Barbara Aulinger

LUCIEN C. KAPP
PAINTING BETWEEN THE MUR AND THE MISSISSIPPI



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ISBN Print: 9783205221326 — ISBN E-Book: 9783205221333

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Painting between the Mur and the Mississippi

Translated from German by Maria Slater

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ISBN Print: 9783205221326 — ISBN E-Book: 9783205221333

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek:
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data available online: https://dnb.de.

© 2024 by Böhlau Verlag, Zeltgasse 1, 1080 Wien, an imprint of the Brill-Group (Koninklijke Brill BV, Leiden, The Netherlands; Brill USA Inc., Boston MA, USA; Brill Asia Pte Ltd, Singapore; Brill Deutschland GmbH, Paderborn, Germany, Brill Österreich GmbH, Vienna, Austria)
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Cover image: *Last Tango at the Forum Decatur,* Illinois, 1968/2015, 10 x 12 in, watercolor, pen and metal ink, private collection
Typesetting: Bettina Waringer, Wien
Translation: Maria Slater
Cover design: Michael Haderer, Wien

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com

ISBN: 978-3-205-22133-3

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ISBN Print: 9783205221326 — ISBN E-Book: 9783205221333

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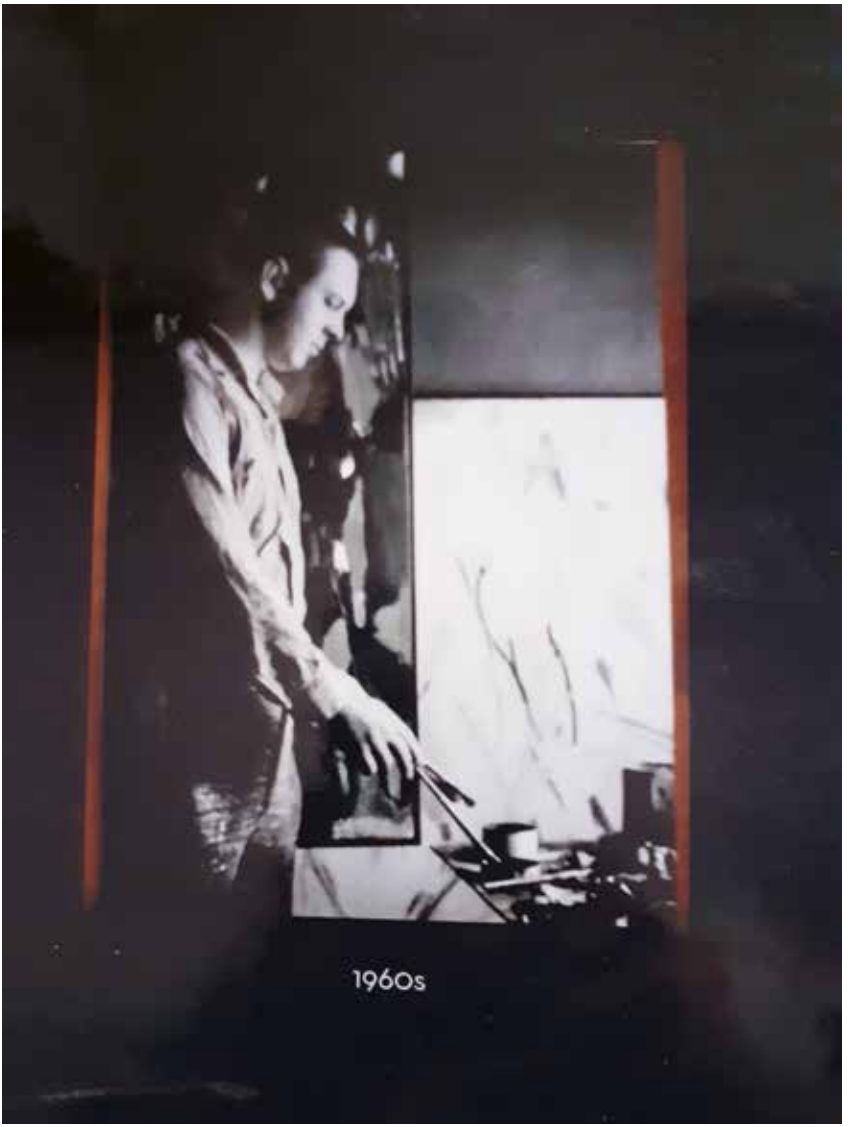
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Lucien Cyril Kapp passed away in his home in Decatur on April 30, 2024, at the age of ninety. He continued producing art until the very end.

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"It is ghastly to start replacing creative work with theory formulation. I contend that ingenious creators did not create theories but artworks, on the basis of which theories were later developed."
(Natalia Goncharova 1912: letter to the editor)

"Every work of art is the child of its time. […] It follows that each period of culture produces an art of its own which can never be repeated."
(Wassily Kandinsky 1912: *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*)

"I paint within the limitations of the prevailing mode. Its time in the continuum seems right."
(Lucien Cyril Kapp 1960)

"In fact, the form of the work of art gains its aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed and understood."
(Umberto Eco [1962] 1989: *The Open Work*)

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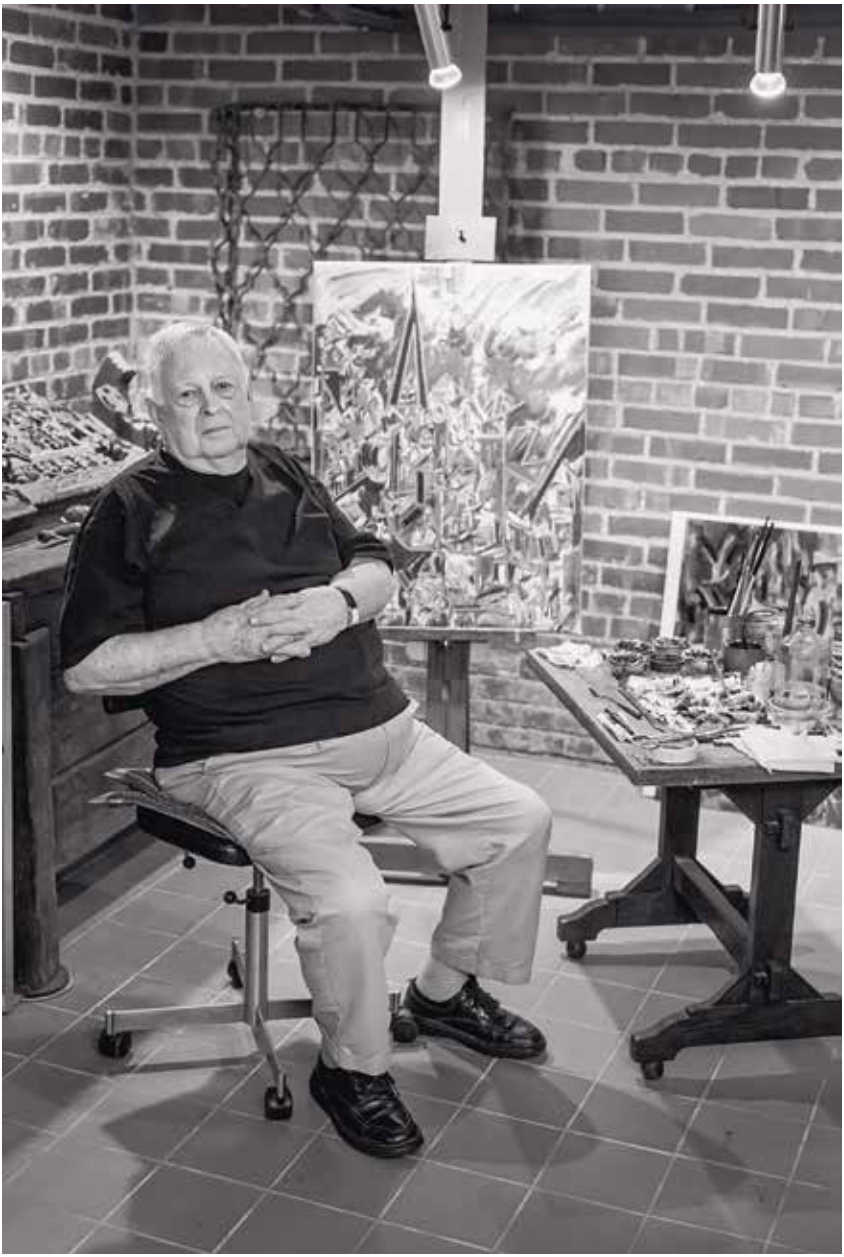


Fig. 1: Lucien C. Kapp in his studio in 2016; an unfinished portrait of Maria Lankowitz is on the easel.

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Condensing the World

The American painter, graphic artist, poet, and designer Lucien Cyril Kapp created an extensive body of work that spans almost seventy years. Born in 1933, he was descended from German immigrants and married an Austrian woman.

His path to Abstract Expressionism was determined by three strands of memory and places of experience: first his home state of Illinois, once inhabited by Indigenous peoples like the Cahokia, the Menominee, and the Illini; second the Asian and Japanese art that he had encountered as a young artist during the two years he served in the US Navy; and third his many trips to Austria, mainly to western Styria.

It was in these three worlds of thought that Lucien Kapp developed his unique stylistic idiom that is influenced by Surrealism and the "mythmakers" of the 1940s. The role he accorded the title of each picture was new and inseparable from the work itself, the words and the picture combining to present a challenge to the viewer. Whereas many artists, especially in the big cities, turned to Pop Art, Kapp found a new means to "condense the world" by abstracting his memories and his view of the American way of life. His response to the anxiety present in the artistic movements of these decades was an internal river of imagination that forged a bridge between Abstract Expressionism and the present day.

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