg Art Wing, along with the Sinatra Sculpture Court, displayed Agam artworks, providing most museum visitors with their first kinetic art experience. When the exhibition opened in Palm Springs, Agam was rapidly expanding his collector base in the United States. Several collectors and the Bird's Eye View Gallery in Los Angeles lent their Agam pieces to the museum as the foundation for the inaugural exhibition. The famed American architectural photographer, Julius Shulman, documented the contemporary museum and Agam exhibition.





Art critic Henry J. Seldis of the *Los Angeles Times* reported on the museum's opening and the Agam exhibition:

*To inaugurate the new museum's loan exhibition with a revelatory retrospective by Paris-based Israeli artist Yaacov Agam was a most felicitous choice....To make the Palm Springs Desert Museum more than a local or regional accomplishment, the international and contemporary accent provided by the Agam retrospective proves to be essential.*²⁴

Above

Square Waves adjacent to the Sunnylands swimming pool, c. 1976.

Sunnylands Collection 2009.1.8050
Photographer unknown.

Opposite, left

Yaacov Agam and Walter Annenberg ascend the museum staircase, January 29, 1976.

Collection Palm Springs Art Museum
Photographer unknown.



The museum's dedication ceremony was pivotal because it served as Leonore, Walter, and Agam's introductory meeting venue. The show provided the opportunity for the Annenbergs to acquire their first major Agam artwork, *Square Waves* (1975), purchased directly from the artist at the exhibition. The six-by-six-foot square tubular, stainless steel transformable sculpture was installed poolside at the Annenbergs' estate where it continues to serve as the focal point on the Sunnylands outdoor terrace. Today, visitors to the historic residence are able to view the sculpture in its original setting.

Israeli Counsel, Guest of Museum

Museum members gathered to honor the internationally famed painter and sculptor, Yaacov Agam. The featured speaker for the January 29, 1976 evening was Ambassador Hanoch Givton, consul general of Israel in Los Angeles. Accompanying the ambassador was Hayim Hefer, the consulate's cultural attaché. This special event included a reception at which guests met Ambassador Givton and Agam before enjoying dinner in the Annenberg Art Wing of the Palm Springs Desert (now Art) Museum surrounded by Agam artworks.



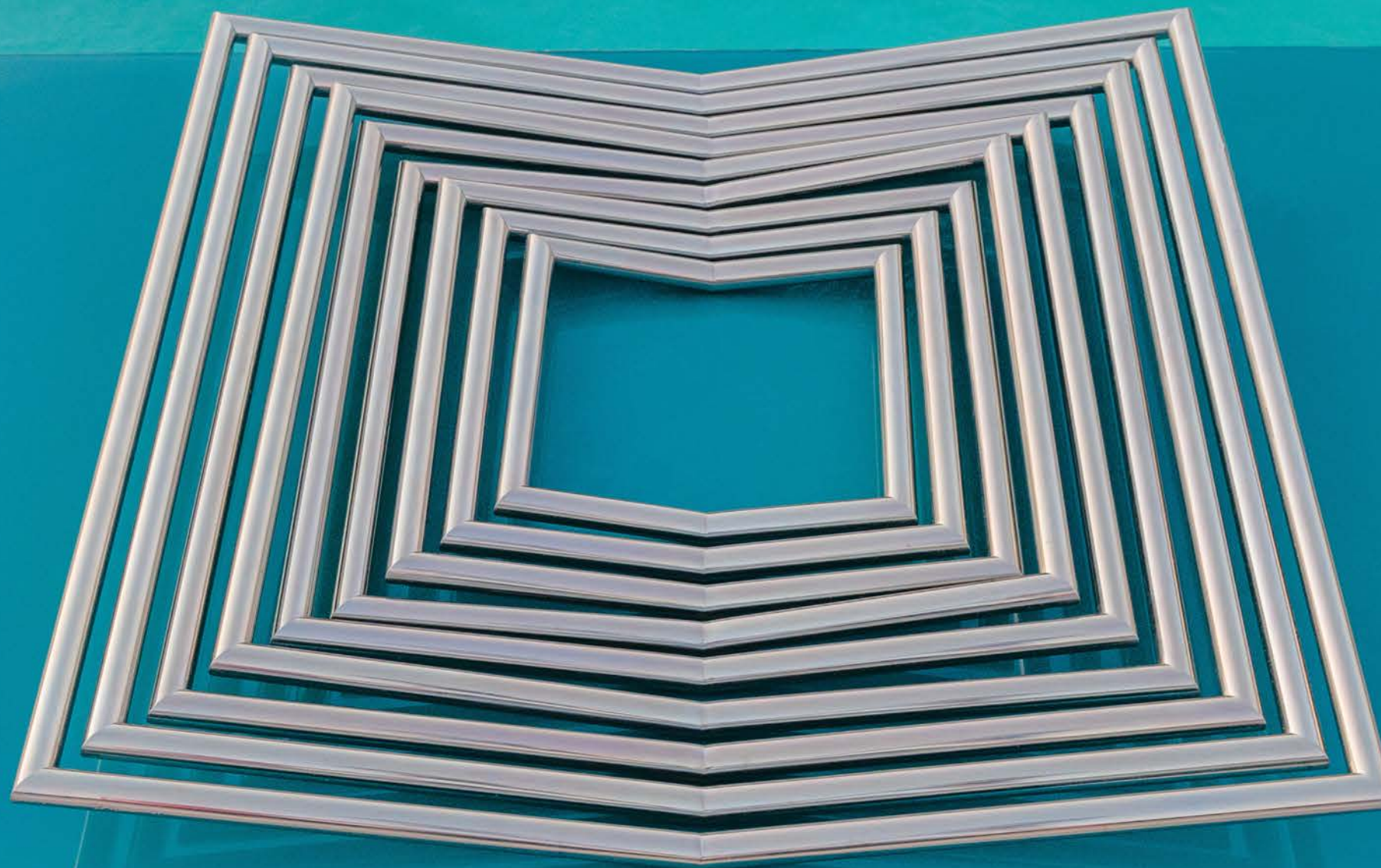
Above

Hayim Hefer, Minna Givton, Ambassador Hanoch Givton, museum director Frederick W. Sleight, and Ruti Hefer, January 29, 1976.

Collection Palm Springs Art Museum
Photographer unknown.

1970s

In 1976, the Annenbergs acquired their first Agam artwork directly from the artist at the *Agam in Palm Springs* exhibition held at the Palm Springs Desert (now Art) Museum. The Annenbergs chose to site *Square Waves* adjacent to the swimming pool, thus introducing a witty element to their terrace at Sunnylands. The nest of polished aluminum tubes move with a slight touch or breeze and reflect light off the nearby water.



Square Waves. 1975
Yaacov Agam
Polished aluminum
73" x 73"
Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.91

Multigraph

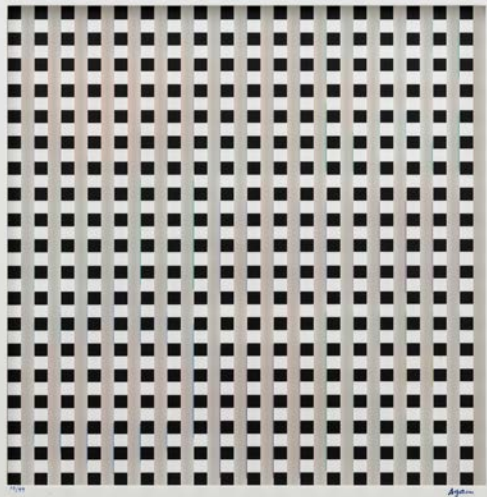
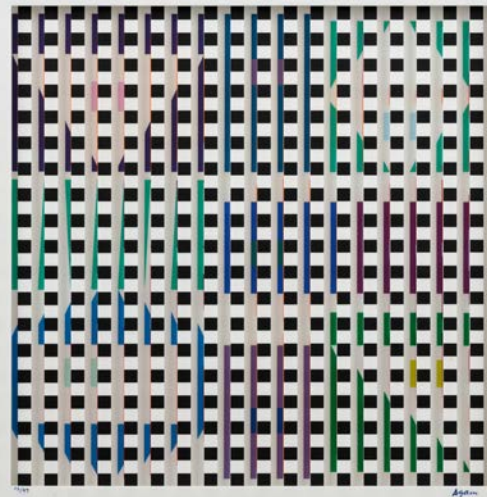
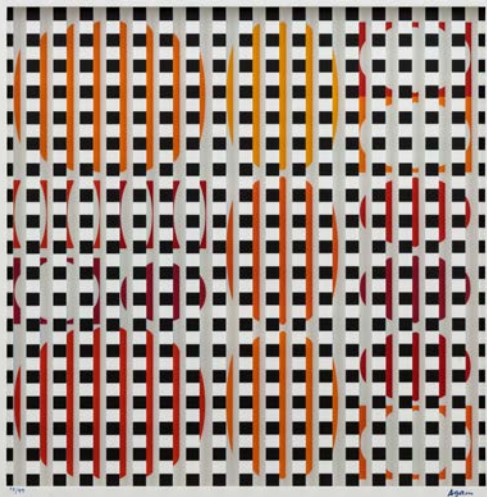
Using a serigraph with a moveable grille juxtaposed over it, Agam created a multigraph in which different compositions are seen as the viewer moves the grille.

Below, the elaborate design disappears to a black and white grid through manual manipulation of this piece.



Left and opposite
Hidden Image. 1979
Yaacov Agam
Multigraph, edition 55/99
17¾" x 17¾"
Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.95

Below and opposite
Spring. 1979
Yaacov Agam
Multigraph, edition 73/99
17¾" x 17¾"
Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.96



Agam at Sunnylands and Beyond

Walter’s association with Agam is documented in the Sunnylands Archives and reflects an artist/patron relationship. Most correspondence from Walter to Agam took place through third parties and focused on his purchase of artworks. Nothing of any personal nature was mentioned in this business correspondence. Agam was more convivial in his approach to the Annenbergs as he continued to inscribe books and other small mementos to Leonore and Walter in an affectionate manner throughout the years.

The receipt for payment for *Square Waves* (1975), signed by Agam on January 27, 1976, is the earliest dated correspondence between Walter and Agam in the Sunnylands Archives. The Sunnylands guest and menu books verify at least two visits by Agam on January 29, 1976 and December 18, 1980. On these occasions, Agam delivered and installed artwork, and dined at the estate. During these visits, Agam signed the guest book with a multicolored signature, adding an artistic flair to the page. He held several colored pens in his left hand, then began signing his name in a uniform movement rendering multiple images of “Agam.”

The Annenbergs collaborated with Agam on designs and locations for commissioned artworks for their properties in California and Pennsylvania. Correspondence between them suggests that they collaborated on the design and teakwood base choices for the sculptures, *Reflecting Space* (1978) and *3 x 6 Double Frame Interplay* (1976).

On December 27, 1977, Agam wrote to Walter regarding the commissioned work *Sunnylands* (1977):

*I think it is an excellent and exciting idea to concentrate my art in one place as suggested by you, and it will be most exciting as the work I am doing for you will very likely be an important art edition which will give a deeper and brighter understanding and feeling of your particular collection of my art. It will be certainly one of my major and finer art works.*²⁵

Agam later stated that this work was a “masterpiece” and “extraordinary.” Before delivery to Sunnylands, Walter agreed with Agam’s request to have the painting displayed at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, for an exhibition from September 21 to October 21, 1978.

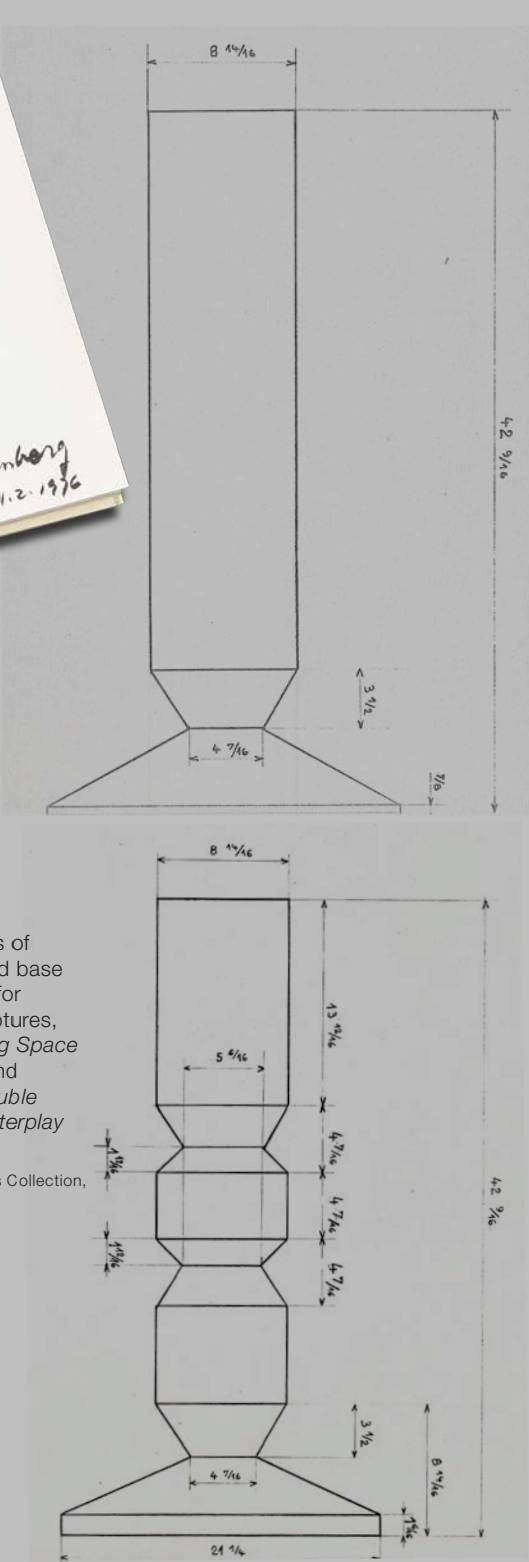
In addition to purchases and commissions of Agam art for Sunnylands, the correspondence file indicates that Walter made a down payment for an untitled painting commissioned for the Annenbergs’ Sun Valley, Idaho, home on January 27, 1976. In 1980, Walter purchased seven serigraphs for his Triangle Publications, Inc. office in Radnor, Pennsylvania, acquiring the works from Gallery West in Los Angeles. Agam was by far the most represented artist in the Annenberg collection with a total of 16 works,



Right
Book inscriptions from Agam to Walter and Leonore.
Sunnylands Collection,
2009.1.001776 and 2009.1.003092



Above and opposite
USA Double Rainbow. 1995
Yaacov Agam
Agamograph, lenticular plastic with laminated color silkscreen, edition 17/99
24" x 24"
Collection of Diane Deshong



Right
Drawings of
teakwood base
choices for
the sculptures,
Reflecting Space
(1978) and
*3 x 6 Double
Frame Interplay*
(1976).
Sunnylands Collection,
2009.1.86

all completed during a six-year period from 1975 to 1980. There is no clear explanation for the Annenbergs' interest in these specific works. It could be as simple as the fact that Leonore and Walter appreciated the aesthetic quality of kinetic art. There are no apparent political messages in the works that they collected. An exception might be the piece that incorporates both the British and American flags, a gift from Anne and Kirk Douglas, which can be viewed within a political context. The two flags represent Walter's American ambassadorship to Britain's Court of Saint James's from 1969 to 1974. This sentimental and thoughtful gift reflects Walter's ambassadorial service. Honored to have this artwork in his collection, Walter saw this work with flags representing each country as a reflection of his career serving the United States in the United Kingdom.

The Annenbergs enjoyed many gatherings of royalty, heads of state, celebrities, and others at Sunnylands. They displayed their four largest Agam works on the outdoor terrace, which served as the focal point for the exterior landscape. The paintings and sculpture were situated on the south, west, and north walls of the patio and poolside, and could be seen from many directions, blending the outside with the inside through the floor-to-ceiling glass windows. This arrangement created an outdoor room, typical of the desert lifestyle and an extension of the interior space. Due to the number of works and their placement, Agam had a commanding presence at Sunnylands and a permanent outdoor gallery that helped to create a relaxed entertainment area for the Annenbergs.

A letter dated May 22, 1980, references early plans by Triangle Publications, Inc. to have an Agam wall sculpture installed at the new *TV Guide* building in Radnor, Pennsylvania. Correspondence dated October 27, 1980, describes the sculpture as an aluminum three-dimensional work with a mirrored surface that would be 8 feet, 2 inches high and 17 feet, 11 inches wide. Newspaper research and inquiries made to the Radnor Historical Society, *TV Guide*, and Penn Medicine (current owners of the *TV Guide* building) did not confirm that such a sculpture exists or was installed. It is likely that the project was abandoned. The 1988 appraisal report for the Radnor office lists nine Agam serigraphs in the hallway and conference room.

Below

A birthday luncheon in the dining room at Sunnylands with *Situations* (1978) outside on the terrace.

Sunnylands Collection,
2009.1.003680

Photographer unknown.



Opposite

Untitled (British American flags). 1980
Yaacov Agam

Plastic on Lucite rotating stand, double-sided color screenprint on paper,
accordian folded, edition 165/300
9" x 16" x 2"

Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.97



Right view

71.....72

IN MOTION: AGAM AT SUNNYLANDS

1970s

Agam and Friends of the Annenbergs

The Annenbergs enjoyed their Agam collection and showed the art, which stresses illusory imagery, movement of form and time, and vibrant, dynamic color, to their friends. They introduced Agam to their closest friends, then President-elect Ronald Reagan and his wife Nancy. A 1981 *Washington Post* story about Agam's opening night exhibition at the Art Fair Gallery in Friendship Heights, Washington, D.C. provides insight into the Agam/Reagan relationship.

Yaacov Agam's American image has changed dramatically since a major retrospective last fall at the Guggenheim Museum, and—as he puts it—'since the Reagans.' Through Leonore and Walter Annenberg, who own 18 [sic] of his works, Agam was introduced to President and Mrs. Reagan at Blair House last January, just before the inauguration, and now there are four Agams in the White House. Until then, Reagan had been known here chiefly for his interest in cowboy art.

'Nancy had seen his work often at my home in Palm Springs, and liked it,' explains Leonore Annenberg, who first 'discovered' the artist whom she calls 'a genius' at the opening of the Desert Museum in Palm Springs, of which she was president. After meeting the Reagans, Agam presented them with a bronze cast of his 'Peace Star,' an 11-pointed, three-dimensional 'starburst' form that merges the five-pointed star of Islam with the six-pointed star of Israel. 'And, for Reagan, it means even more, because it is also the American star and the Russian star,' says Agam.

'I gave it to the president because he's trying to make peace in Lebanon, and if he does this, it will be a tremendous achievement,' says Agam, who like many Israeli artists, deals often, usually symbolically, with the subject of peace. 'Peace Star' was originally created, at Menachem Begin's request, to commemorate the Camp David Accords. And both Begin and Anwar Sadat have also been given castings. 'I've met a lot of presidents,' says Agam, 'But never one who was so balanced between the emotional and the rational. He is the only artist who has become a president, and you can feel it. I also gave him another sculpture 'Beating Heart,' because he feels so deeply for the American people.'

*'The Reagans keep it upstairs on a table, and play with it all the time,' said Leonore Annenberg. The sculpture consists of five concentric hearts that move when touched.'*²⁶

This article highlights the interchange of the group, Agam's engagement with a head of state, and the "peace through art" diplomacy theme.

Opposite

Agam demonstrating *Star of Peace* with Nancy and President-elect Ronald Reagan, 1981.

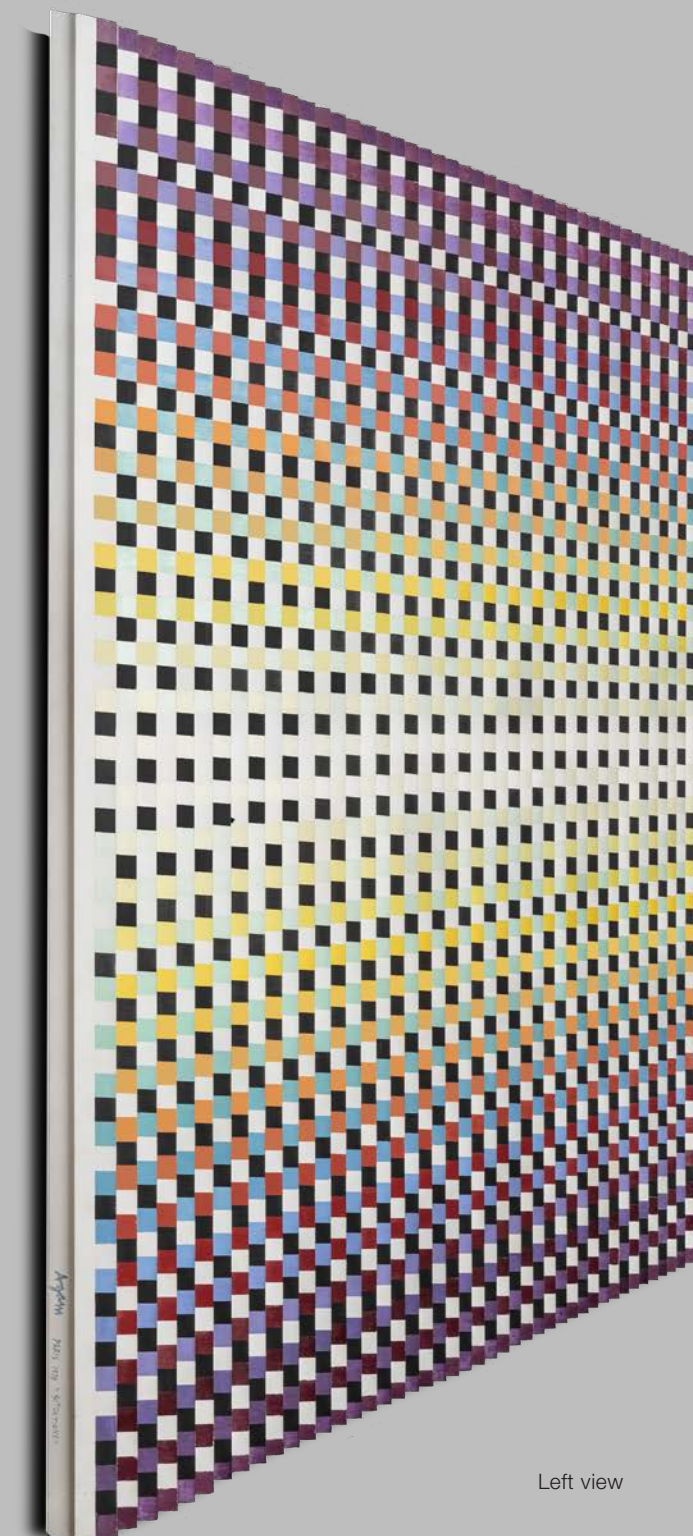
Courtesy Ronald Reagan Library
Photo by Michael Evans.



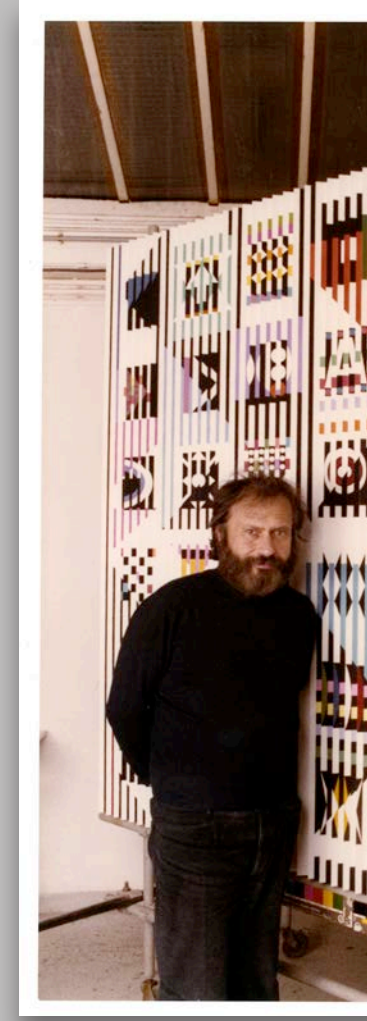
A gift from Anne and Kirk Douglas recognized Walter Annenberg's ambassadorial service. The British and American flags represent his role as the American ambassador to the Court of Saint James's from 1969 to 1974.



.....66



Left view



Left, above, right
Situations. 1978
Yaacov Agam
Oil on aluminum
71" x 71"
Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.92

Agam and Outdoor Art at Sunnylands

The Annenbergs boldly placed Agam’s paintings outside at Sunnylands. For three prominent outdoor walls, they commissioned exuberant, large-format paintings: two on metal and one on a mirror background. While outdoor sculpture is typically fabricated to withstand the elements, placing paintings outside, let alone in the California desert, reveals an audacious curatorial approach and a conscious test of materials.

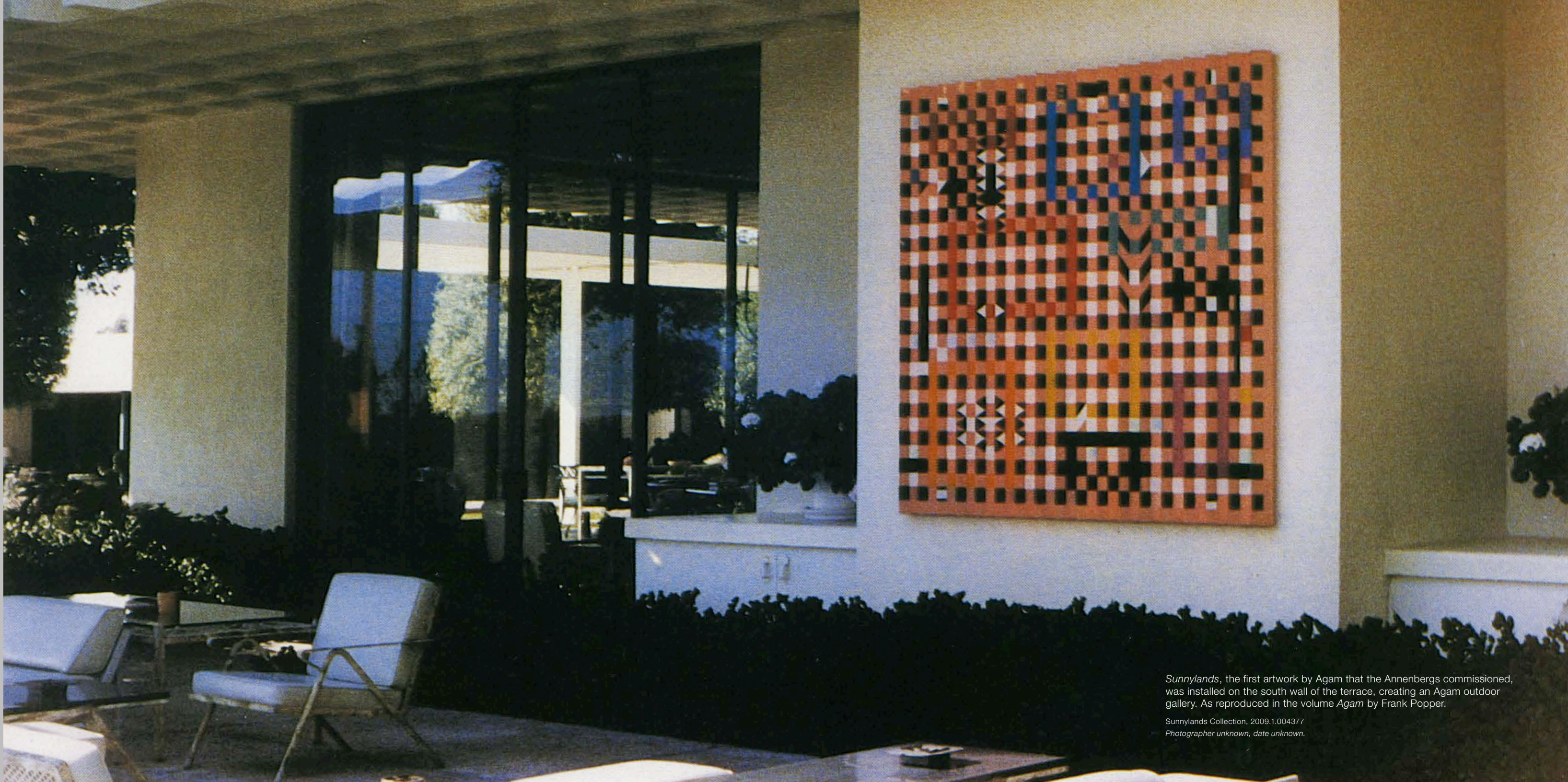
Agam proposed a custom paint that he believed would not fade in the desert environment. He incorporated a binder used in aeronautic and nautical paints with the paint pigment, and elongated rooflines and overhangs protected the walls on which the paintings hung. However, wind, sun, and blowing sand battered the paintings for over three decades, resulting in fading and discoloration on the two metal pieces: *Sunnylands* and *Situations*, which underwent comprehensive conservation treatments in 2020.

The paintings conservator’s goal was to ensure that the artworks would appear as the artist intended them. The paintings were cleaned to remove dirt and accretions and the aged surface coating was gently removed. Paint insecurities in both paintings were consolidated and old losses to the paint layer were eventually filled and inpainted to match the surrounding paint.

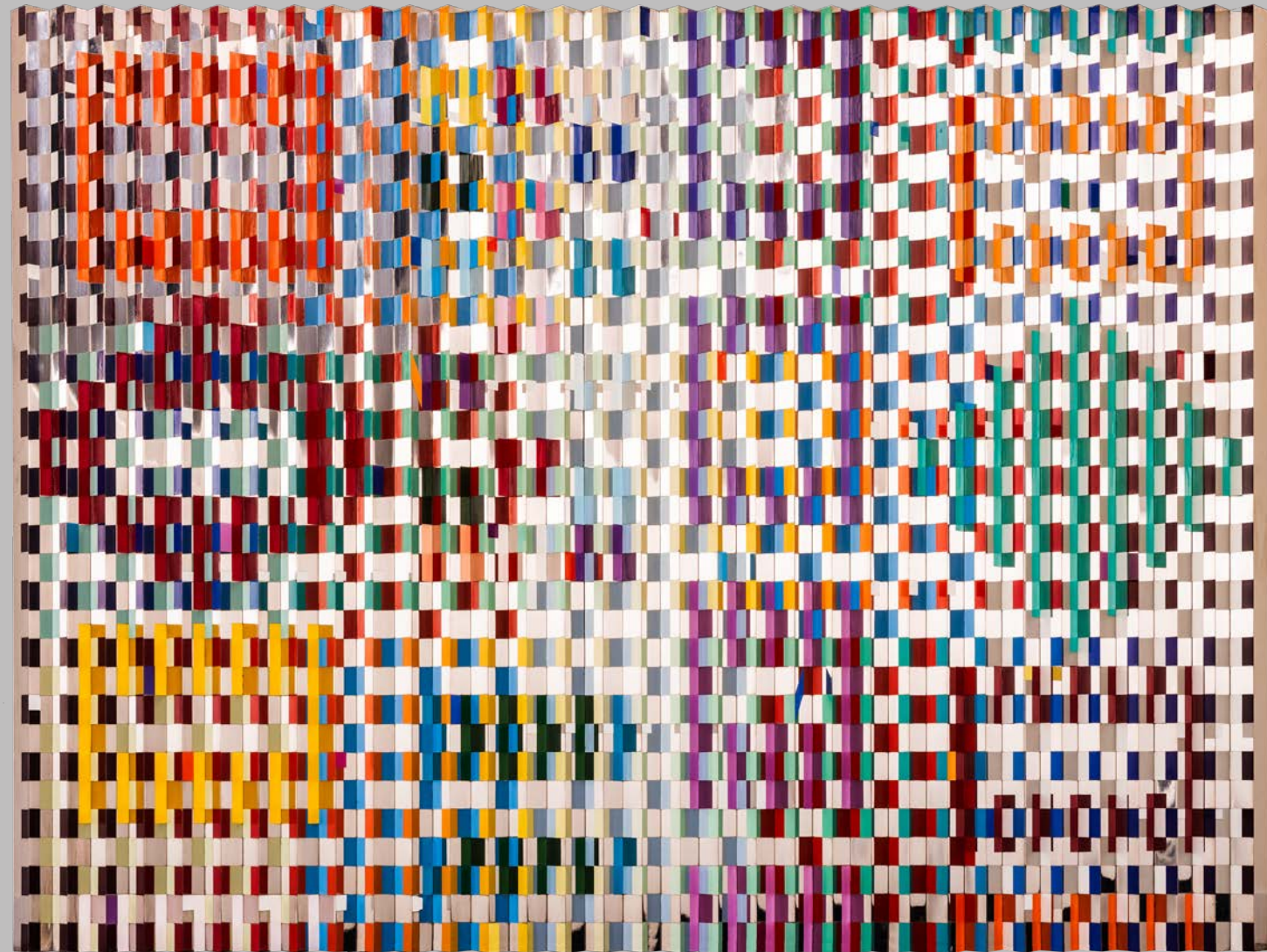


Above left
Various views of the small-scale maquette of *Sunnylands* (4½" x 4").
Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.4595

Above right
Sunnylands. 1977
Yaacov Agam
Enamel paint on aluminum
74" x 75"
Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.4593



Sunnylands, the first artwork by Agam that the Annenbergs commissioned, was installed on the south wall of the terrace, creating an Agam outdoor gallery. As reproduced in the volume *Agam* by Frank Popper.
Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.004377
Photographer unknown, date unknown.



Above
Expanded Space. 1979
Yaacov Agam
Acrylic and mirror on aluminum
38" x 51"
Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.94



In the *Vanity Fair* letters section, Annenberg friends Josephine and Newton J. Minow of Chicago wrote on meeting Agam at Sunnylands in 1980:

HERE'S RONNIE!

VANITY FAIR'S splendid report about Sunnylands ["Return to Sunnylands," by Bob Colacello, April] brought back warm memories of our many visits there through the years as houseguests of Lee and Walter Annenberg.

One time, as we arrived, our hosts were outside, as usual, to greet us, and there was a painter dressed in white overalls, apparently doing some repairs. Walter asked if we would like to meet the painter, and we said of course.

To our great surprise, we were introduced to the famed Israeli artist Yaacov Agam, who was visiting from Paris.

Agam graciously presented us with a French envelope stamped with a rendering of one of his paintings, and then added multiple inscriptions of his name in many colors.²⁷

The Minows' interaction with Agam during their Sunnylands visit on December 18, 1980, is humorously noted in the Sunnylands guest book, only a few lines below Agam's multiple signature. The Minows wrote: "Like Agam, again & again & again & again"²⁸—surely a reference to Agam's colorful signature style and perhaps the number of times they visited Sunnylands over the years. The Minows signed the Sunnylands guest book on six occasions.

Agam was an influential modern artist and a pioneer in the kinetic art movement. Walter stated that Agam was a "distinguished artist" and appreciated his creative spirit, mathematical sense, and kinetic compositions. The Annenbergs' regard for Agam as a favorite international contemporary artist is demonstrated by the number of artworks in their collection as well as their long-standing relationship with the artist. They encouraged friends to collect Agam works and they were the recipients of Agam gifts from friends. Agam's desert presence remains vital today with works on view at public institutions and held in private collections throughout the Coachella Valley.



Below

Unidentified magazine clipping showing Agam signing his name using multiple colored ink pens. Photographer unknown, date unknown.



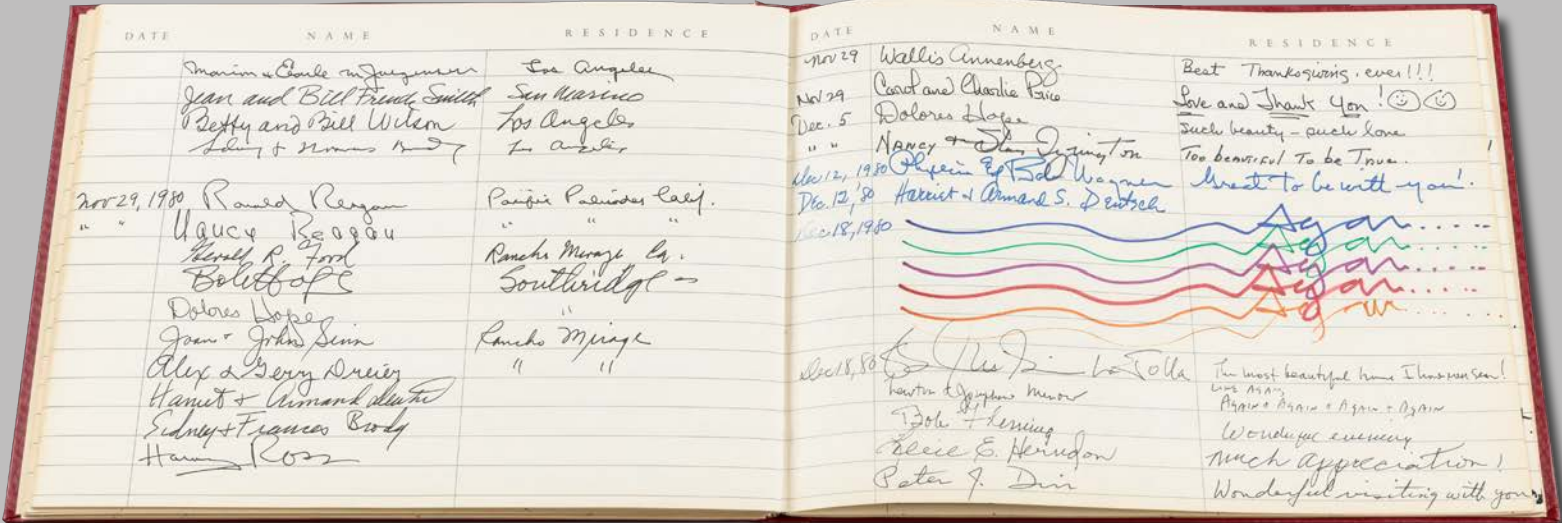
Left

Untitled. No date
Yaacov Agam
Enamel on mirror
20" x 30"
Collection of Diane Deshong

This piece was a gift from Agam who wrote: "To the honorable Mr. and Mrs. Annenberg Cordially, Agam Thanksgiving 1983."

Below

Sunnylands guest book with Agam and Minow entries on right-hand page, December 18, 1980. Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.3252.



Retrospectives Around the World

With the growing interest from the general public in experiencing the genius of Agam, large-scale retrospectives were organized in distinguished institutions around the world. One of the most spectacular installations was *Agam: Beyond the Visible*, exhibited from September 25 to November 2, 1980, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Agam transformed his concepts about the physical, psychological, and spiritual universe into artworks that expressed time, movement, and space. He pursued his metaphysical quest to go “beyond the visible” in search of the perceptible absence of the image. The merging of the themes developed by Agam over the span of his entire career was published in the volume *Homage to Yaacov Agam* that accompanied the Guggenheim exhibition.

There continue to be Agam exhibitions, commissions, public art, and architectural installations throughout the world. He constantly strives to develop fresh themes, utilize new techniques, and access contemporary resources. Each new project has provided Agam with opportunities that have led to a lifetime of tremendous creativity and inspiration.

Inspirations for Next Generations

Agam and the other pioneers of kinetic art provided a passage between the major modern art movements of the early 20th century (such as surrealism, constructivism, Bauhaus-style applied arts movement, and dada) and the ongoing experiments in perception that have defined the art of the intervening 60-plus years. For example, advancements made since the 1950s by Agam and his fellow artists are considered a link to the Southern California Light and Space movement of the late 1960s–1970s. This California connection continues today through works by contemporary artists such as Coachella Valley-based Phillip K. Smith III. Kinetic art continues to develop and expand internationally with the next generation of creatives who employ innovative resources and technology, as well as up-to-date advancements in computer sciences. A whole new world of artistic creativity lies beyond.



Below

Circle of Land and Sky. 2017
Phillip K. Smith III

Mirrored polished stainless steel
10' x 165' as installed for Desert X,
Palm Desert, California

Collection of the artist
Photo by Lance Gerber.

Opposite

Untitled (detail)
Yaacov Agam
See page 42.



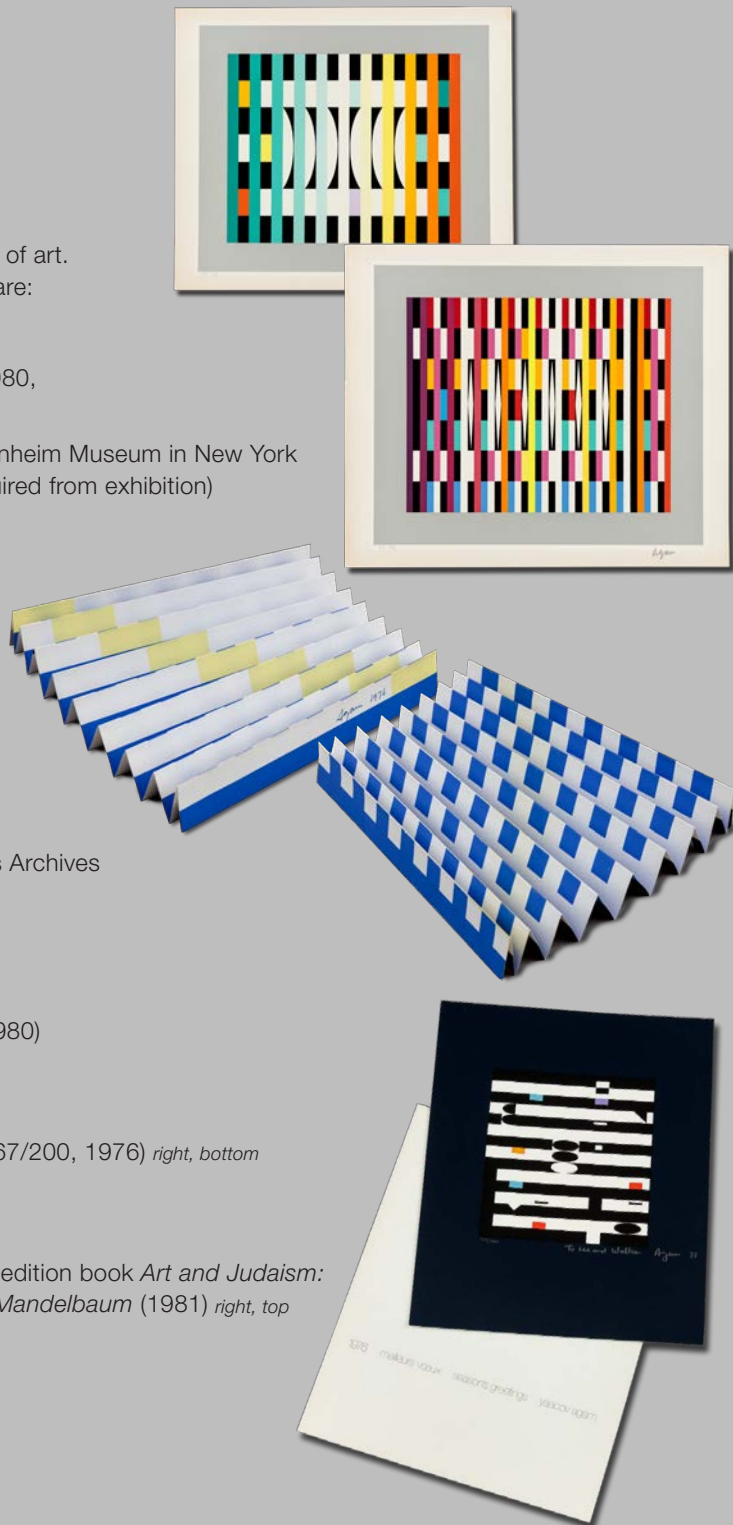
Agam Artworks and Gifts

The Sunnylands Collection consists of nine Agam works of art. These impressive sculptures, paintings, and serigraphs are:

- *3 x 6 Double Frame Interplay* (edition EA 0/9, 1976)
- *Untitled* (British American flags) edition 165/300, c. 1980, gift of Anne and Kirk Douglas)
- *Expended Space* (1979, exhibited Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York exhibition *Agam: Beyond the Visible*, 1980, work acquired from exhibition)
- *Hidden Image* (edition 55/99, 1979)
- *Reflecting Space* (edition 3/9, 1978, exhibited Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum 1980, work acquired from exhibition)
- *Situations* (1978)
- *Spring* (edition 73/99, 1979)
- *Square Waves* (1975)
- *Sunnylands* (1977)

Additional Agam materials are housed in the Sunnylands Archives and document his presence in the collection:

- Accordion serigraph (1976) *right, middle*
- Agam books with inscriptions and drawings
- Agam postage stamps: *Message of Peace* (France, 1980) and *Star of Love* (Israel, 1983)
- Greeting card: *Reflection* (no date)
- Holiday card insert: *Transformation Étape A* (edition 167/200, 1976) *right, bottom*
- Magazine clippings, photographs, ephemera, posters, and correspondence on Agam stationery
- Two untitled serigraphs (edition 4/53) from the limited-edition book *Art and Judaism: A Conversation between Yaacov Agam and Bernard Mandelbaum* (1981) *right, top*
- Wood maquette for *Sunnylands* (c. 1976-77)



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Right

Postage stamp *Star of Love*. 1983
Sunnylands Collection, 2009.1.003092



+ - x 9 (*Plus Minus Times Nine*)
(detail)

See page 19.

Acknowledgments

Walter and Leonore Annenberg were fervent collectors of Yaacov Agam's art throughout the 1970s. They commissioned large, bold paintings to adorn the outdoor patios at their Sunnylands estate and installed his large kinetic sculpture poolside. This exhibition celebrates the impact that Agam had on the Annenbergs and their Sunnylands estate, the Coachella Valley art scene, and the Palm Springs Art Museum.

We thank the following people for contributing to this exhibition with its catalog and accompanying programs.

First and foremost, there is no art without the artist. We thank Yaacov Agam for daring to create a breakthrough in artistic expression, which continues to influence artists today. His son, Ron Agam, is extending his father's legacy through his own optical innovations in geometric kinetic art. We thank him for his enthusiasm for the exhibition and contributions to the catalog.

The exhibition was greatly enhanced through generous loans. We thank our exhibition partner, the Palm Springs Art Museum, that loaned 29 significant works to the exhibition, some of which have never been exhibited before; Diane Deshong provided three works of art from her personal collection; and Graham C. Boettcher, Ph.D., and Shelby Merritt from the Birmingham Museum of Art provided one critical print that completed the sequential series of seven prints. We thank all of them for their collegial support and championing the loans for this project.

The board of trustees of The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands provided generous support for this exhibition and publication. Trustees are Wallis Annenberg, Lauren Bon, Diane Deshong, Howard Deshong III, Leonore Deshong, Elizabeth Kabler, Elizabeth Sorensen, Charles Annenberg Weingarten, and Gregory Annenberg Weingarten. David J. Lane, president of The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands, also provided valuable encouragement.

Frank Lopez, Sunnylands' librarian and archivist, researched and curated the exhibition, drawing from the collections and archives at both Sunnylands and the Palm Springs Art Museum. He co-authored

the catalog and guided the exhibition with the support of the collections and exhibitions staff—Zulma Trejo, multimedia archivist, and Mary Velez, senior art handler.

Katherine Hough, former chief curator of the Palm Springs Art Museum, contributed as co-author of the catalog and art historian for the project, while shepherding the collaboration between Sunnylands and the Palm Springs Art Museum. We thank Louis Grachos, Rochelle Steiner, Alicia Thomas, and Julie Hoogland of the Palm Springs Art Museum for their partnership and generous access to the impressive Agam holdings and historical archives at the museum.

Additional Sunnylands staff who helped with the project were Janice Lyle, editor, and Ashley Santana, managing editor, who ensured the quality of the catalog text and layout. Mike Reeske, David Montoya, Gerardo DeLeon, and the entire facilities team prepared the exhibition space. Ken Chavez and Eric Ornelas of the communications department added their expertise in marketing the exhibition. Michaelleen Gallagher and the education staff—Ivonne Miranda Correa and Danielle Sombati—supported the exhibition through innovative programming.

Many additional people outside Sunnylands were instrumental in a variety of ways: Carla Breer Howard shared her skills as copy editor; Rabbi Steven Rosenberg, Douglas Morton, Jason Brown, and Robert Fey at the Temple Isaiah Jewish Community Center provided their generous time and access to their Agam holdings; Steve Branch at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library facilitated photographic permissions; Kamila Korbela, principal paintings conservator of LA Art Labs, provided professional art restoration; and Mark Davidson photographed the artworks. Kamil Beski of Beski Projekts in Los Angeles and designer Karina White provided the extraordinary exhibition design and installation, while lighting designer Geoff Korf lit the artworks beautifully. Finally, this catalog was expertly designed and art-directed by Robin Rout and John Crummay of JCRR Design.

Anne Rowe
Director of Collections & Exhibitions
Sunnylands Center & Gardens

The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands acknowledges the people who first lived in the Coachella Valley and whose descendants reside here today. Sunnylands occupies a space where indigenous people gathered and built community. We hope that engaging in important conversations on national and world affairs honors those who came before us.