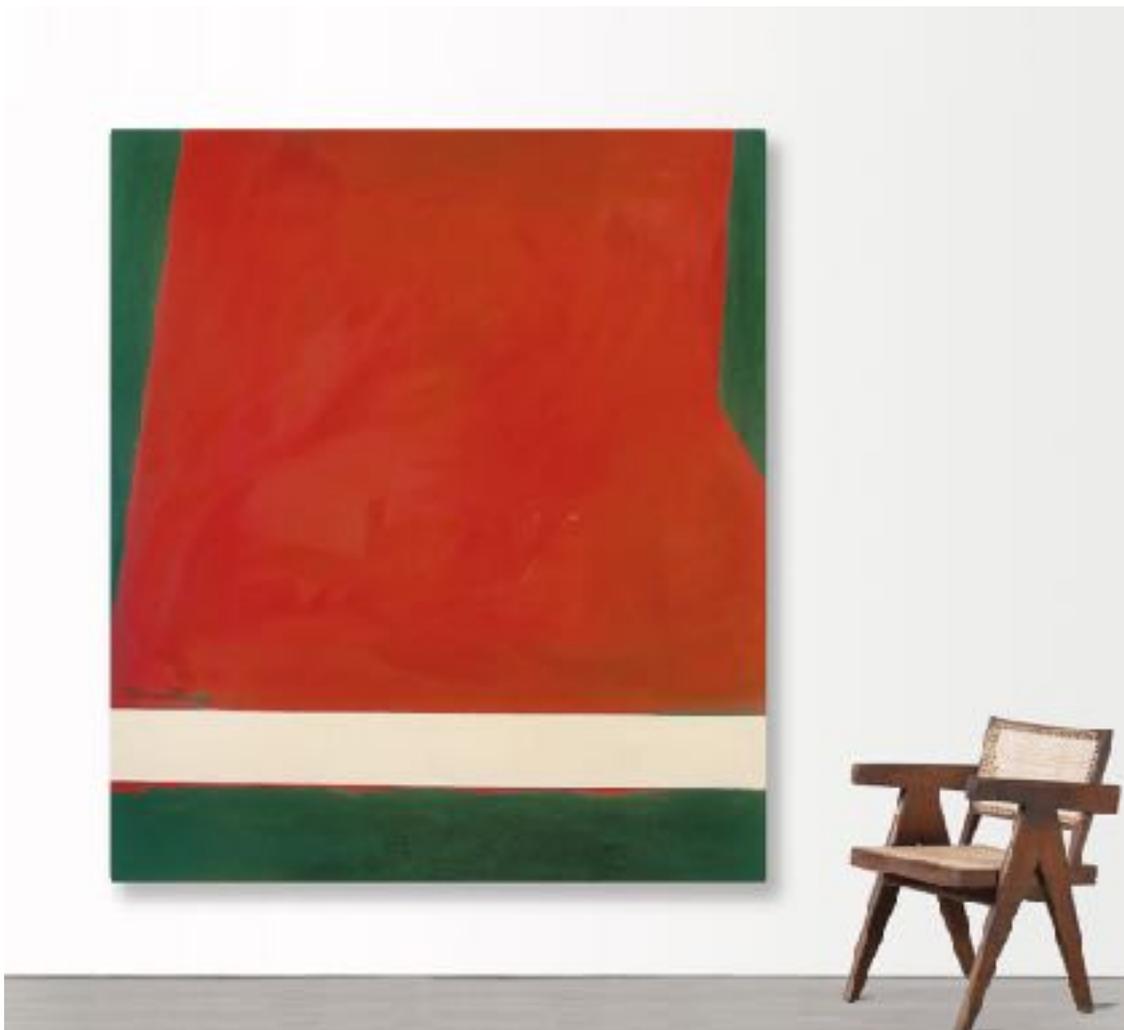


# ROWNTREE CLARK



Robyn DENNY

1930-2014

Place 3

oil on canvas

213.5 by 181.5cm,; 84 by 72in.

signed, titled, dated 1959 on reverse

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# ROWNTREE CLARK

## PROVENANCE

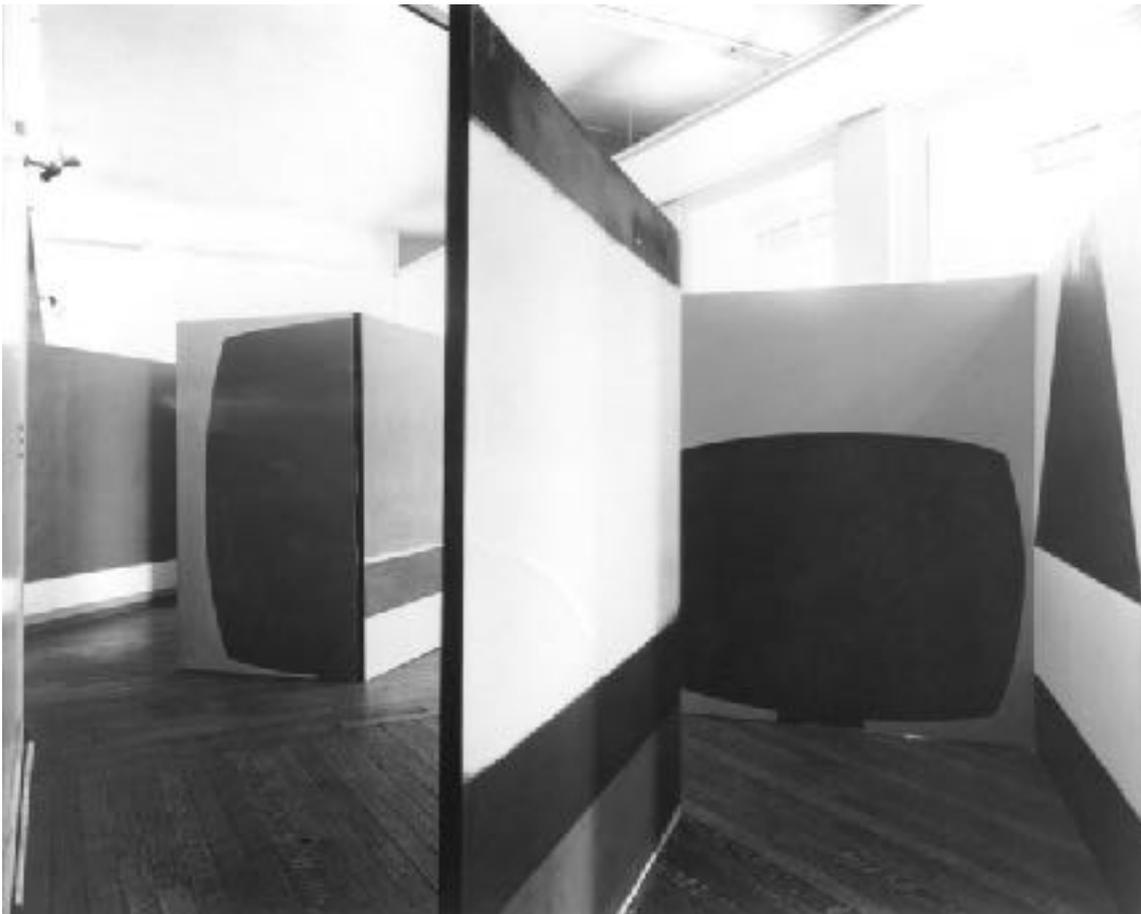
The Estate of the Artist and thence by descent;  
Private Collection 2022

## EXHIBITED

London, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Place, 1959;  
London, Situation. An exhibition of recent British Art, British Arts Council, 1962/3  
(touring exhibition in England);  
London, Tate, Robyn Denny, 7th March - 23rd April 1973, no.20,  
touring to: Stuttgart, Württembergischer Kunstverein; Leverkusen, Städtisches  
Museum; Verona, Studio La Citta; Amsterdam, Galerie T

## LITERATURE

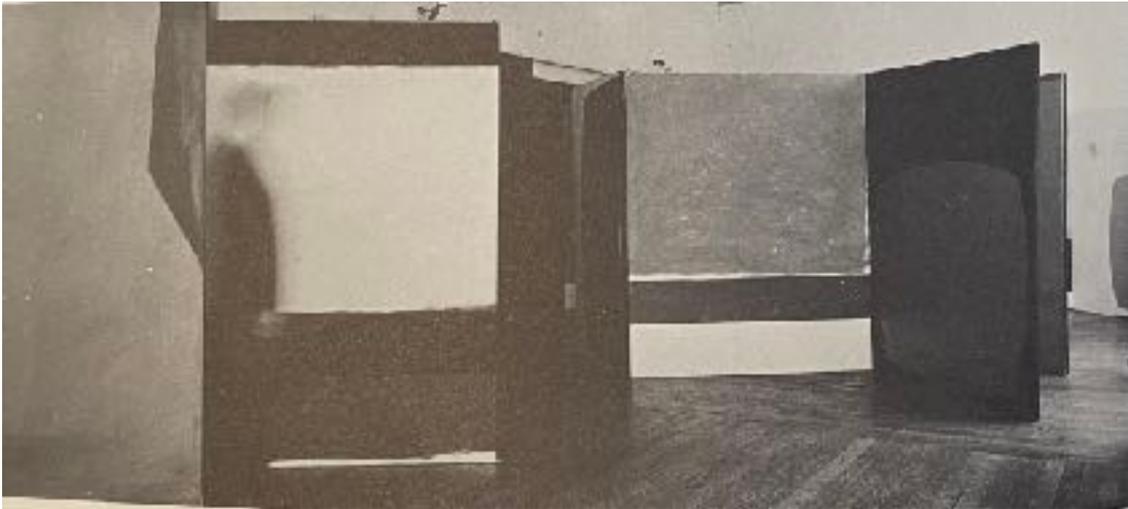
David Thompson, Robyn Denny, Penguin Books, London, 1971, p.63;  
Robert Kudielka, Robyn Denny, The Tate Gallery 1973, exh.cat., p.66  
Margaret Garlake, Robyn Denny. Early Works 1955-1977, London 2008,  
illustrated, p.47



Photograph of the "Place" exhibition held at the ICA in 1959

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Robyn Denny is one of a legendary group of artists, among them Richard Hamilton, Bridget Riley and William Turnbull who transformed British art in the late 1950s. His generation includes Peter Blake, Richard Smith and David Hockney. Denny embodies their drive to renew contemporary British Art as an expression of urban vitality with an emphasis on urban modernity, abstract expressionism and popular culture.



Photograph of the "Place" exhibition held at the ICA in 1959

'Place 3' is arguably the best painting from a group large scale works made specifically for the now legendary exhibition of the same name which was held at the ICA in the autumn of 1959.

The rules of 'PLACE' stipulated:

Size:

7ft x 6ft and 7ft by 4ft.

7ft by 6ft was chosen as the standard size as it is just larger than man-size at full stretch [...]

Colour

Red, Green, Black, White (used singly or in any permutation) [...]

Organization

The paintings are arranged diagonally across the gallery to give four main vistas [...]

'Place' was a collaboration between Robyn Denny, Richard Smith and Ralph Rumney, each of whom contributed a similar number of paintings. The purpose of the exhibition, proposed by Alloway and elaborated by the artists, was to test visitor's perceptions by inviting them into an unprecedented environment. The

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paintings stood directly on the floor, without frames, which was considered astonishing at the time. They were arranged in two parallel zigzags to suggest a maze, which visitors would be obliged to negotiate. Drawn into a simple game, the viewer would be transformed 'from a spectator into a participant' while the maze was understood to act as a metaphor for a complex city environment.'



R. Blyth (1906-1977), PLACE, Plate 1 (1959), New York collection



R. Blyth (1906-1977), PLACE, Plate 2 (1959), New York collection

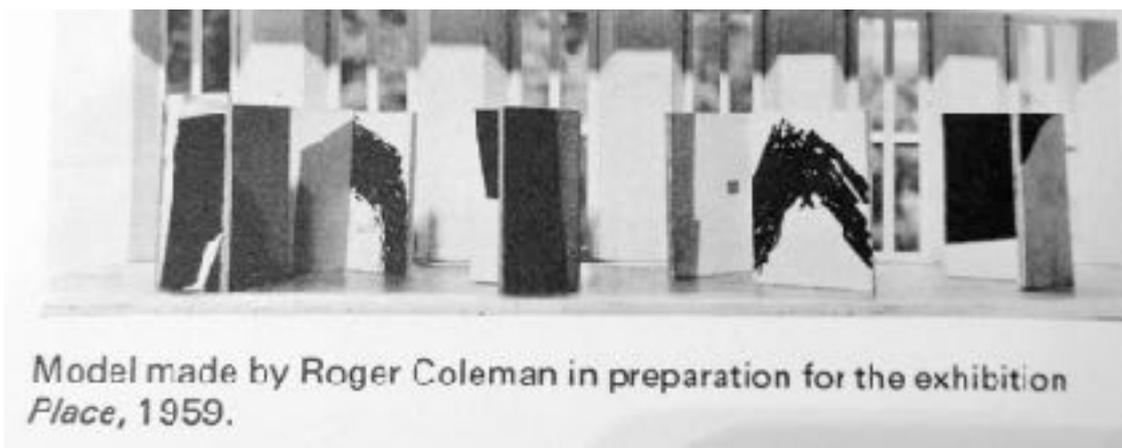


R. Blyth (1906-1977), PLACE, Plate 3 (1959), New York collection



R. Blyth (1906-1977), PLACE, Plate 4 (1959), New York collection

'Place' was opened on 23 September 1959. Roger Coleman who was on the ICA exhibition committee arranged for it to be shown in Dover Street. In the 'Guide' to the exhibition Coleman expounded not only the installation but the background to the undertaking: the mass media ('not a source of imagery but a source of ideas that act as stimuli and as orientation), space in American painting (space being a direct function of the size of the painting surface), and games theory (spectator relationship to the situation). The paintings in 'Place' were strictly speaking no longer pictures. They no longer hung on the wall as isolated objects - anticipating what was later to be considered one of the major achievements of British Sculpture through the likes of Caro. The spectator shared with them a common basis, and it was this common ground that 'Place' was all about. But critics did not play along: it was an extravaganza of exhibition design, a bad joke; it was a hoax, a gesture of contempt for art.



Model made by Roger Coleman in preparation for the exhibition *Place*, 1959.

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Richard SMITH, Place II - 1959, Sotheby's, 21/11/2018 - £87,500

These concerns are a link with the American gestural abstract painting Denny and Smith experienced at first hand in New York. Smith had a 21-month Harkness Fellowship in 1959, and became, with Harold Cohen, Anthony Caro and Richard Hamilton, what Hughes called a 'pictor transatlanticus'. New York was for them what Paris had been to the previous generation, 'not only because of the painting', for Smith at least, 'but because America was the home of other cultural manifestations that I like, jazz, rock and roll and a certain kind of architecture'. Smith and Robert Denny had both visited the Venice Biennale in 1958 and saw large new works by Mark Rothko in the American pavilion, as well as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg at the Italian Pavilion. The scale of these along with the large scale Tintoretto fresco has a lasting impact on Denny that would evolve in the similarly large scale, "Home from Home 1959', (right) now in the Tate collection, and culminate in the works Denny produced for the 'Place' exhibition.

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"This experience he related to the then current theories about man's relationship with the urban environment, especially that the density of city architecture did not allow people to step back to observe it. It occurred to him that he should try and achieve this same effect with his paintings, so that the spectator should not wish to 'step back', and therefore, see the paintings on a small scale, but should experience them close to. At the time he wrote (Artist's Archive No. 11, p. 1): 'Big pictures, man-scaled for comfort, myopic involvement demanding close spectator participation-I like them to be nice to be near'."



Tate entry on 'Home from Home 1959' painting just before the 'Place' exhibition.