

Kenneth V. Young (1933 -
2017) *Untitled*, 1970
Acrylic on canvas
24 by 24 inches (61 x 61 cm)



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Provenance: Estate of the artist

Exhibition: Washington, DC, American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center, *Kenneth Victor Young: Continuum*, April 6 - May 26, 2019, pp. 5, 29, illustrated in color

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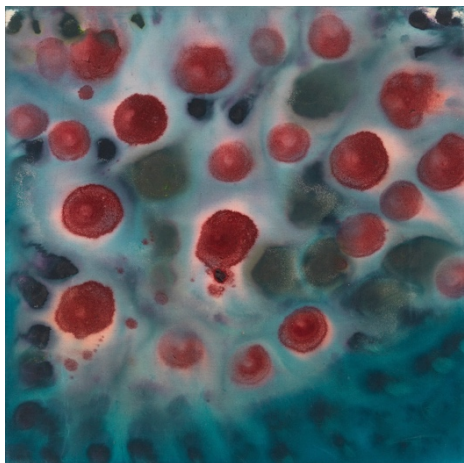
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Untitled, 1970



Kenneth V. Young's *Untitled, 1970* features the colorful floating orb imagery for which he was known. Kaleidoscopic concentrations of brilliant colors effloresce out to the edges of the painting, and produce a stark yet harmonious dichotomy between the unprimed canvas and the colorful acrylic. Throughout this work Young manages to consistently map out a fine line between planned intensity and restraint of form, presentation, and color. While *Untitled* presents irresistible orchestrations of color, there is a softness to the forms and an alluring fluidity in how they integrate with each other and, as a whole, the canvas itself. There are no heavy-handed dollops of impasto, no combative clashes of paint, but instead a congruous and deliberate amalgamation of color and form; more akin to the blossoming of a flower or a nocturnal celestial display, than to any human conceit or affair. Young achieved this delicate palette and coherent elegance of form by pouring watered-down paint onto the raw canvas, so as to produce a stained effect. This staining method is characteristic of many other color school artists, and in particular Young's peer and friend, Sam Gilliam. Like Morris Louis, Young would spread his canvases on the floor to apply the dripping paint.

As a student, Young studied physics and chemistry well before his attention turned to studio art. Instead of studying figure, ground, and gesture, Young studied the atomic and chemical compositions of life. He learned about the perfectly balanced and formed multiplex structure of all life on earth and the extreme interdependence of all its variations from a molecular to a macrocosmic level. He studied the Newtonian mathematical equations, which govern all matter, motion, space and time. He saw the chasm between the underlying harmony and regimented nature of the underpinnings of existence, and the chaotic and discordant way in which human life unfolds. In his painterly practice Young sought to bring some order to this confused and tumultuous world. His melodious compositions are always balanced, no color or brushstroke vies for attention with another; like nature, all of the work's components function in concert with each other. Young's seamless melding together of colors and shapes transforms his paintings from collections of individual expressions into singular images. From a human perspective nature appears as an anarchic violent battle

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between competing species, but from a scientific perspective it becomes clear that nature is in fact a perfect communion of life and matter. It is the latter perspective which we see expressed in Young's work. His paintings are the aesthetic delineations of his scientific knowledge and, ultimately, his world view.