

Simeon Braguin



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Simeon Braguin (1907-1997)

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Untitled, 1988-90 50 x 64" A/C 132883

Cover Image: 42 x 34" A/C 132896

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Simeon Braguin (1907-1997)

Simeon Braguin (pronounced Bra-geen) was born in Kharköv, the Ukraine, on January 12, 1907 to Anna and Yalöv Braguin. In 1917, at the outset of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, they fled with their daughter and ten-year-old son to New York, where Simeon's father supported his family as a merchant.

As he grew up, Braguin took art classes at Columbia University and at the Art Students League. His first exhibition came in 1931 at Marie Harriman Gallery in Manhattan, followed soon after by a second at the Daniel Gallery. In 1971, Braguin made a "late return" solo show at the Poindexter Gallery in New York. A critic for Arts magazine called Braguin's paintings "powerful in their understatement and wonderful in their evocations". In 1975, the Gallery gave him his second solo show where he introduced his "Essex Harbor Series".

After his last exhibition at Poindexter, he increasingly worked with soft pastel colors, allowing them to take over his previously white backgrounds. In the early 1980s, his wife, Janet Chatfield Taylor, died. Braguin was reaching a new peak in the maturity of his style. It was at this point that he was discovered by Helen Thomas, a curator of the Yale University Art Gallery. His most impressive distinction as a painter followed in 1991, when Yale gave him a solo exhibition in the Gallery.

From the early 1980s onward, each of Braguin's paintings is marked by carefully balanced geometric shapes, painted in unique hues of pastel colors. These geometric shapes of color never bear a sharp precisionist edge; rather, they are purposely softened with a rough finish. The translucency of the color fields show that he worked and re-worked sections, layering one color atop another until he achieved the desired effect of establishing a careful harmony of shape and color.

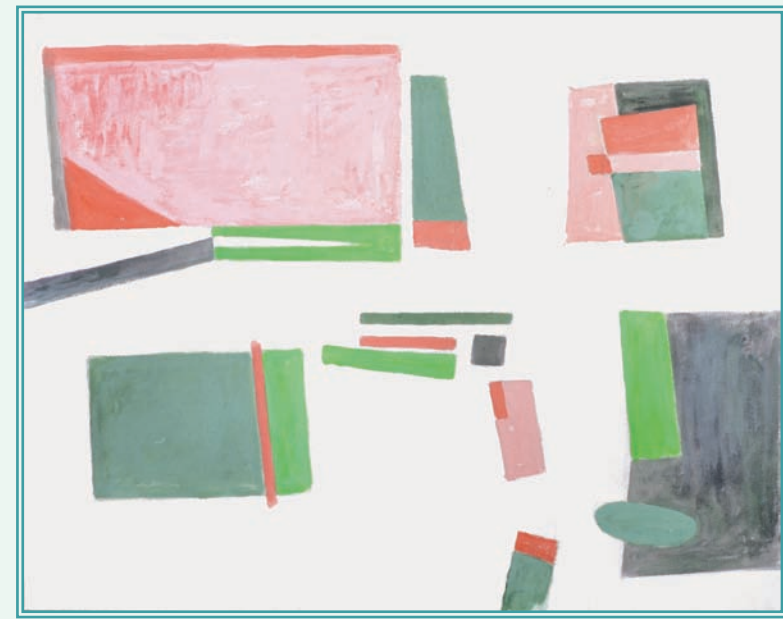
Braguin's paintings often express a sense of aerial perspective or weightlessness, as if he were an omniscient observer hovering over Essex Harbor as he painted. Moreover, within the broader geometric shapes of color, Braguin frequently cultivated his own iconography. Carefully placed smaller shapes constantly reappear which can best be described as the "boat", the "whale's tail", the "fat T", and the "half-moon". In addition to these shapes, he often painted delicate lines. Some appear as grids, evocative of those found in his wire sculptures. Others are calligraphic twists that appear to be spontaneous, but were actually carefully placed and painted. Still others appear similar to Nordic runes, as if poised to communicate a mysterious message.

In 1994, just three years after his major exhibition at Yale, Braguin suffered a stroke which greatly affected his ability to speak. "Nevertheless" remarked a friend, "he communicated with a marvelously expressive face". Thereafter, his ability to paint also diminished until, on November 7th, 1997, Simeon Braguin passed on. He left no heirs. No one, not even his closest friends, were prepared for what they later heard in the evening television news; that Braguin had left millions of dollars to Yale University to establish the Janet and Simeon Braguin Fund for American Art.

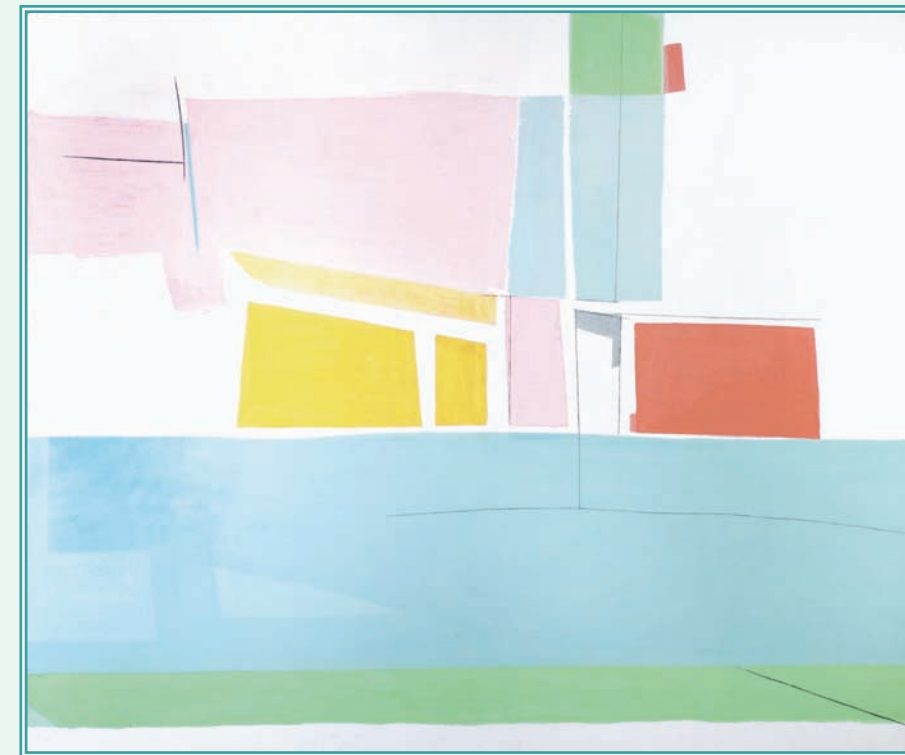
- Peter Hastings Falk
Excerpted From The Life and Art of Simeon Braguin
Institute of Art Research and Documentation, 2003



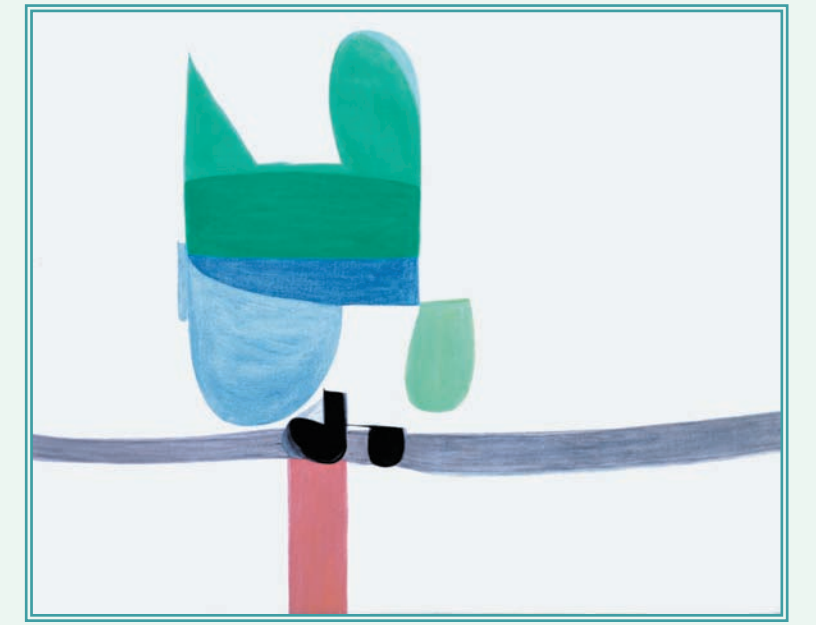
Untitled, 1988 50 x 64" A/C 132886



Untitled 30 x 38" A/C 132892

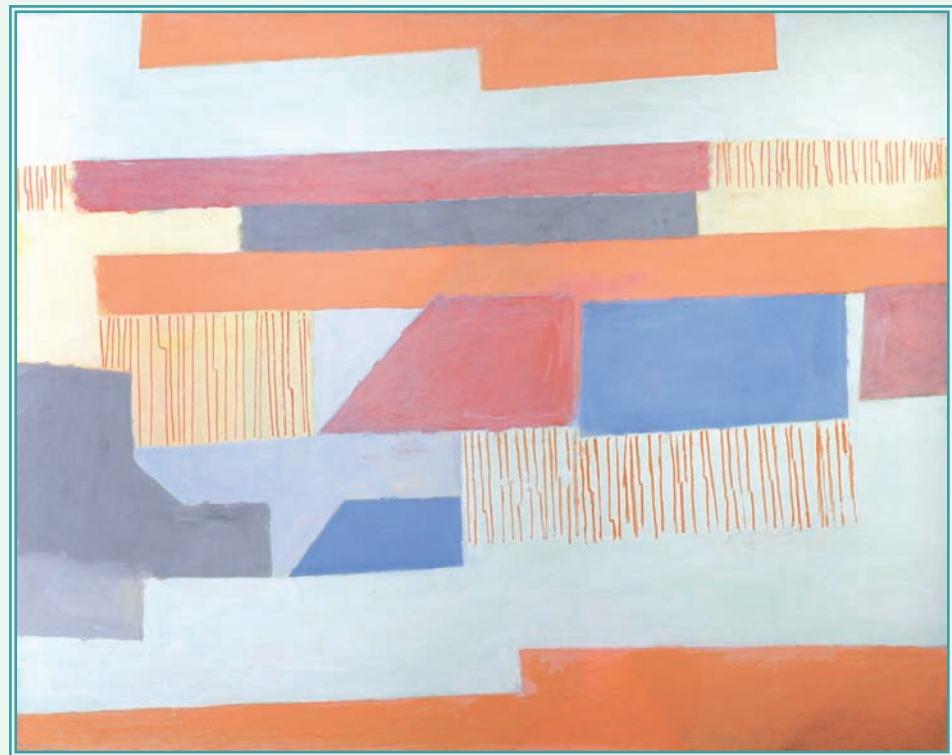


Untitled, 1975 54 x 65" A/C 132889



Untitled 34 x 42" A/C 132915

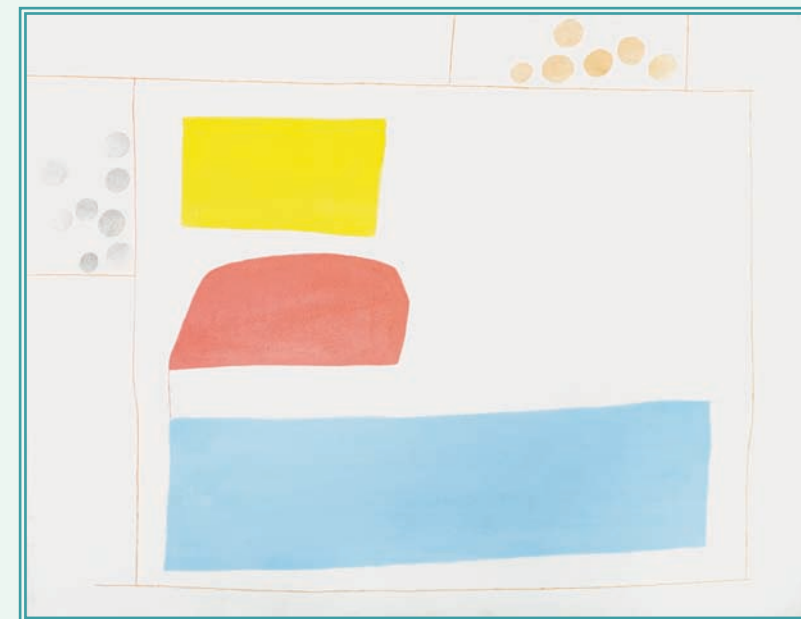
Selected works from the Essex Harbour Series, 1975



Untitled, 1994 50 x 64" A/C 132884



Untitled, 1976 50 x 65" A/C 132890



Untitled 34 x 44" A/C 132894



Untitled, 1981 52 x 65" A/C 132887