

## LONGHOUSE RESERVE, 2013

### Catalog essay

JACK YOUNGERMAN, Black & White

Janet M. Goleas

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In the sixty some years of Jack Youngerman's art, he has moved through the flatness and frontality of geometric abstraction to the lyric system of invented shapes that characterizes much of his oeuvre to voluptuous free-form structures in three dimensions. The white and black resin sculptures on view at LongHouse were created in the 1980s in Bridgehampton, where Youngerman has had a studio since 1968. These seven works are the result of the transformation of a flat rectangle into compound curving forms, via simple torsion. They partake of the South Fork and its dunes, waves, wings and leaves, and rest effortlessly at LongHouse while the gardens complement their natural shapes.

The sculptures are elegant and complex. Youngerman's vision, fueled in part by an abiding interest in non-Western art and a Japanese aesthetic, resulted in forms reminiscent of rolling planes that appear to be floating, resting or rising up. Their disposition is provocative, addressing the issues of two and three dimensionality with a graceful and elusive poetry.

Youngerman cut his chops in Paris, enrolling in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts there in 1947 on the G.I. Bill. His introduction to the arts was the post war School of Paris, which offered august masters such as Constantin Brancusi, Jean Arp and Henri Matisse, whose innovations in organic form would help lay the groundwork for the young artist's evolution. By the time he returned to the U. S., moving to New York in 1956 at the behest of Betty Parsons, Youngerman was on the cusp of artistic development.

Unlike Paris, the New York art world was in a constant state of reinvention. As Abstract Expressionism yielded to a new American painting, organic form, massing volumes and dramatic, simplified color was introduced to the image field. One of the signature attributes of Youngerman's mature work, the invented form, emerged at this time. In paintings such as *Red White*, 1958 and *Coenties Slip*, 1959, strident shapes and lucid color coalesce, lending to the forms a palpable and distinct presence.

The contained shapes in his paintings were dynamic, obliquely referencing the natural world while transcending its specifics. Thick fields of pitch black, lemon yellow and reds, oranges and blues morphed into bold, almost sculptural compositions. Cropped inside the picture plane - as if a mere rectangle could not contain them - the hybrid shapes bounced between volume and flatness, sharing the image field with foreground and background.

Youngerman's use of form was fluid and organic, and throughout the 1960s and 70s the artist transformed his imagery variously into shaped canvases, folding screens and freestanding cutouts in steel and aluminum that often replaced color with a structural and graphic clarity. In his first fiberglass sculptures, the artist reinvented the curved forms and resolute shapes that had come to define his paintings, finding a related vocabulary in three dimensions that was freeform, graceful and visually compelling.

The engineering required to produce the fiberglass works was profound. With the help of the light and sound artist, Christopher Janney, whose facility and inventiveness helped in the construction of Youngerman's large sculptural commissions *The Ohio*, 1973 and *Dryad*, 1983, the works eventually found a structural integrity that retained the freshness and sensuousness that Youngerman sought. The palette was either ebony black or a pure, mellow white, both capable of refracting light and shadow with a sense of quiet drama.

Jack Youngerman has had more than fifty one-person exhibitions, including a retrospective of his paintings and sculpture at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum of Art in 1986. In 1959, he was included in the exhibit, *Sixteen Americans*, organized by curator Dorothy Miller at the Museum of Modern Art.

- Janet M. Goleas

*Concurrent with the opening of Jack Youngerman, Black & White at LongHouse, the artist is exhibiting new large format oil paintings at Washburn Gallery in New York, as well as an extensive survey of works on paper at The Drawing Room in East Hampton.*