

An abstract painting by Herman Maril. The top portion of the image is a textured, warm yellow-orange color. Below this is a dark, almost black horizontal band. The lower two-thirds of the image are dominated by various shades of blue and teal, with visible brushstrokes and a sense of movement. The colors transition from a deep, dark blue on the left to lighter, more vibrant blues and teals on the right. There are some subtle hints of green and brown in the bottom right corner.

# Herman Maril

Color and Space





FIG. 1. *BLUE FISH*, 1970, OIL ON CANVAS, 60 x 40 IN.

# Herman Maril: Color and Space

*My preoccupation in painting has always been space. . . .*

*Huge open areas of space. I like to think of the concept of space.*

*I like to deal with big open spaces. And color.*

*Color and space is painting.*

—Herman Maril<sup>1</sup>

**H**ERMAN MARIL (1908–1986) was a painter of his surroundings—seascapes, domestic and studio interiors, and landscapes, primarily in his native Maryland or in his summer residence on Cape Cod from 1934 onward. In style, each work emphasizes clarity and simplicity painted in broad, flat, color masses to evoke a sense of lyricism.

In his early work, the artist portrayed everyday farm scenes and city streets realistically toward a more Modernist context. Moving beyond World War II and into the 1950s–1960s, he transformed his work into larger, more open, and more abstract canvases, while remaining tied to the recognizable elements of the physical world. In these later works, color becomes more expressive and functional in achieving the format and depth of his compositions, thereby engaging the viewer in the explicit places and things, days and seasons, and love of family and home that inspired his work. Such are the paintings in this exhibition.

Throughout his career, art critics and art historians lauded his work. At the age of 26, the art critic Olin Dows wrote in the *American Magazine of Art* that “Herman Maril’s painting is reserved, and, like most good painting, it is simple. He is interested in the essentials. Each picture has its core; each is beautifully conceived and organized. It is clothed in a certain poetry, a certain meaning that is pictorial.”<sup>2</sup> According to Howard Wooden, a former director of the Wichita Art Museum, as the artist’s style evolved, his paintings became more effortless, resting on his consistent use of understatement and his intentional elimination of superficial incidentals, features that are among the most distinguishing qualities and greatest strengths of his career.<sup>3</sup> David Scott, a former director of the Smithsonian’s National Collection of Fine Arts, echoed that by eliminating distracting

elements and tensions to the picture plane, he achieved harmonious energy.<sup>4</sup>

*Herman Maril: Color and Space* features the artist’s work from the 1950s–1980s, encompassing his penchant for the sea, landscape, and interiors. Marine-related subjects painted in Cape Cod and Maine include fishing nets in *Form and Flow*, 1958 (Fig. 7), a lone sailboat in *Sailboat, Green Sun*, 1963 (Fig. 14), the rugged coast of Maine in *Pines and Deep Dunes*, 1968 (Fig. 3) and *Maine Coast*, 1967, and an expansive shore line in the large-scale *Still Waters*, 1973 (Cover). Landscapes such as *Nadja’s Garden*, 1969 (Fig. 2), and *The Yellow Truck*, 1980 (Fig. 11), focus on his inhabitation in and around Baltimore, while *Clothesline and Flowers*, 1970, reflects his time in Provincetown.

Interiors vary from domestic scenes such as *Memories of High Mount*, 1960 (Fig. 9), *Blue Fish*, 1970 (Fig. 1), and *Interior with Dresser*, 1983 (Fig. 15), to those focusing on his studio, a frequent theme throughout his career. Maril listened to classical music when he painted, as referenced by the radio in *Music in the Studio*, 1985, while the tools of his trade appear in *Studio Corner*, 1977 (Fig. 6). On occasion, the artist populated his paintings, as in the case of *Bikini Figure*, 1961 (Fig. 5), featuring a bather sunning herself and *Central Park Skaters*, 1981, an abstracted scene of figures gliding over the ice.

Born in Baltimore, Herman Maril studied at the Maryland Institute of Fine Arts, graduating in 1928. His further education came from exposure to the European Modernist collection of Claribel and Etta Cone who befriended him and allowed him access to their paintings. He was particularly influenced by the works of Pablo Picasso, Paul Cezanne, Georges Braque, and most importantly, Henri Matisse, whose inspiration allowed the young artist ultimately to develop his own style.



The artist in his Baltimore studio, circa 1980. Photo by Aaron Levin

During the Depression, he worked for the WPA artists' program, creating murals for the US Post Offices in West Scranton, PA and Alta Vista, VA, for the US Treasury and Labor Departments, and for schools in Washington, DC, and MA. In addition to these very public achievements, the period of the 1930s brought the artist considerable recognition for his talent as well as a positive prognosis for his future. In 1933, he was included in *Painting & Sculpture from 16 American Cities* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. A year later, Duncan Phillips visited Maril's studio on Cape Cod and acquired two of his gouaches, followed by several paintings later that year (today, the Phillips Collection owns thirteen of the artist's works). That same year, Eleanor Roosevelt selected his painting, *Old Baltimore Waterfront, 1934* (Smithsonian American Art Museum), to hang in the White House. Thence, he exhibited at the Corcoran Gallery, The Baltimore Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the 1939 World's Fair in New York. By 1942, the Metropolitan Museum had acquired one of his gouaches and exhibited his painting, *Sunday Playground*, circa 1942 (location unknown).

After serving in the Army during World War II, he embraced his profession wholeheartedly, while imparting his knowledge to budding young artists as a professor at the University of Maryland from 1946 to 1977. The post-war years brought additional success as he continued to exhibit in museums and was represented by various prestigious art galleries of the time: Macbeth,

Babcock, Castellane, Forum, and Terry Dintenfass Galleries in New York, Franz Bader Gallery in Washington, DC, and Wellfleet Gallery on Cape Cod. He received numerous awards and was further recognized by his inclusion in the Cone Sisters Collection given to the Baltimore Museum of Art in 1950.

His work was shown alongside prominent artists of the day such as Thomas Hart Benton, Charles Burchfield, Edward Hopper, and Reginald Marsh in the 1942–1943 *Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Art* at the Whitney Museum of American Art and later, with Georges Braque, Stuart Davis, Juan Gris, Marsden Hartley, and Georgia O'Keeffe in *Twentieth Century Still Life Painting* in the 1997 Phillips Collection exhibition. He established friendships with many others, particularly in Provincetown, an artist colony that included Milton Avery, who was his nearby neighbor from 1954–1960, and Mark Rothko, who lived next door during the summer of 1958. Maril was very giving of his time and actively supported younger artists and his fellow colleagues through participation as a frequent Trustee at the Provincetown Art Association, as the artist representative on the Baltimore Museum's Board of Trustees for many years, and as a founder of the Baltimore branch of Artist's Equity.

During his lifetime, Herman Maril's work was featured in over 50 solo exhibitions and many group shows at galleries and museums nationwide. In addition to those mentioned above, he is represented in the collections of over 100 museums including: Butler Art Institute, Cleveland Museum of Art, Delaware Art Museum, The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, National Gallery of Art, New Britain Museum of American Art, Newark Museum, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, The Walters Art Museum, Whitney Museum of American Art, and Wichita Art Museum, among others.

1. Carl Schoettler, "Herman Maril: The Confidence that Comes with Half a Century of Painting," *Baltimore Evening Sun*, March 1, 1983, p. C1; C4

2. Olin Dows, "Herman Maril," *American Magazine of Art*, vol. XXVIII, July 1935, p. 411

3. Howard Wooden, *Herman Maril: A Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings, 1926–83* (Wichita: Wichita Art Museum, 1984), p. 5

4. David Scott, *Herman Maril: Search for the Essence* (Annapolis: Mitchell Art Gallery, 1994), p. 2





FIG. 2. *NADJA'S GARDEN*, 1969, OIL ON CANVAS, 54 x 35<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> IN.



FIG. 3. *PINES AND DEEP DUNES*, 1968  
CASEIN ON PAPER, 11 x 14 IN.



FIG. 4. *LANDMARK ON THE PRR*, 1965, OIL ON CANVAS, 30 x 40 IN.





FIG. 5. *BIKINI FIGURE*, 1961, CASEIN ON PAPER, 22½ x 21¾ IN.



FIG. 6. *STUDIO CORNER*, 1977, OIL ON CANVAS, 30 x 40 IN.





FIG. 7. *FORM AND FLOW*, 1958, OIL ON CANVAS, 40 x 30 IN.



FIG. 8. *VICTORIAN NOOK*, 1976, OIL ON CANVAS, 50 x 40 IN.





FIG. 9. *MEMORIES OF HIGH MOUNT*, 1960  
OIL ON CANVAS, 18 x 14 IN.



FIG. 10. *PROVINCETOWN BAY*, 1984, OIL ON CANVAS, 22 x 30 IN.



FIG. 11. *THE YELLOW TRUCK*, 1980, OIL ON CANVAS, 40 x 30 IN.





FIG. 12. *THE TELEPHONE*, 1982, OIL ON CANVAS, 40 x 29<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> IN.



FIG. 13. *AT THE WINDOW*, 1956  
OIL ON CANVAS, 28 x 18 IN.



FIG. 14. *SAILBOAT, GREEN SUN*, 1963  
CASEIN ON TAN PAPER, 19 x 13 IN.





FIG. 15. *INTERIOR WITH DRESSER*, 1983, OIL ON CANVAS, 40 x 60 IN.



*STILL WATERS*, 1973, OIL ON CANVAS, 60 x 40 IN. (DETAIL ON COVER)

HERMAN MARIL: COLOR AND SPACE MARCH 2-APRIL 21, 2017

*Debra Force* FINE ART, INC.

13 EAST 69TH STREET SUITE 4F NEW YORK 10021 TEL 212.734.3636 WWW.DEBRAFORCE.COM