

**Telegraph.co.uk:** 'Plastic fantastic: Almine Rech celebrates the 1960s Light and Space Movement' by Colin Gleadell, February 7, 2017

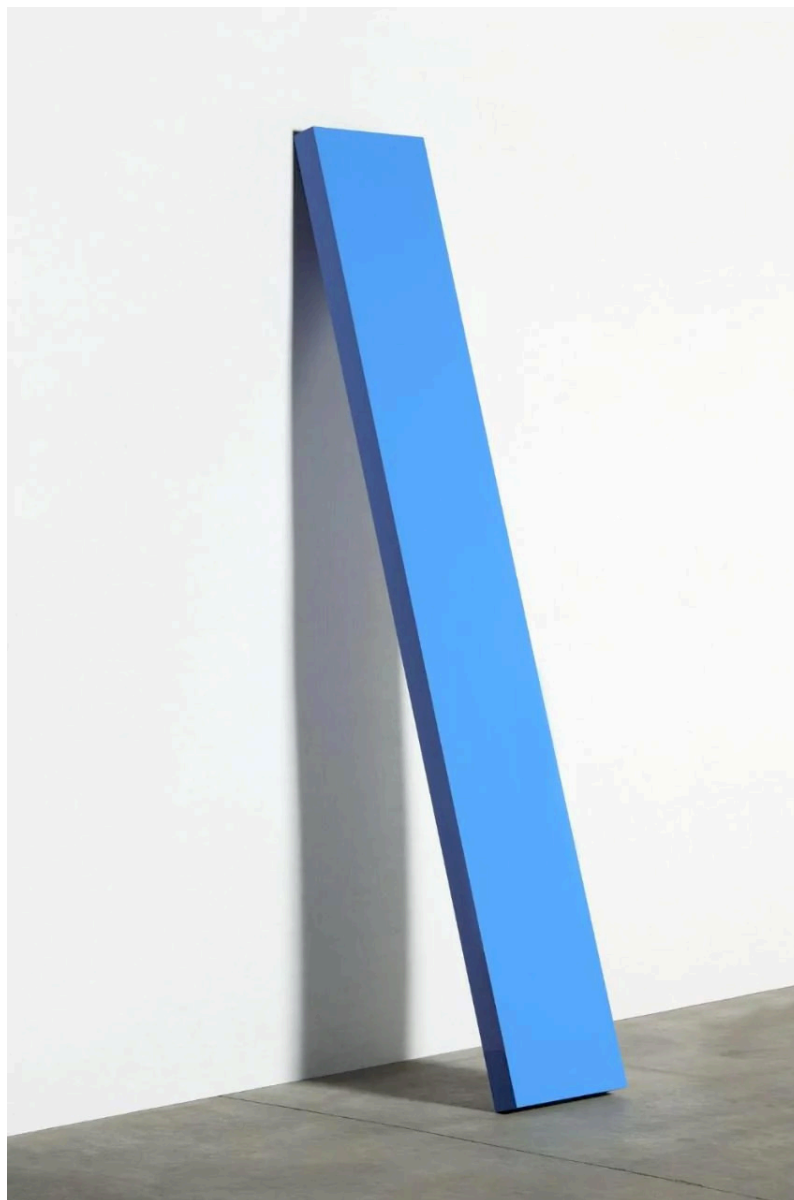


DeWain Valentine, Concave Circle Blue CREDIT: PHOTO MELISSA CASTRO DUARTE/COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND ALMINE RECH GALLERY

An exhibition at the Almine Rech Gallery in London this week will recall the 1960s in California – not the music of the Beach Boys especially, but art that captures that special, lightheaded sense of luminosity and airiness which has made Venice Beach such a draw.

Appropriately, the material with which the artists worked had something in common with the recording and film industries. No one who has seen Mike Nichols' 1967 film *The Graduate* can forget the party scene where young Benjamin (played by Dustin Hoffman), is taken outside by the patronising Mr McGuire who intones: "Ben... I've just one word to say to you ...plastics. There's a great future in plastics". But he had a point. During the 1960s plastic was going through a revolution, not just industrially, in the science lab, but as a material for artists.

At the same time that David Hockney was exploring his California dream in paint, a group of more technologically minded artists seized upon the potential of synthetically produced resins for making evocative translucent sculptures, contributing to what is referred to as the “Light and Space Movement”.



John McCracken, Link 2000 CREDIT: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST'S ESTATE AND ALMINE RECH GALLERY

The organiser of this exhibition, Plastic Show, was one of those artists – De Wain Valentine. He taught plastics technology at the University of California and in 1966 patented his own type of modified polyester resin which he used for his sculptures. But, like several of his peers, he has been sidelined by the market.

However, in the last six years there have been important exhibitions devoted to the artists of the Light and Space Movement – at museums in San Diego, Berlin and Seattle, and at commercial galleries, notably the Almine Rech and David Zwirner galleries, two powerhouse international galleries committed to the minimalist aesthetic. Prices at the Plastic Show range from \$100,000 to \$2 million, the most expensive tending to be for the earliest works.

From the artists in this show, one of the most expensive at auction is John McCracken. When he died in 2011, McCracken's auction record was \$337,000 (£173,000) for an eight-foot fibreglass plank sculpture coated in polyester resin. Since then his prices have been rising steadily reaching close to \$1 million at auction and more privately.

The Plastics Show includes five polyester works by him, three from his desirable 1970s period. Also in the \$1 million league at auction is Robert Irwin with just one work in the show, but at 12-foot-high, the shiny acrylic column, Prism 1971, is the biggest.

De Wain Valentine has yet to reach those peaks. His work barely surfaced at auction until 2011 as it had little resale value. But since then it has been selling, mostly in Los Angeles, for up to \$175,000. Apart from his inclusion in museum shows, Almine Rech, which has represented him since 2014, has devoted exhibitions to him in London and Paris, where Francois Pinault was amongst the buyers; at Art Basel in Miami and at Frieze Masters in London where sales have been strong. "He was forgotten for 20 years, but now there is new interest," says Jason Cori of Almine Rech.

In 1964, Craig Kauffman enlisted the help of Planet Plastics to make vacuum-moulded plastic wall reliefs with spray gunned translucent colours to give them radiance. Before long he had been taken up by the Pace Gallery in New York, but immersed himself too much in teaching to be a force in the market.

The human thread to this show is that all the artists knew each other... "They were friends – but also rivals"

Like most of the artists in this show, his auction market only started recently – in his case after he died in 2010 and Zwirner staged a group show for the Light and Space artists. Of the handful of vacuum-formed plastic sculptures that have been sold, a rare surviving 1967 example holds the record \$293,000 set in New York in 2014. The six examples in this show date from the 1990s on.

The outsider in the group, not because she is the only woman but because she is more of a painter than the others, is Mary Corse, now in her seventies. A student of quantum mechanics, psychology and philosophy, she began with monochrome paintings and plexiglass constructions until she started using tiny glass beads or microspheres in her acrylic paintings. Other galleries that have vied to show her work are White Cube in London and Lehmann Maupin in America. Her work has only really appeared consistently at auction since 2010, and hit the \$100,000 mark a year ago.

The human thread to this show is that all the artists knew each other. They shared interests in Buddhism and UFOs, but explored the new technology in different ways. "They were friends – but also rivals," says Cori.

Plastic Show is at Almine Rech from February 9 until March 25; [alminerech.com](http://alminerech.com)