

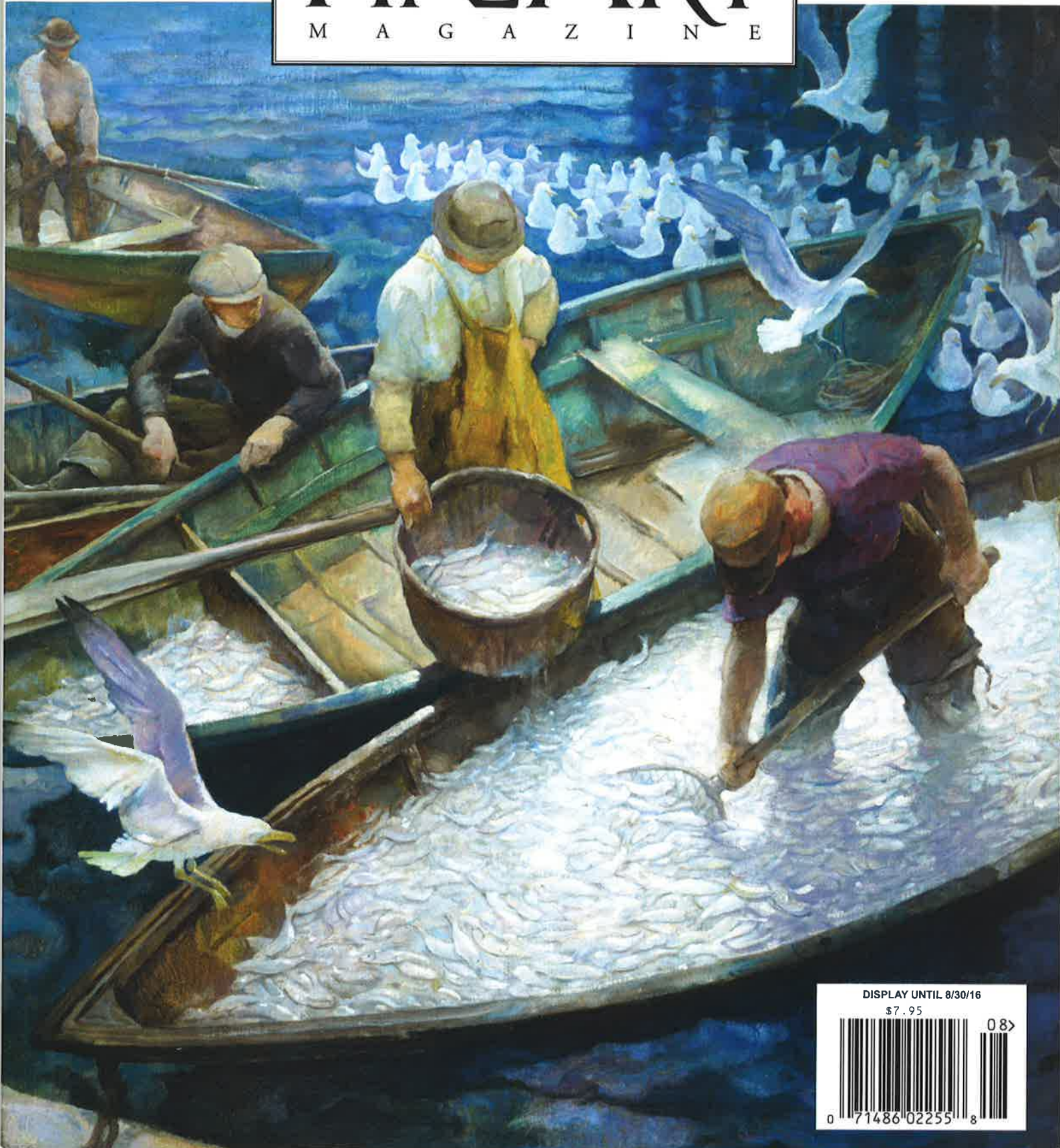
PREVIEWING UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS, EVENTS, SALES AND AUCTIONS OF HISTORIC FINE ART

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Form and Space

Van Doren Waxter in New York presents 29 India ink drawings
by American abstract artist Al Held

Through July 8

Van Doren Waxter

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Piero della Francesca (1420-1492) was a master painter of the early Renaissance. His work is known not only for its sublime renditions of religious narratives but for its scientifically analyzed geometry and perspective. He would have been right at home observing the paintings of Al Held (1928-2005) 500 years later.

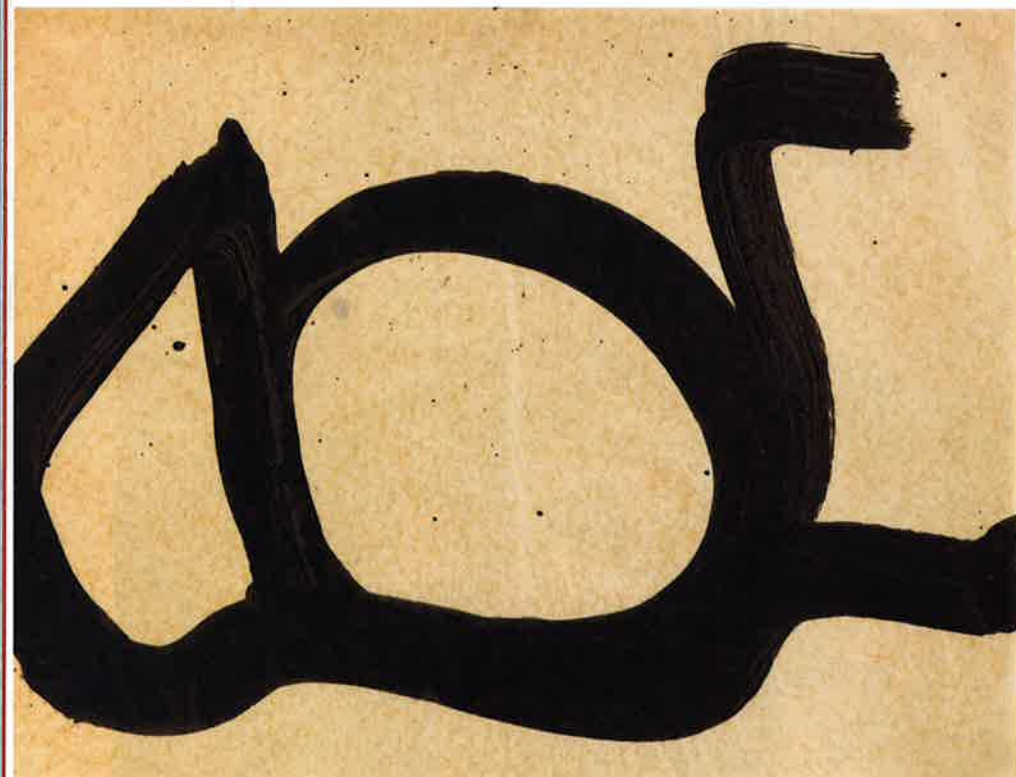
Held built two-dimensional spaces that Francesca would understand but that might confuse him the more he looked. Geometrical shapes project deep into the space of the painting itself and project out into the viewer's own space, despite "existing" only on the picture plane. Many shapes are seen from different perspectives and interpenetrate one another. "I don't think of my paintings as space trips," Held said, "but I am trying to make a space that I've never experienced or seen."

In the catalog to her 1974 exhibition *Al Held* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Marcia Tucker wrote first about the obvious. "Because they are markings on a two-dimensional surface, all paintings involve space—optical space, illusory space, conceptual and mathematical space, as well as the physical space which the painting occupies as a tangible object."

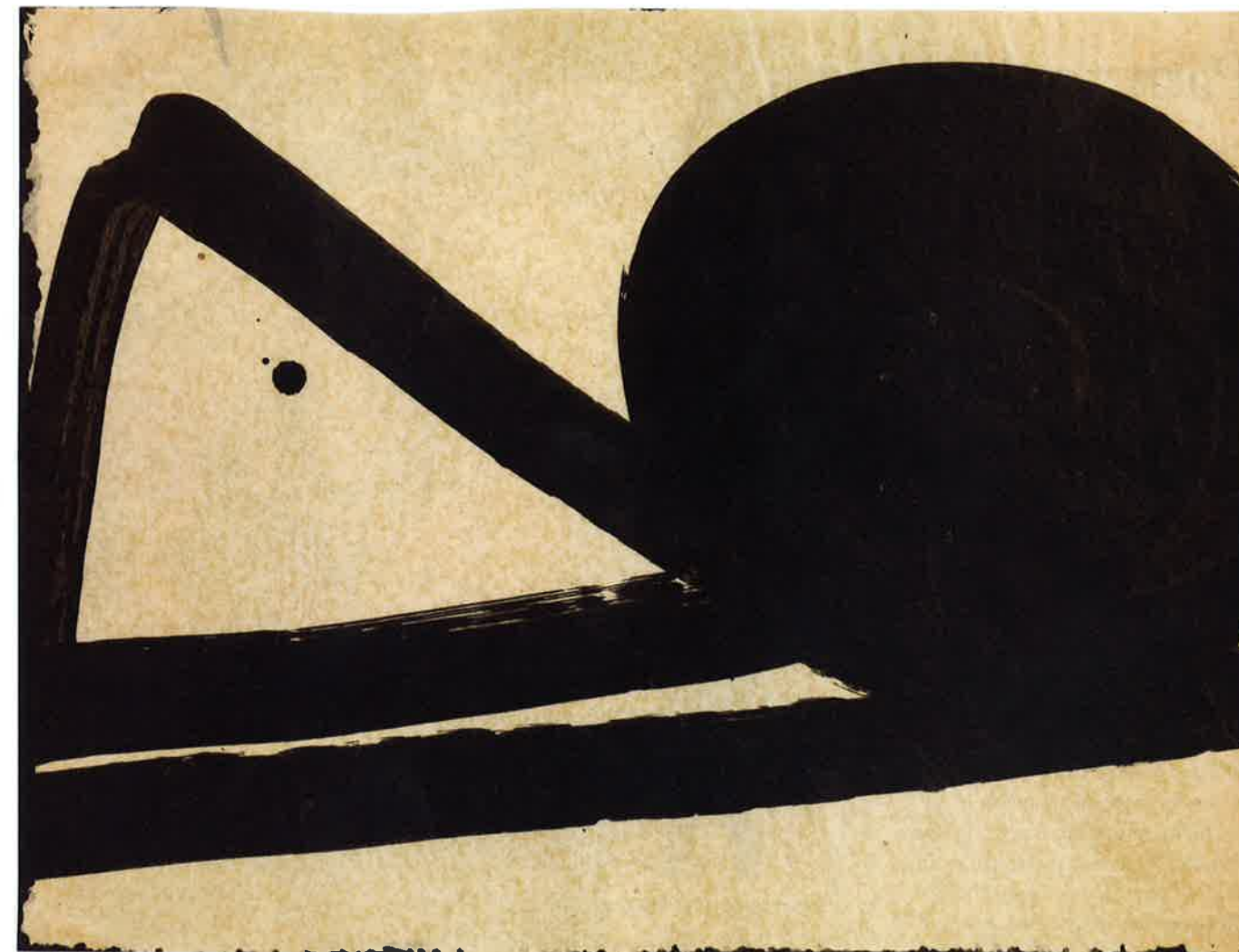
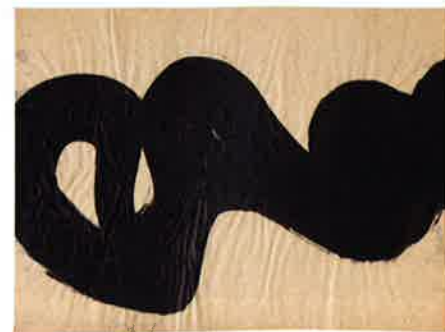
She then described the complex. "Held's work similarly develops from predominantly topological concerns in the pigment and geometric paintings to an extensive exploration of projective and, more recently, Euclidean space. Recent work is marked by multiple points of view, oblique space, shifting perspectives, optical projection into the viewer's space, elimination of all color but black and white, and the absence of a clearly defined surface plane. It is of such visual complexity that it is impossible to retain an eidetic image

Far left: Al Held (1928-2005), 60-127, 1960. India ink on paper, 18¼ x 24 in.

Left: Al Held (1928-2005), 60-7, 1960. India ink on paper, 18 x 23¾ in.



Al Held (1928-2005), 60-127, 1960. India ink on paper, 18¼ x 24 in.



Al Held (1928-2005), 60-97, 1960. India ink on paper, 18¼ x 24 in. Images courtesy the Al Held Foundation, Inc. and Van Doren Waxter, New York / Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

of a single painting. The work has clearly changed from engagement with large size and materiality, compelling the viewer to move parallel to the canvas (or to back away from it), to illusionistic optical movement in and around the picture plane."

In the 1960s, at the same time Held was working out the complex geometries of his massive paintings, he was making small ink on waxed paper drawings. They, too, deal with space, nearly filling the picture plane or creating negative space. They recall the brush paintings and calligraphy of Asia in the freedom of their expression. They also recall the free brushstrokes

of his earlier paintings as he emerged from an abstract expressionist style to his later precise lines.

Al Held: Brushstrokes, India Ink drawings from 1960, an exhibition of 29 of these drawings, is being held at Van Doren Waxter in New York City through July 8. The gallery notes, "A departure from Held's more recognizably hard-edged, overlapping geometric abstractions, these are spare works consisting of one or two brushstrokes of black ink on waxed paper. Disarmingly simple, they are not considered studies but rather a series unto itself, existing as an exacting visual preamble to his larger-scale statements

on perception and depth of field."

Held was born in Brooklyn and wandered around New York as a boy. He joined the Navy at 16. Returning to New York, he studied at the Art Students League of New York and, later, on the GI Bill, the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris. He returned, again, to New York when it was the hotbed of abstract expressionism. He said, at the time, "I want to give abstract expressionism structure."

Marcia Tucker gave him more credit, praising him for "making space conceptual, intellectual, abstract and magical." ■