

Plagens, Peter. "John McLaughlin," *The Wall Street Journal*, 2 March 2013.

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John McLaughlin

Van Doren Waxter

23 E. 73rd St., (212) 445-0444

Through April 19



John McLaughlin/Van Doren Waxter

'Untitled' (1951) by John McLaughlin at Van Doren Waxter.

A photograph in a 1962 *Life* magazine spread on California painters shows John McLaughlin (1898-1976) standing on a sunny golf course near his home in Dana Point. The artist, leaning on a club, looks quite neat and natty. Beside him stands one of his typical paintings: a frozen scroll of horizontal white rectangles, with one black band, on a bright yellow ground. If you've seen Mr. McLaughlin's deceptively simple pictures, you can feel the man's life-experience (son of a Massachusetts senator; husband to a descendant of Ralph Waldo Emerson; collector of and dealer in Asian art; Marine Corps translator in the Pacific during World War II; an artist who painted seven hours a day, seven days a week) philosophically distilled onto canvas.

The mostly self-taught Mr. McLaughlin wasn't interested, however, in painting his autobiography, but in transcending it. "My purpose is to achieve the totally abstract," he once said. "I want to communicate only to the extent that the painting will serve to induce or intensify the viewer's natural desire for contemplation without benefit of a guiding principle.... This I manage by the use of neutral forms."

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The painting on the golf course isn't in this slender exhibition, but four others are—including a surprising and small early (1947) biomorphic painting, and a 1951 black-and-white canvas, with a circle in it—that indicate how rigorous Mr. McLaughlin's road to pure rectangles was. For those who enjoy looking for a long time at a few works that are exactly right without being finicky or precious, this is your show.