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Robert Fishko, *Director*

**ILYA BOLOTOWSKY**  
**(1907-1981)**

**Selected One -Person Exhibitions:**

- 1930 G.R.D. Studios, New York
- 1946 New Art Circle, J.B. Neumann, New York
- 1949 Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York
- 1950 Rose Fried Gallery, New York
- 1952 New Art Circle, J.B. Neuman, New York
- 1954 Grace Borgenicht Gallery, New York  
(also 1956, 1958, 1959, 1961, 1963, 1966, 1968, 1970, 1974, 1976, 1978, 1980)
- 1960 State University College of Education, New Paltz, New York
- 1965 Parish Art Museum, South Hampton, New York
- 1970 Ilya Bolotowsky Paintings and Columns, traveling to Newport Harbor Art Museum, Balboa, California, University of Colorado, Boulder, University Art Museum of New Mexico, Albuquerque, The University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City
- 1973 Recent Serigraphs, Wichita Art Museum, Kansas
- 1974 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Ilya Bolotowsky, travelled to the National Collection, Washington, D.C.
- 1980 Ilya Bolotowsky, WPA Murals: Paintings From 1935 to 1945, Washburn Gallery, New York
- 1981 Salt Lake Art Center, Utah
- 1982 Yares Gallery, Scottsdale, Arizona
- 1983 Bolotowsky And His Circle, New York University Grey Art Gallery
- 1984 Five Decades, Washburn Gallery, New York IL Punto Blu Gallery, Southampton, New York River Gallery, Irvington-On-Hudson, New York Pembroke Gallery, Houston, Texas

### **Selected Group Shows:**

- 2022 *Important Works of American Art*, Forum Gallery, New York, NY  
2012 *Five Decades: Art and Artists of Forum Gallery 1962-2012*, Forum Gallery,  
New York, NY  
2008 *New Acquisitions*, Forum Gallery, New York, NY

### **Public Collections:**

Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA  
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York  
Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Ct  
Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, Al  
Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York  
Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, PA  
Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA  
Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH  
Robert Hull Fleming Museum, Burlington, VT  
Gotheborg Museum, Gotheborg, Sweden  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY  
Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.  
Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN  
University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa City, IA  
Jerusalem Museum, Jerusalem, Israel  
Lyman Alyn Museum, New London, CT  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY  
Michener Art Museum, University of Texas, Austin, TX  
University of Minnesota, Duluth, MN  
Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, NY  
Musee d'Art Moderne, Ceret, France  
Museum of Fine Arts, Calcutta, India  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA  
Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY  
National Collection of Fine Arts Washington, D.C.  
Newark Museum Association, Newark, NJ  
New Jersey State Museum, Trenton NJ  
University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM  
North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, NC  
Oklahoma Art Center, Oklahoma City, OK  
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA  
Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.  
Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, R.I.  
Edward Root Collection, Utica, New York  
Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA  
Salt Lake City Art Center, Salt Lake City  
San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, CA  
Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, NB  
Slater Memorial Museum, Norwich, CT  
Societe Anonyme Yale University, New Haven, CT  
J.B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY

The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL  
The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX  
Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH  
Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN  
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York  
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven,

Ilya Bolotowsky had a legendary career that involved painting, sculpture, mural production, as well as teaching and also filmmaking. He was an idealist who constantly embraced new trends in search for order and balance in response to his tumultuous upbringing in Russia.

Bolotowsky was a socially progressive thinker who devoted his life to enriching the abstract tradition. He found that the geometric discipline of the cerebral Neoplasticism exemplified by Piet Mondrian was a way to express his desire for a dynamic equilibrium. His geometric abstractions of the 1950s achieved a sophisticated balance of linear spatial divisions and striking color tonalities.

In a review of his 1974 retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum, which traveled to Washington D.C.'s National Gallery, he had his work singled out as scarcely human, commanding a design sense of tremendous power and flexibility.

Born in St. Petersburg, Ilya Bolotowsky became a leading early 20th-century painter in abstract styles in New York City. His work, a search for philosophical order through visual expression, embraced Cubism and Geometric Abstraction and was much influenced by Dutch painter Piet Mondrian. **(Source - Bulter Institute of American Art)**

Bolotowsky immigrated to America in 1923 and, settling in New York City, attended the National Academy of Design. He became associated with a group called The Ten, artists including Julian Weir and Childe Hassam who rebelled against the strictures of the Academy and held independent exhibitions.

In 1936, having turned to geometric abstractions, he was one of the founding members of the American Abstract Artists, a cooperative formed to promote the interests of abstract painters and to increase understanding between themselves and the public.

During this period, Bolotowsky came under the influence of the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian and the tenets of Neoplasticism, a movement that advocated the possibility of ideal order in the visual arts. Bolotowsky adopted his mentor's use of horizontal and vertical geometric pattern and a palette restricted to primary colors and neutrals.

His mural for the Williamsburg Housing Project, New York, was one of the first abstract murals done under the Federal Art Project. Despite Bolotowsky's clear, precise control of his images, he emphasized the role of intuition over formula in determining his compositions.

In the 1960s, he began making three-dimensional forms, usually vertical and straight sided.

(Source: Website of Utah Museum of Fine Arts)

**The following is excerpted from the New York Times, August 6, 2001 by Daniel Watkin:**

*Shedding 7 Coats, a Beauty Emerges on a Hospital Wall*

By DANIEL J. WAKIN

For nearly six months, the men of Ward B-11 watched restorers chip and dissolve their way through seven coats of institutional paint. They breathed the mingled odors of solvent and hospital food. They wondered at the stream of important-looking visitors to their day room.

And they witnessed the resurrection of a 1941 landmark of abstract art in America.

It is a mural by the Russian-born artist Ilya Bolotowsky in the circular day room at Goldwater Memorial Hospital on Roosevelt Island. The 350-square-foot assembly of lines, right-angled shapes and pastel colors has undergone a complete restoration, which was completed on Monday.

The mural lay hidden and forgotten for decades, a victim of the passive neglect of bureaucrats, until it was featured in 1991 by the Municipal Arts Society's Adopt-a-Mural program and funding was pieced together for the restoration.

"It's an absolutely wonderful thing," said Andrew Bolotowsky, the artist's son. "My father was very serious about this particular work, as he was about all his works. It was very dear to his heart."

In his lifetime, Bolotowsky, one of the nation's first important abstract painters, knew his mural had been painted over. But he did not speak about it often, his son said. "The things that were most important to him, he was quiet about," Andrew Bolotowsky said.

In 1981, Bolotowsky began reproducing the mural as an acrylic painting, but he died before finishing the canvas. The mural faded from memory. Now it is back, and the tale of its excavation carries a fair number of twists and turns. So did the life of Bolotowsky.

Bolotowsky (boh-loh-TUFF-skee) was born in 1907 in St. Petersburg, the son of a lawyer and an artist. The family fled the Russian Revolution for Constantinople, and immigrated to the United States in 1923. Bolotowsky attended the National Academy of Design in New York, served in the Army as a technical translator in Alaska, made movies, and wrote plays and short stories.

He had a Balkan-style mustache and a photographic memory. He played Bach slowly and romantically on the harpsichord. For exercise as a young man, Bolotowsky would walk from Manhattan to Tarrytown, N.Y., and back. As a father, he would

take his son on walks lasting hours to lectures on "anything and everything," Andrew Bolotowsky said.

Bolotowsky was a founder, in 1936, of American Abstract Artists, a group that included Piet Mondrian, Ad Reinhardt and George L. K. Morris. They created purely abstract art in a style that came to be known as Neo-Plasticism.

Like many abstract painters of his time, Bolotowsky is not very well known, said Debra Balken, a historian of American modernist art and independent curator. But scholars and art lovers are beginning to rediscover the period.

"His contribution was keeping alive abstract painting during the decade of the 30's," she said. "It was the decade of the Depression. It was not fashionable to be an abstract painter."

As Bolotowsky was beginning American Abstract Artists, the Federal Works Progress Administration commissioned him to create a mural, one of the first abstract murals in the country, for the Williamsburg Housing Project in Brooklyn.

The W.P.A. also hired him to paint a mural at the hospital, at the time called the Hospital for Chronic Diseases, on what was then called Welfare Island. Bolotowsky was a second choice. (Wiser heads prevailed when the first choice, Byron Browne, proposed a photomontage of vigorous young athletes, perhaps not ideal for a hospital that was built in 1939 for tuberculosis patients.)

"The most suited design for a hospital mural should contain no definite subject matter but should be generally soothing in its line and color," Bolotowsky wrote in his proposal.

In the post-World War II years, institutions lost a taste for government-funded art, particularly abstract works, and many of the hundreds of W.P.A. murals in New York fell on hard times. Bolotowsky's mural was painted over.

Samuel Lehrfeld, the executive director of Goldwater, part of the Coler- Goldwater Specialty Care Hospital and Nursing Facility, has served in some capacity at the hospital since 1972. He said he learned about the mural's existence somewhere on the grounds in the early 1980's. "If we had seen that mural, and if anybody had painted it, there would have been somebody dead here," he proclaimed.

Bolotowsky embarked on his project to recreate the work, plus two others feared lost, in 1979.

A lucky stroke helped. Years earlier, Jackson Pollock came across a scaled- down preliminary version of the mural in a pile of W.P.A. materials, Andrew Bolotowsky said. Pollock retrieved it; his wife, the artist Lee Krasner, later donated it to the Guggenheim Museum. Bolotowsky photographed the scale version to use for his acrylic reproduction.

On a gray November day in 1981, as he was on his way to let in a visitor, Bolotowsky stepped through the manually operated doors of the freight elevator at

his Lower Manhattan loft. He was unaware that the elevator was at the ground floor; he plunged down the shaft and died. Andrew Bolotowsky still has the charcoal sketch his father was working on at the time for the central panel of the mural reproduction.