



ED BAYNARD

In a Yellow Room



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James Fuentes Press

VINCE ALETTI Remembers ED BAYNARD

Fair warning: I'm the ultimate unreliable narrator, with a memory so selective it might as well not exist. When I go back to old journals, I often don't recognize myself, much less the friends I mention. Scott? Ellie? Frank? Who are these people? Ed is a lot more memorable. He made sure of that.

When I met him in New York, some time in the 1980s, Ed Baynard wasn't as famous as he once was, but he still knew everyone and was very social, very vivid: a man about Downtown. I knew his name from the posters and notecards that had long been a staple of the MoMA museum shop: his signature flowers in vases, at once restrained and exuberant, chic and unfashionably sincere.

At first, we spent more time on the phone than we did in person, but once we clicked, shortly after he'd moved

to a big loft on 23rd Street, we saw each other pretty regularly. I began to get a better idea of what Ed did before and after his success as a painter and printmaker. It's still a jumble to me; he'd had so many lives—each one more fabulous than the next—that I wasn't sure what to believe. If there was something mythic about Ed, it only added to his aura. The more he revealed, the more mysterious he became.

Ed's 23rd street loft was a great New York apartment. The front room, his studio, had a wall of windows onto the street and a large table full of fresh and fading flowers, regularly replenished from the sprawling market a few blocks west. Another table held stacks of drawing pads, jars of brushes, and countless tubes of paint and watercolors. Canvases, most of them work in progress, lined the walls or perched on an easel. For a visitor, it was all wonderfully extravagant; for Ed, it was matter-of-fact—all in a day's work.

The art pottery vases and bowls that appear in so many of his pictures were displayed on shelves in a passageway and niches leading back into his kitchen. Their colors, glazes, and lovely imperfections were so rich and painterly they already looked like Baynards. When Ed lost the loft, only a fraction of the pottery survived his move to Hell's Kitchen. His studio space was radically reduced, but it still had windows on the street. He insisted he was happy there, and he worked constantly.

Maybe it was just that Ed was more open to showing work than he had been before, but almost every time I visited

him on 44th Street, he had a new series of drawings or paintings on display. And he always felt that they were better than the last series. I usually thought they were equally strong: confident, elegant, and classically Baynard, without ever feeling retro. With few exceptions, they were variations on the theme of flowers and containers, usually painted from life.

It was exciting to see him so productive but sad to realize how much work was simply accumulating, stacked against the wall, unseen except by a few close friends and the occasional dealer or dealer-adjacent connection. The situation was daunting, but Ed seemed undeterred. I'd never known him so energized by his work and determined to make the best of his new circumstances. He cleared a small plot of dirt in front of his building and planted a garden; taking care of it made him a fixture in the neighborhood. He liked turning New York into a small town where he knew a little bit of everybody's business.

Ed was, famously, a character. He liked being known and noticed. Being with him one-on-one could be more fraught, but he could also be a sweetheart, a confidant. Ed and I spoke on the phone a lot, often about exhibitions we liked or found disappointing or just hated, about movies (which I don't think we ever went to together), and the theater (which I could never afford), but mostly about mutual friends, boyfriends, and tricks. After Peter Hujar died, Ed was the person I talked to most about sex, even when we weren't having any.

Especially when we weren't having any.

Inevitably, there were plenty of times when we tried each other's patience. Ed could switch from charming to infuriating in the course of a run-on sentence. Like a lot of gay men slightly older than me, he was at once casually sophisticated and pointedly vulgar. Not offensive (except to the prudish) and rarely rude (except to the offensive), but sharp tongued and not one to censor himself. When our friendship began to fray, it was partly because I no longer found Ed as witty as he thought he was. I'm not sure why we stopped speaking, but I thought maybe we just needed some time apart—time to remember why we enjoyed one another in the first place.

Suddenly, that time was up. Months after our final phone call, when I heard that Ed was in the hospital, I also heard that he didn't want visitors. Ed Baynard died on November 8, 2016. When he was too ill to handle a brush, he told friends that he was still painting in his mind. We can only imagine what images he conjured there.

But I couldn't stop thinking about all the work he left behind. Not just the paintings and drawings I saw stacked up on 44th Street, but everything that came before. After dinner with one of Ed's closest heirs, Dietmar Busse, I thought I should do something to help get his archive seen again. The first person I called, Matthew Higgs, the brilliant director at White Columns, hadn't heard of Ed, but he Googled him while we were on the phone and liked what he saw. Before we hung up,

he'd decided to bring a group of Baynard drawings to Frieze's New York edition, where every picture sold. A visit to Ed's storage spaces upstate made us realize we'd seen only the tip of a vast, amazing iceberg—more than enough for an actual retrospective, which Higgs and I organized for White Columns in the summer of 2019. Friendship isn't a matter of debts incurred and repaid, but it's gratifying when an artist long in eclipse comes back to warm, appreciative light. Seeing an array of large paintings from throughout Ed's career—many not shown in years, others never before exhibited—was like having the best of Baynard back among us. Still the life of the party.

VINCE ALETTI is a writer and curator based in New York. He is a photography critic for *The New Yorker* and *Photograph* and his work has also appeared in *Aperture*, *Artforum*, and *Vogue Italia*, among other publications. Aletti was the art editor of the *Village Voice* from 1994 to 2005 and the paper's photo critic for 20 years. In 2005, he won the International Center of Photography's Infinity Award for writing. He has curated numerous exhibitions, including the Ed Baynard solo exhibition at White Columns in New York in 2019.

The Estate of Ed Baynard (1940-2016) is represented by James Fuentes, New York and Los Angeles. The gallery's debut presentation of the artist's work will take place at Independent 20th Century this September in New York.

“This is a very chaotic world and a very chaotic time. The planet needs our attention. It needs harmony. My gift is a gift of making harmony.”

—ED BAYNARD

ED BAYNARD (b. 1940; d. 2016) was raised in Washington DC. He spent much of the 1960s based in Paris and London before settling in New York in 1971—the same year he would present his first solo exhibition in Manhattan. Before embarking on a nearly five-decade painting career, Baynard experimented with many mediums, working as a graphic designer, a clothing designer, and film performer. Baynard's last major retrospective was staged at White Columns in New York in 2019, co-curated by Vince Aletti and Matthew Higgs. He has also had solo presentations at Holly Solomon's 98 Greene Street Loft, New York, in 1972; Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, in 1973; Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, in 1977; John Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco, in 1980; and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York, in 1980, among others. Baynard's artwork is held in the permanent collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; High Museum, Atlanta; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Tate Galleries, London; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; and The Center for Contemporary Graphic Art, Fukushima, Japan.





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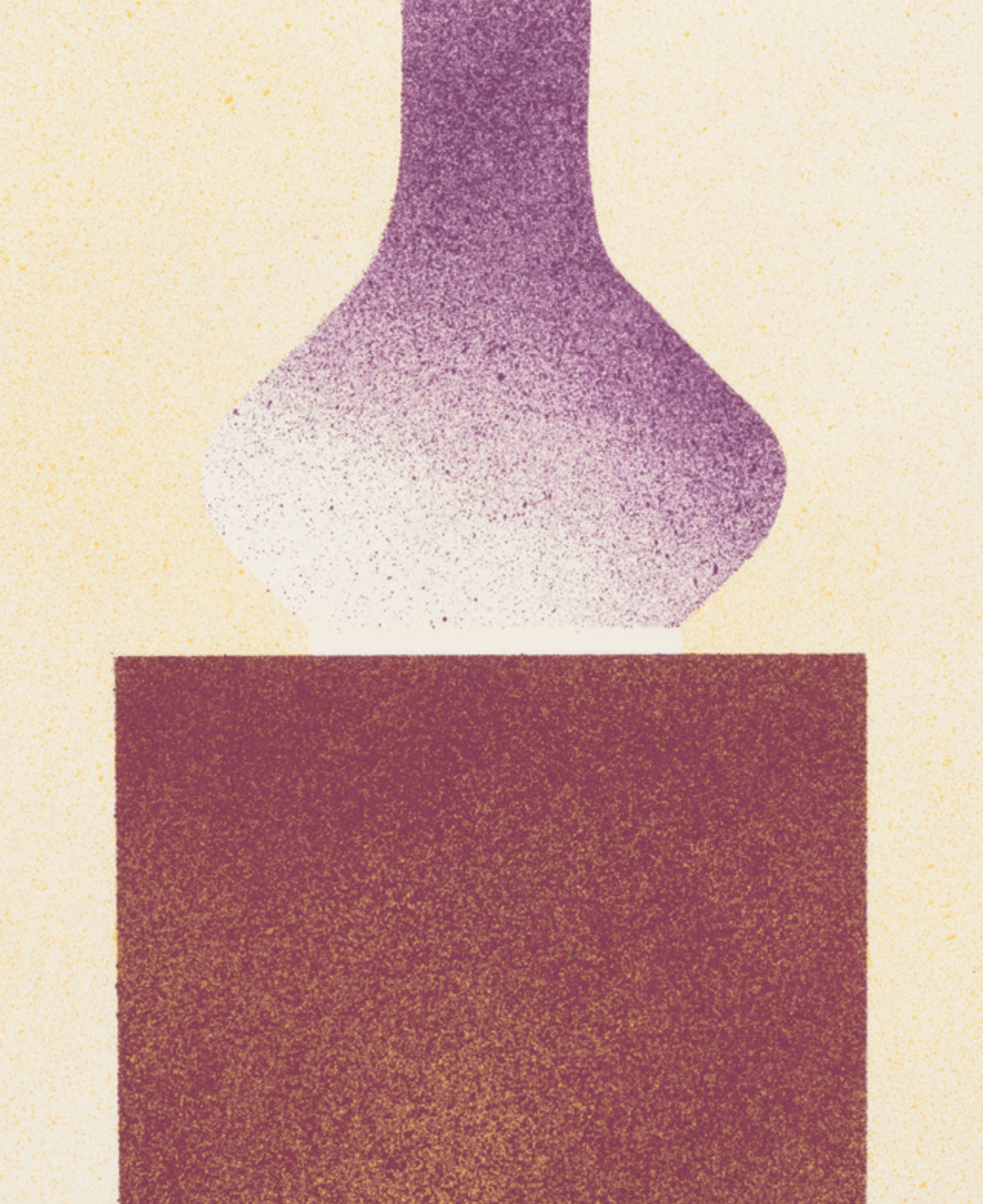
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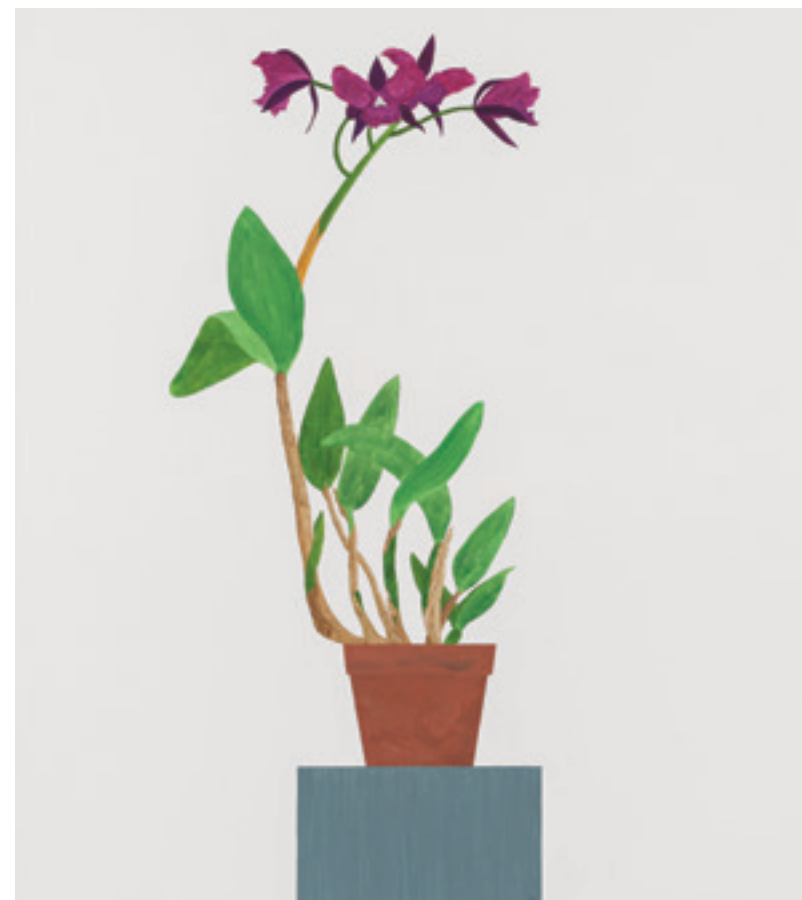




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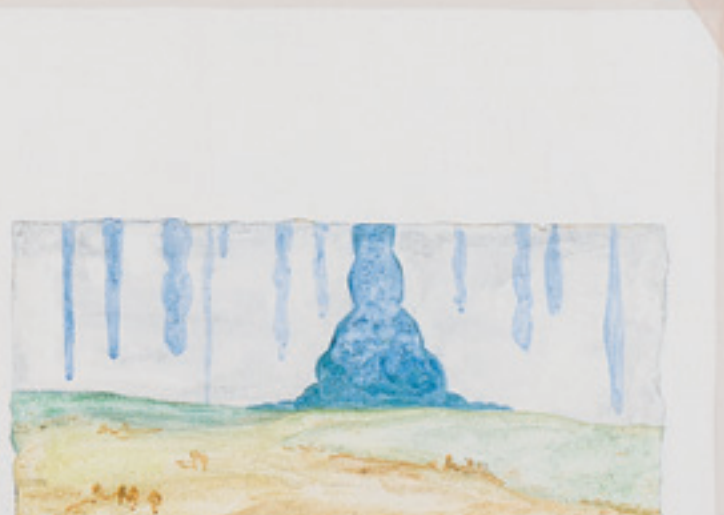
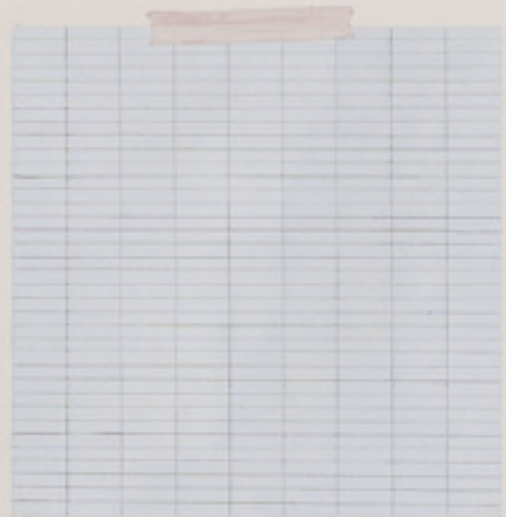






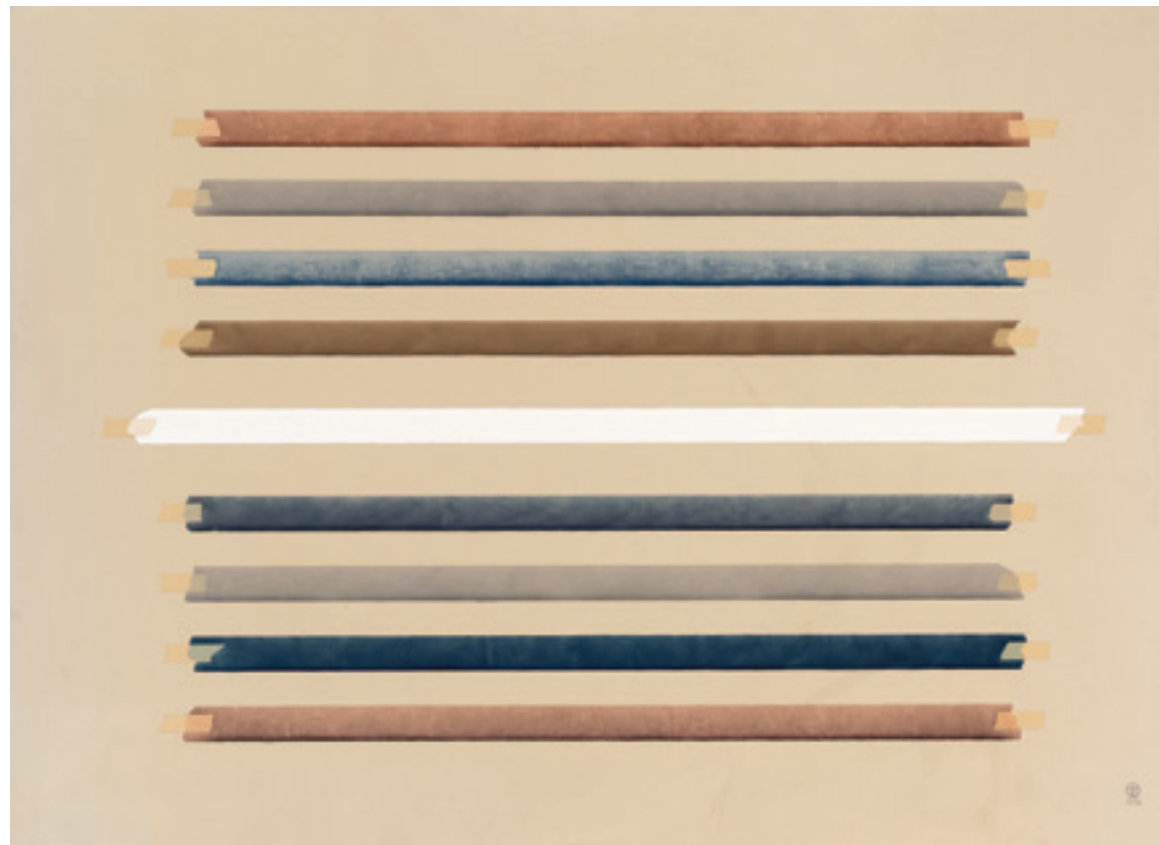












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- 22 *Untitled*, 1979
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