

[EN]

citedelarchitecture.fr

CHROMOSCOPE

A LOOK AT THE COLOR FIELD MOVEMENT

22 OCTOBER 2025 – 16 FEBRUARY 2026

The Chromoscope exhibition embodies the Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine's stated desire to foster dialogue between architecture and contemporary visual arts. Architects and artists have always inspired each other. While remaining distinct disciplines, they share the same visual culture and narratives that have continually intertwined.

The gallery of murals and stained glass windows takes visitors on a journey through several medieval buildings with monumental decorations, reproduced and restored in an immersive format. These decorations are often characterized by large areas of flat color, simple colors, little or no use of illusionistic perspective, a marked preference for monumental compositions, and a tension between static scenes and the suggestion of movement at the limits of perception.

This taste for flatness, for color alone, for the saturation of the color field without any illusion of depth, for stimulating the viewer's gaze with subtle details that create tension in the painting... these are all ingredients found in the works of the Color Field movement.

The confrontation between these two very rich periods in the history of painting therefore offers a way of revisiting both. What do the notions of abstraction and figuration really mean? What really moves us in a work of art? How much of the emotion that arises from encountering a painting is due to context and the viewer's gaze?

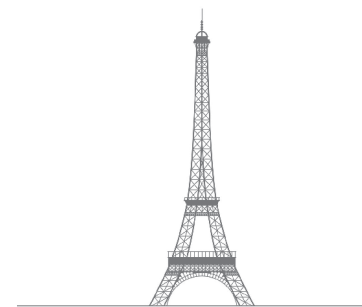
By combining heritage collections with contemporary creations, the Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine offers new narratives and promotes a better mutual understanding of works and eras.

MURAL PAINTINGS AND STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

As the gallery spaces are quite narrow, please follow the designated route carefully.

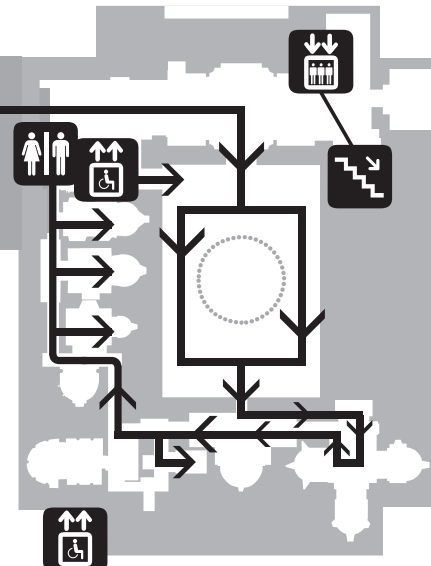
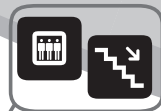
Access to the exhibition MUTE
| Ground floor

Beginning in the mid-1950s, Color Field and Post-painterly abstraction placed emphasis on chromatic surfaces as the very subject of painting. This exhibition features Thomas Downing, Sam Francis, Helen Frankenthaler, Adolph Gottlieb, Morris Louis, Robert Motherwell, Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Larry Poons, and Frank Stella, with exceptional loans from the artists' estates, as well as important private collections, with the support of Yares Art. Without any manifesto or specific program, these key artists defined this seminal period in art history, in the immediate wake of Abstract Expressionism.



Installed in the museum's Gallery of mural paintings, the exhibition unfolds within the venue's labyrinth of medieval domes and chapels, that are ornated by polychromatic and figurative frescoes, interwoven into its vaults and arches. This immersive environment envelops us and invites to experience the frontality and chromatic intensity of the Color Field paintings, and triggers visual and spiritual links between two distant historical and aesthetic worlds.

Situated in the history of postwar abstraction and the phenomenology of perception, Color Field abstraction project us into pure optical fields, now liberated from imitation, figuration, and eventually from traditional abstract composition. These mesmerizing works conjure a disorienting floating effect by systematically removing figures or objects. This loss of reference points, paradoxically heightened by the vibrant optical geometry, derives from Stella's or Noland's grids, targets, and chevrons—pictorial devices that project color, outwards, towards the viewer, which lie at the heart of one's arcane perception. These sensorial repercussions emanate from *Little Sangre de Cristo* (1964) by Poons, or *Cinema de Pepsi Sketch II (Red)* (1966)



by Stella. Both works favor the immediate impact of an elementary but highly seismic gestalt along with an illusory visual coalescence characteristic of Optical Art.

Whether geometric or atmospheric, this particular form of abstraction recalls, in part, the allover logic of Abstract Expressionism, while its radical frontality dispenses with any beginning, middle, or end. It also precludes any estimation of scale or any precise relationship between the viewers' physical body and the object of their attention. In other compositions, our gaze is again drawn in, and then transported through various chromatic, gestural, and chaotic currents and rhythms. These approaches are exemplified in the anatomical extrapolations of Frankenthaler's *Nude* (1958), *Las Mayas* (1958) or *Acres* (1959)—inspired by Francisco de Goya, as much as by Jackson Pollock or by Willem de Kooning. In contrast, these aesthetic variations, evidenced in Francis's *Black and Yellow* (1955) and *Louis' Surge* (1958) offer softer fluctuations. Others are channeled with a sensual rigor inherited from Hans Hofmann and Josef Albers in *Downing's Midnight Blue* (1963) or Noland's *Every Third* (1964), and Poons' geometric work.

Most of these compositions present expansive visual fields, comprised of translucent markings and entities that appear suspended. Their surfaces, generally devoid of any depth, sometimes uneven and shifting; sometimes fluid and continuous, remain in harmony with the two-dimensionality of the canvas. It is a matter of extrapolating certain modalities of Abstract Expressionist painting from the 1940s through gesture, staining, grid systems, capillarity, dilution, and absorption. Above all, the "pure opticality" and modernist radicalism advocated by the critic Clement Greenberg, these works reject the tactile materiality of the gnarled,

impasto-like drippings paint of splatters resulting from Pollock's drip technique.

These artists refute Heinrich Wölfflin's formal stylistic distinction—later adopted by Greenberg—between "linear" and "painterly" painting, the former, which is clearly defined, and the latter, which is turbulent and gestural. Indeed, beyond the uniformity or chaos of the technique employed, the phenomenon of chromatic perception and the dissolution of the composition's framework are more powerfully played out between the eye and the mind than from the canvas. It is mentally that we grasp the delicate and puissant reality of a visual strategy that is both frontal and layered, evoking the translucent luminosity of watercolors and sense of intimacy. In his "Veils" series, such as *Surge* (1958) and *Nexus III* (1959), Morris Louis directed the flow of highly diluted acrylic paint onto unstretched, unprimed canvases. According to Leo Steinberg, in 1972, the artist subjected these "drippings" to the laws of gravity—an observation that could also be applied to the dynamic diagonal polychrome drips featured in Poons' *Spanish Dancer* (1975). Whether these compositions evoke atmospheric or aquatic landscapes, as in the work of Francis, or, for example, in Gottlieb's *Pale Splash* (1971) or Motherwell's *Open #165*, (1970), or whether they avoid any obvious visual resonance, as in Noland's work, most of these pieces provide an ambiguous chromatic field as a portal to a new sensorial dimension. However, in 1967, as Greenberg discerningly underscored while comparing Claude Monet's *Water Lilies* to the paintings of Olitski and Louis, "such equations cannot be thought out in advance; they can only be felt and discovered." In other words, the in vivo apprehension of this historical style of abstraction and its consequences remain irreducible to any image or narrative. This is yet another reason,

if ever there was one, to plunge ourselves into this pictorial and architectural journey.

These precursors and essential representatives of both the Color Field and Post-Painterly abstraction movements have left a considerable legacy that has influenced many artists. Moreover, recent scholarly examinations have considered their works in the context of spatial and perceptive experiences, rather than just merely as paintings. In keeping, recent group exhibitions, such as *The Fullness of Color: 1960s Painting* held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2019–2021 or *Glory of the World: Color Field Painting, 1950s to 1983* at the NSU Art Museum, Fort Lauderdale, in 2024, have revised their strictly modernist and formalist readings, and have reestablished these movements as an essential moment within the vast spectrum of twentieth century's abstraction.

AROUND OF THE EXHIBITION

I FLASH TOURS (in English)

Guides welcome you every day in the exhibition.

Feel free to ask them questions!

I GUIDED TOURS (in French)

Saturdays, November 8, December 6 and 27,

February 7 • 15pm

1h / €5 (+ admission ticket)

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

CITÉ DE L'ARCHITECTURE ET DU PATRIMOINE

Palais de Chaillot. Place du Trocadéro

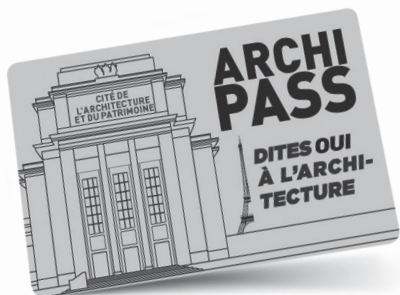
M° Trocadéro / Léna

Tél. 0033 1 58 51 52 00

CITEDELARCHITECTURE.FR



Free wifi



With the **ARCHI PASS**,
become a member of the Cité, enjoy
exclusive benefits, stay at the heart
of the institution's activities, and take
part in its community.

Join the ARCHI PASS members at
citedelarchitecture.fr/membre-archi-pass

OPENING HOURS

Open every day except Tuesday

11 a.m. – 7 p.m.

Late opening on Thursdays

until 9 p.m.

Closed on January 1, May 1, July 14,
and December 25

ADMISSION FEES

13€ / 10€

EXHIBITIONS

ALBUM DES JEUNES ARCHITECTES ET PAYSAGISTE 2023

October 16 – November 17, 2025

PARIS 1925 – L'ART DÉCO ET SES ARCHITECTES

October 22, 2025 – March 29, 2026

MUTE – FABIENNE VERDIER

October 22, 2025 – February 16, 2026

QUARTIERS DE DEMAIN

December 3, 2025 – March 30, 2026

**Find the full programme at
CITEDELARCHITECTURE.FR/EN**

With the support
of Yares Art

