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Archie Rand's Landmark *Letter Paintings* Acquired by Italy's Modena FC Collection



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Archie Rand, *La Vern Baker*, 1969.

JARVIS ART

For decades, Archie Rand's "Letter Paintings" series has been something of a cult favorite among painters and critics. Now, 44 of them are heading to an unlikely home: the corporate collection of Italy's Modena FC.

New York-based gallery Jarvis Art announced this week that the Italian football club has acquired the group of paintings, which Rand made between 1968 and 1971 while still a teenager. The series was shown in 1983 at the Museum of the Carnegie Institute and reunited in a 1991 exhibition at Exit Art in New York, where it earned a jazzy review from *New York Times* critic Roberta Smith. The works have rarely been seen together since.

The paintings marked an early turning point for Rand. As a teenager, he apprenticed under painter Larry Poons and became an acolyte of the influential critic Clement Greenberg, who saw the young artist as part of the next generation of abstract painters. But instead of following that path to its logical conclusion, Rand veered off script. He began writing the names of the musicians, poets, artists, and public figures he loved across luminous abstract canvases, turning Color Field painting into something deeply personal.

Looking back years later, Rand described the works as "tombstones for the unheralded." They were, he said, an attempt to paint something modern art had largely forgotten: love.

In her review, Smith argued the paintings deserved far more attention than they had received. She praised the way they fused the lush surfaces of Color Field painting with the language and references of Conceptual art, calling them works that balanced "reverence and irreverence." She went on to suggest they anticipated later developments ranging from New Image Painting to Jean-Michel Basquiat's use of musicians' names.

"This acquisition of one of Archie's most prominent historical series, along with the great success of his recent show at the gallery, *Heads*, is a testament to the longevity of his work, not just today but throughout his career," said Lindsay Jarvis, founder of Jarvis Art.