

(U) The Melzac Collection

UNCLASSIFIED

From Intelligentsia

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The Melzac Collection is located throughout both CIA's Original Headquarters Building and New Headquarters Building.

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The 29 modern paintings at CIA represent an elemental approach to art, a swashbuckling donor, and a correlation to the art movement contemporary with the OMB architecture. These paintings within our compound affirm the original intention of DCI Allen Dulles that the CIA be campus-like in character. Such art is a perfect and necessary complement of the multifaceted academic pursuit of understanding ourselves and others. It reinforces the Agency's unity of purpose and unifying theme. The paintings within our walls and the architecture that surrounds them complement each other.

The way the eye perceives color and pattern was the subject of Norman Bluhm, Gene Davis, Howard Mehring, Kenneth Noland, Thomas Downing, Alma Thomas, and the other artists of the Washington Color School. These artists worked in Washington, DC, at the same time as the better known and more gestural abstract expressionists Jackson Pollock and Willem De Kooning worked in New York City. The Color School work was part of a new minimalism in American art.

For the first time, color and the raw materials of painting—paint and the raw, unprimed canvas—became the subject matter. As artist Kenneth Noland advocated, "The thing is to get that color down onto the thinnest conceivable surface, a surface sliced into air as if by a razor. It's all color and surface." These artists poured the paint onto the canvas in layers of thin washes and repeated color in patterns of stripes or dots or rhythmic paint strokes. Standing in front of these paintings, you will sense the rhythm of the layered colors and the movement of the paint. Many of the paintings are so large that they tend to absorb the viewer. The collection's patron—the late Vincent Melzac—was a larger-than-life figure. A Washington business executive who began collecting art at age 16, he collected work by promising new artists and grew to love it. Every major collection in Washington, including the National Museum of American Art and the Phillips Collection, eventually benefited from his largesse.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Melzac made more contacts in the art world and filled his collection with many works by the artists represented here at the Agency today. He became the CEO of the Corcoran Gallery of Art in the early 1970s. He raised prize cattle and Arabian horses on his West Virginia farm until his death in 1989.

Melzac's first loan of art to the CIA came in 1968 when eight large paintings by Norman Bluhm, Gene Davis, Thomas Downing, and Jack Bush were selected by officials of the Corcoran Gallery to fit the large open spaces of OHB. At that time, he also loaned a sculpture by Giorgio Spaventa; it now resides in the Vatican. Melzac also donated sculptor Marc Mellon's bust of George H. W. Bush that stands at the top of the stairs of the OHB lobby. In 1982, DCI Casey awarded Melzac the Agency Seal Medallion for his generous support to the CIA.

Paintings Owned by CIA



(b)(4)

ARROWS by Robert W. Neumann, 1967



Black Rhythm by Gene Davis, 1964



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Center Grid by Thomas Downing, 1960

Dapple by Thomas Downing, 1959]]

Inside Orange by Norman Bluhm, 1966

Mars Refection by Alma Thomas, 1972

Flanks by Thomas Downing, 1967



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Untitled "Concentric Squares" by Thomas Downing, 1959

Untitled "Gray" by Howard Mehring, ca. 1938-1959

Untitled "Orange" by Howard Mehring, 1959

Untitled "Reverse Edge" by Howard Mehring, 1960

Paintings on Loan to CIA



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Fold-II by Thomas Downing, 1968

French - 75 by Norman Bluhm, 1960

Passing Waterfall by Norman Bluhm, 1958

Rudder by Thomas Downing, 1965

Untitled "Brilliance" by Howard Mehring, ca. 1958

Untitled "Calligraphy" by Andrea Epstein, 1989

Untitled "Diagonal" by Howard Mehring, ca. 1938