



William Peacock and Kate Booker the artist's paternal grandparents, 1930s.



Father Sydney Charles Peacock and mother Grace Winnifred Underwood with the young son in 1947 at Cottage Farm, Tempsford, England in 1947.



Second Cousin, John Bettles, Cottage Farm, Station Road, Tempsford, Bedfordshire, England 1947.

Beginnings: London, England 1945 – 1969

I WAS BORN IN LONDON ON THE 26TH OF JULY 1945. I lived at 52 Shakespeare Road, Herne Hill, SE until 1961. My childhood love of art grew during time spent at St. Jude's Primary school where, inspired by pots of thickened paint, I was content to paint for hours on the school easels affixed with art paper.

MY MOTHER, GRACE WINIFRED UNDERWOOD (1906–1986) loved to draw and paint. I remember spending many hours at her side doing just that. Mother was not an accomplished artist and, like so many things in her life, never had the opportunity to develop her talents. She played the piano, mostly by ear, and I recall her happily playing her way through a song. Since we had no piano at home, this usually happened at family gatherings, weddings, and funeral receptions. Mother was the youngest of six children and, after the death of her mother, she was treated very poorly by her stepmother. Her education was limited due to frequent changes of schools, a result of the family's many moves to manage public houses around London. She married my father while in her late thirties, taking on the role of homemaker, and later working in a munitions factory during the Second World War.

My maternal grandmother was a music teacher from Dublin, Ireland and my grandfather was a Scottish publican. Unfortunately, I never knew any of my grandparents, as they had all died before I was born.

MY FATHER, SYDNEY CHARLES PEACOCK (1903–1976) was born in Riegate, Kent, and later moved to Staplehurst, where my English grandmother and Scottish grandfather owned a general store. My father worked in army canteens as a boy during the First World War, and later served in the Royal Artillery as a General's groom during the years between the two world wars. He traveled with the army to India and Singapore, and fondly recounted those experiences. During the Second World War, he joined the London Fire Service as a motorcycle dispatch rider instructor, training the riders who carried messages during air raid blackouts.

Following the war, father went into the motorcycle business with his brother and friend, Tom Monday. "Mondays," as the business was called, became known across England for fitting sidecars to motorcycles. My uncle Bill rode in motorcycle trials and performed stunts. My cousin Raymond also took part in motorcycle trials, rode for rep teams, and competed throughout the 1950s. The father of John Sertees, the British motorcycle champion and later racing car champion, was a friend of my father.

He would invite us to Brands Hatch racetrack, where we would visit the pits when John was racing. I think my love of speed was born there amongst the smell of oil, rubber and leather. From childhood, I rode on the pillion of my father's motorcycle, and soon became accustomed to bikes and speed. This passion continued into my youth, when I worked at my uncle's motorcycle store, and at Earls Court Motorcycle show selling motorcycles and sidecars.



Graham Peacock at age 7.



Dad's motorbike and sidecar in the 1930s.



Outings with Dad's Matchless motorcycle and sidecar, 1950s.



Father served as a groom in the Royal Artillery after the Second World War into the late 1930s; he was a motorcycle instructor with the London Fire Service training air raid dispatch riders during WWII; Father on horseback, Royal Artillery, 1930s.



52 Shakespeare Road, London, SE24, the family home from the artist's birth until 1960.

SHAKESPEARE ROAD IS OFF RAILTON ROAD, which runs between Brixton and Herne Hill, close to Dulwich Road and Brockwell Park, and is only three miles from Big Ben. The area had come through the Second World War mostly intact. Some bombsites remained into the 1950s, but these were either boarded up or had become open areas filled with gardens planted by school children. In winter, they became the site of community bonfires. On November 5, effigies of Guy Fawkes were burned and fireworks lit the skies, Fawkes being infamous for his attempt to blow up the Houses of Parliament in 1605.

HERNE HILL WAS A QUIET NEIGHBOURHOOD after the war, full of large trees, hedges and manicured gardens. On Sundays, fish sellers with cockles, mussels, fresh shrimp and winkles would tour the streets. Horse drawn milk and coal carts delivered to the houses. There were very few cars on the roads then, but there were certainly many elderly ladies sitting in windows, ready to scold us street soccer players when our ball landed in their gardens. Scrumping apples and pears from those same gardens was also a late summer treat.

We lived on the lower floor of a three-storey row house that had a small front garden, which I liked to tend. Mr. Langley, who lived on the main floor, kept a greenhouse in the back garden where he would grow Dahlias and Geraniums, all to be potted up over the winter and planted out in the spring to produce a flower garden of outstanding quality. He kindled my love of gardening, and I learned by watching him work, admiring the different colours and varieties of plants he grew.

WEEKENDS WERE OFTEN SPENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, since my father loved nothing more than to get out of the city to visit my mother's sister and cousins' farm in Tempsford, Bedfordshire. I spent many summer holidays there as a boy. We would camp, picnic and drive to the south coast in South Devon, or visit friends on the Isle of Sheppey, where we would gather cockles on the beaches. Fond memories abound of such adventures, experienced as an only child, with perhaps a friend and my parents. Fresh water river fishing on the Thames was also a weekend pastime with my neighbourhood friends easily accessed by bus and train.

IN 1956 AT THE AGE OF ELEVEN, I attended the new Tulse Hill Comprehensive School, an eight-story building with six gymnasiums, situated on the other side of Brockwell Park, and accommodating two thousand uniformed boys. I enjoyed many early morning walks in the mists and the frosts of spring and autumn days while crossing the park to school. The entire third floor of the school was the art department, staffed by teachers who were mainly graduates from London Art Schools. I studied art as my major subject and from my third year on, began working from life, doing clothed studies, still lifes, and imaginary compositions. I also made ceramics, furniture and carved wooden sculptures. In art history, we wrote about and copied the great painters whose works were on view in the London galleries.



At age 12 with parents in Beer, South Devon, England, on holidays with Mom and Dad.

I had inspiring teachers, and at sixteen years of age was accepted into Goldsmiths College of Art, London University. In 1962, at just seventeen years of age, I started my first year of art school.

BY THE MID 1950S, increasing commonwealth immigration was radically changing the face of London. Wealthy Nigerians and Jamaicans began purchasing houses on Shakespeare Road and renting out rooms, one family to a room. This overcrowding drove many existing residents out as the area changed from tranquil suburb to urban ghetto. With overcrowding and poverty came crime, resulting eventually in the race riots and burnings of Brixton in 1981.

A similar fate befell our house. The old lady on the top floor died, and our new Nigerian landlord moved in a mother with six Irish laborer sons. They liked to drink, which led to heated arguments at all times of day and night that required the police being called to contain the fighting. I recall my father, in one of many stressful situations, arguing with the landlord about not putting a mattress in our coal storage, and then coming home the next day to find the landlord had buried the spring mattress 6” under the back lawn. It seems comical now but it was very stressful then. Mr. and Mrs. Langley and their daughter left the middle floor, and soon the reggae parties and dancing above our heads had our ceiling dropping some six inches. The trees began to be cut down, houses were painted all colours, pink with black-lined bricks being popular, and sole food, drugs and weekend parties abounded.



Mother and Father on the beach at Beer, Nr. Seaton, South Devon, England.

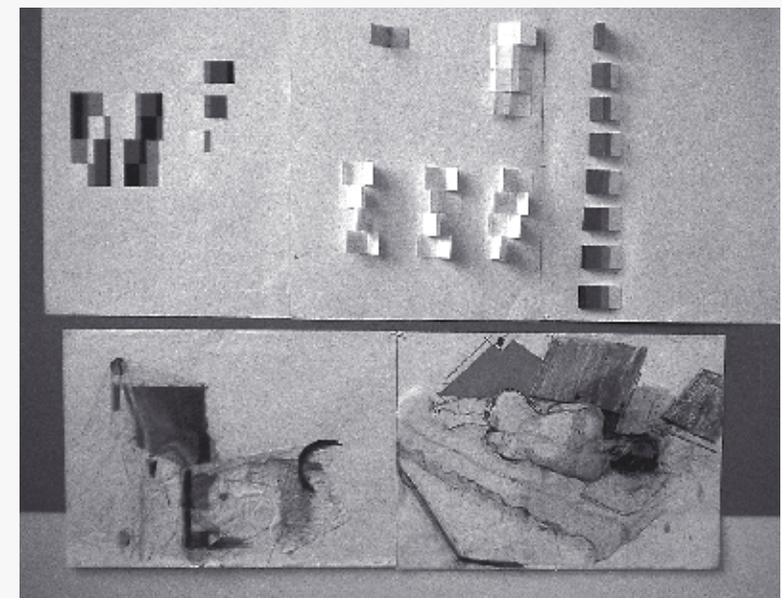
Although these times were very stressful for my parents and me, some of this change in our cultural environment I actually enjoyed. But by the 1980s, the upheaval experienced by the neighbourhood had Brixton becoming one of the most dangerous areas in London. Now, 30 years later, it has once again returned to being a nice neighbourhood.

IN 1961, MY PARENTS FINALLY WERE ABLE TO MOVE into a council house on Monkton Street, off the Kennington Road, near the Imperial War Museum and Lambeth Bridge. I could walk to the Tate and National Galleries. Viewing these collections during the years I was at Art School (1961 to 1966) was an invaluable experience. It amazed me how much my taste was expanded through seeing the exhibitions and permanent collections.

I was trained in contemporary and classical principles of drawing, painting, and sculpture. I drew from life, modeled heads, and figures, made observational work and abstracted forms in two and three dimensions. Mondrian and Malevich were my first major influences.



London University, Goldsmiths College School of Art, Pre Diploma (Foundation Studies) 1961-1962.





21st Birthday July 26, 1966 in Jerusalem, on a tour through the Middle East.



On the beach in Tel Aviv, Israel, with Dutch friend Hans Bes.

I WAS ENROLLED AT GOLDSMITHS SCHOOL OF ART in the first year of a pre-diploma program of the new Diploma in Art and Design, largely based on the fundamental teachings of the Bauhaus movement. I was trained in contemporary and classical principles of drawing, painting, and sculpture. I drew from life, modeled heads, and figures, made observational work and abstracted forms in two and three dimensions. Mondrian and Malevich were my first major influences. Andrew Forge was the head of painting, and my painting teachers were Basil Beatty, Chris Pace, and Albert (Bert) Irwin. Kenneth Martin and William Tucker taught me in sculpture.

DURING MY SECOND YEAR AT ART SCHOOL, I BECAME THE ART SCHOOL SOCIAL SECRETARY, and for the next two years was responsible for booking bands and arranging dances. The art school was attached to a teachers training college so in all the student population was over 2000 and we drew students from all over London to our dances.

ASIDE FROM SCHOOL, I WAS SINGING, AND PLAYING DRUMS AND HARMONICA with a blues band, and visiting the clubs in London to select acts. Sonny Boy Williamson was a resident performer at my favorite club, The Marquee Club. The resident band was the Yardbirds, with Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page and Alan Price with Rod Stewart and Long John Baldry on vocals.

Some of the bands I booked included The Who, The Moody Blues, The Kinks, Graham Bond Organization, and The Train (Steampacket), comprised of Julie Driscoll, Brian Auger and the Trinity, Long John Baldry and Rod Stewart.



Double Spiral 1964
36 x 36 inches

London University, Goldsmiths School of Art, DIP.A.D. Studies.

Sometimes our Blue Note jazz/blues band would play the intermissions, but the band broke up when our keyboard player Neil Innes left to go to the Royal College of Art. Neil later became the musical director for Monty Python productions. "Say no more".

When I left Goldsmiths, I was working abstractly in both painting and sculpture. I was absorbed by the paintings I had seen by Mark Rothko and Morris Louis in London, finding them to be uplifting. I also saw paintings by John Hoyland, a prominent London artist and teacher, and I knew then, that I needed to see more of the work of the New York School. In sculpture, my influence came from Anthony Caro, whose 1961 sculpture *Early One Morning* was a new acquisition on display at the Tate Gallery. That sculpture opened my eyes to what sculpture could be, with its poetic visual counterbalancing of weights and movements, the like of which I had not seen before.

FOLLOWING GOLDSMITHS IN 1966-67, I WENT TO LEEDS COLLEGE OF ART as a postgraduate student. Roy Slade was the director of the graduate school, and Richard (Ricky) Atkinson was the head of the college of art. Influenced by the American artist Richard Smith, I was working on shaped geometric canvases, some of which projected out from the wall, and modular sculptures that ended up more like industrial design objects than sculptures and I soon returned to painting.

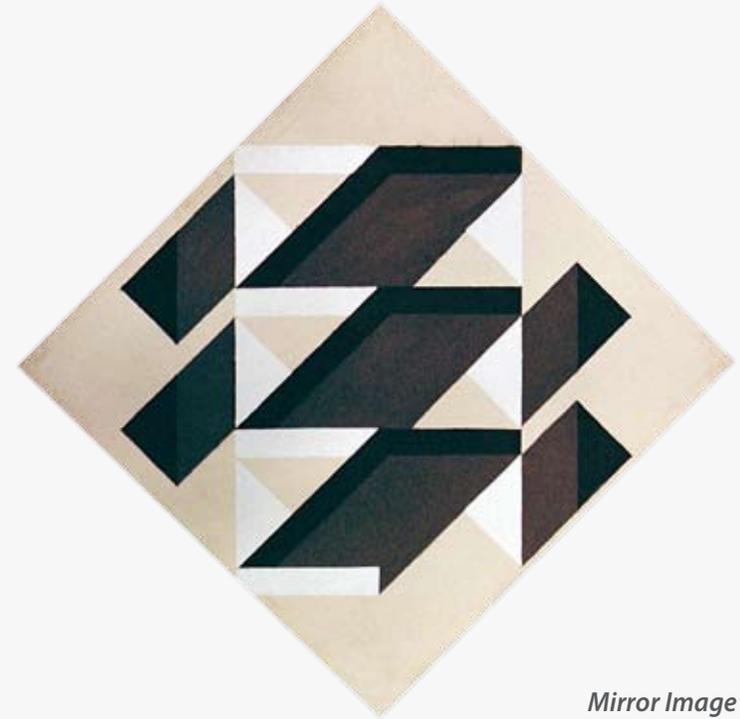


LEEDS WAS A SCHOOL NOTORIOUS FOR ITS 'TENT INSTALLATION' performance works, and although painting and sculpture continued, performance art or 'happenings,' as they were called then, were common. Those were the days when Yoko Ono and her husband were touring England, performing in a large sack in which they would assume various suggestive positions in silence. All very odd and rather uneventful.

UPON GRADUATING FROM LEEDS IN 1967, I was offered a position teaching fundamentals at both Wolverhampton College of Art and Newport College of Art. I chose Newport in the Monmouthshire hills, rather than the industrial north of Wolverhampton.

I was appointed to a Lectureship Grade 2. The pay was very poor, and I had very little money or time to paint. Although I had been short-listed out of several hundred applicants for both jobs, and felt fortunate to get such a position at the age of twenty-one, I soon found that teaching four full days a week, with meetings on the fifth day, left bleak prospects for development as a painter in England. So, I started looking for other options.

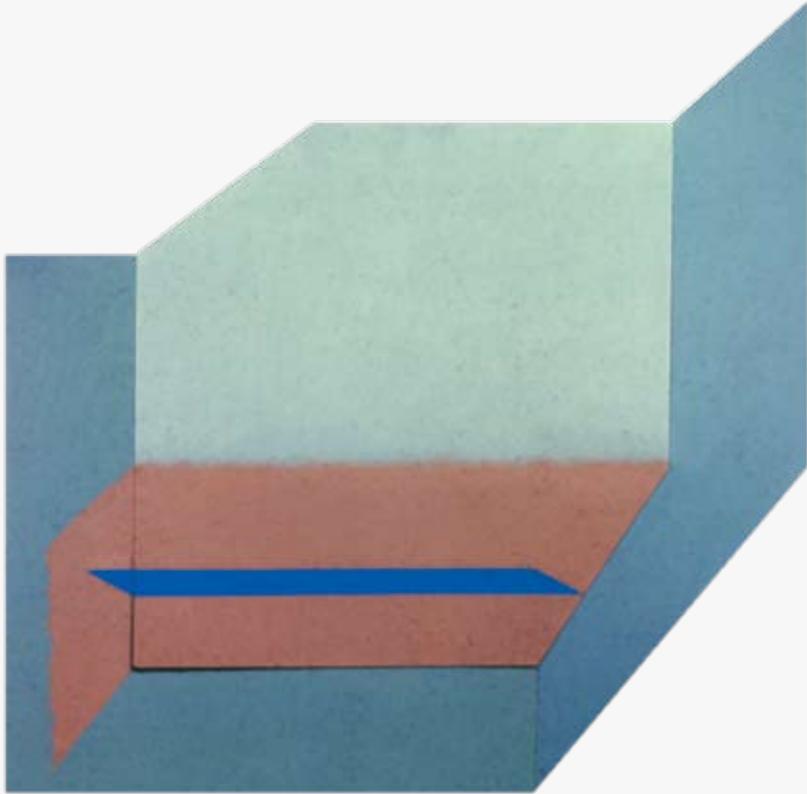
Geometric painting from 1967 made at Leeds College. The artist age 22.



Mirror Image 1965
36 x 36 inches
Acrylic on canvas

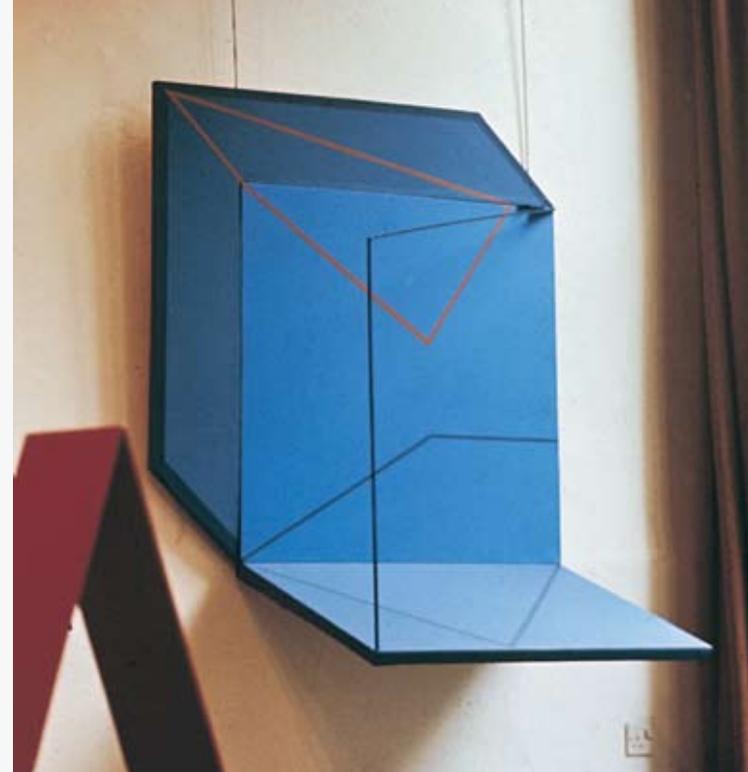


Rectangles to Square 1966
48 x 48 inches
Acrylic on canvas



I WAS SUCCESSFUL IN GAINING AN ITALIAN GOVERNMENT SCHOLARSHIP TO ROME. I had previously been the runner-up for a British Council/German Government scholarship in 1967, so I applied again for Germany and Italy. I went to Rome for eight months in the fall of 1968, on a leave of absence from the Newport College of Art. I was granted a studio at the British School at Rome for a few months, where I made a series of striped grid Mondrian-influenced paintings in bright colours. Afterwards, I staged a showing of these works at the school. Then I lived in an apartment, 2a via del Colosseo, with a pianist who rose at 6:00 a.m. 7 days a week, to practice on the grand piano in the next room. The rent was cheap, needless to say. I sold a small paper piece to the British Consul, and traveled throughout Italy to see the collections in Florence, Bologna, Ravenna, Assisi, Umbria, Venice, and Naples.

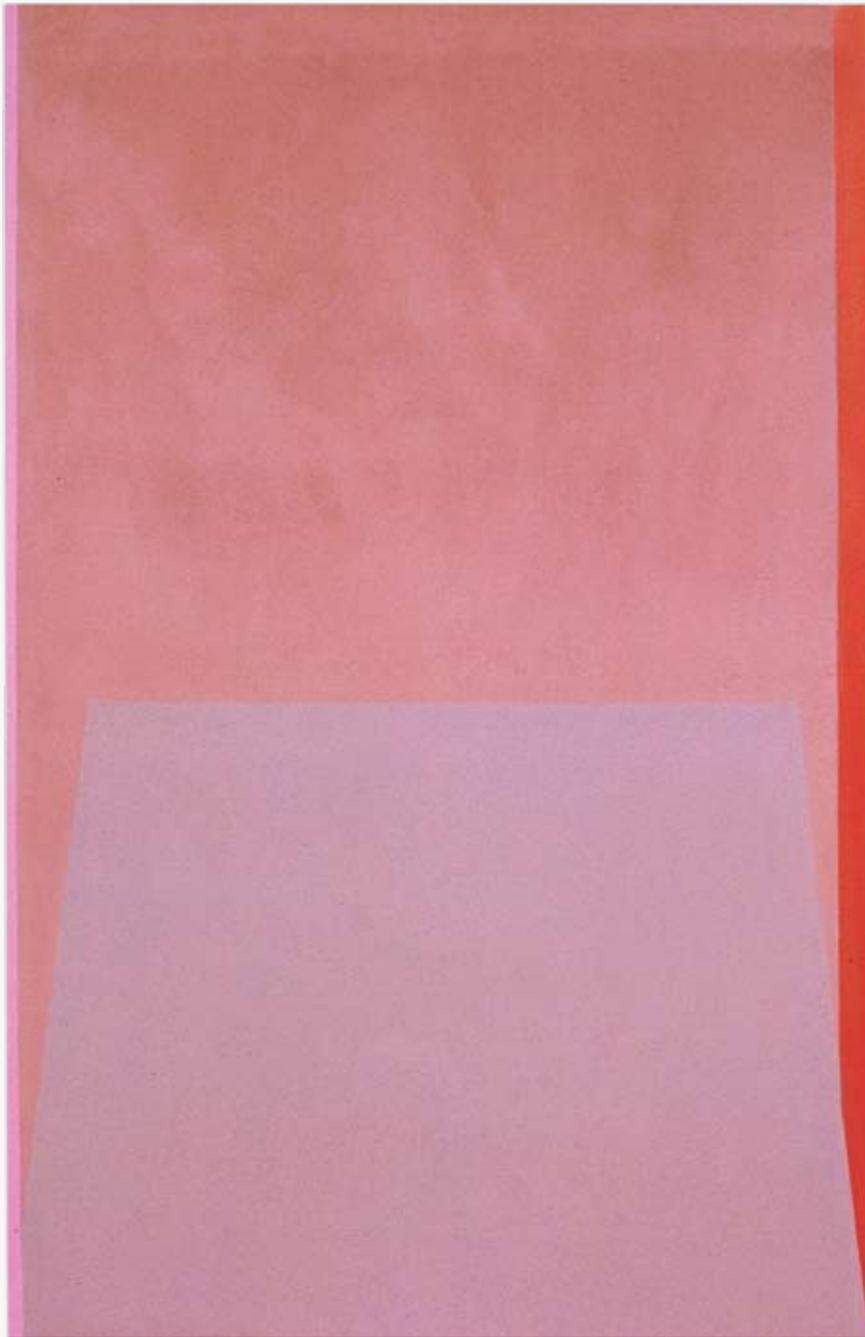
Square Off 1968
72 x 72 inches
Acrylic on canvas
Artists inventory



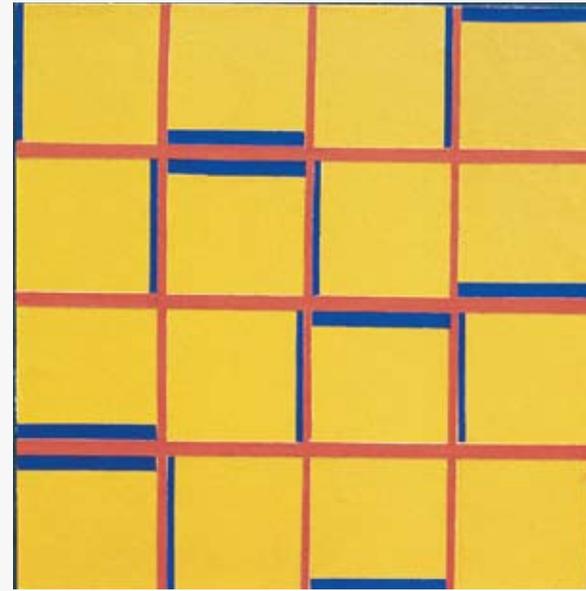
Post Graduate exhibition Leeds City Art Gallery, 1967.



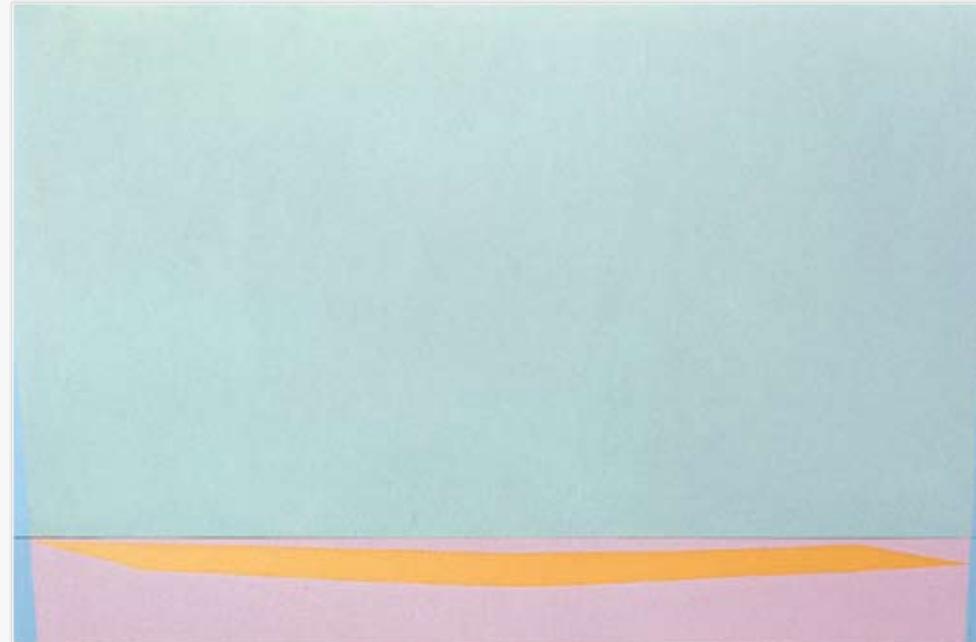
Post Graduate studio at
Leeds College of Art, 1967.



Two Reds 1968
96 x 54 inches; acrylic on canvas; artist's inventory



Grid Study 1969
12 x 12 inches; paper collage



Curve 1968
36 x 48 inches; acrylic on canvas; artist's inventory



Patricia and Ethan, Ferry crossing, Isle of Skye, Scotland in 1976.

DURING MY TIME IN ROME, I met students from the Tyler School of Art's Rome campus, including a New Yorker, Patricia Bratman, who in 1970 was to become my wife. Faced with the prospect of returning to England, and on meeting Pat, I began to look for work in North America. I had met a number of American archeologists, which led to an introduction to Professor Jonathan Knowlton, a painter from Yale on leave from the University of Alberta. He was working in Fiesoli, a small town in the hills above Florence. The University of Alberta's Department of Art was expanding its BFA program and actively searching for staff. On viewing my work, Knowlton recommended me to the Chair, Professor Ronald Davey, an English art historian



Graham Peacock in New York by the United Nations 1970.

hired in 1966 to build an art and design program. I was offered a two-year position in the Department of Art and Design at the University of Alberta.

WHEN I ARRIVED IN EDMONTON, I PAINTED IN A HOUSE ON CAMPUS where the new Telus building now stands, before moving to the Kelly Ramsey Block in downtown Edmonton in 1973, where I remained for 34 years. My studio space was 3000 sq. ft but by the 1980's it had increased to 7600 sq. ft. In 2005, I was forced to relocate to a 5000 sq. ft studio in the Dorchester Building, also in downtown Edmonton, where I now work.

I returned to England from Rome, resigned from my Lecturer position at Newport College of Art, moved back to St Neots, Cambridgeshire, where my parents were living in retirement, accepted a Professorship at the University of Alberta, and moved to Edmonton in August 1969.



Graham Peacock's parents visit to Canada, 1972.

In 1970, I married Patricia Bratman. Patricia was a printmaker and while in Edmonton, she worked as a designer for the Alberta Teachers Association. As a freelance designer for The Edmonton Art Gallery she designed the large E rainbow logo that the gallery started using in the 1970s.

In 1975, Patricia and I had a son, Ethan. We separated agreeably in 1977 and eventually divorced in 1979. Patricia remarried and had two more children. She moved to Carmel, California where she teaches art and has a graphic design business. Ethan completed high school in Carmel, and returned to Edmonton to complete a B.F.A. in Sculpture and Drawing at the University of Alberta. He now owns his own successful business, Elfsar Comics in Yaletown, Vancouver B.C.