



## KEN GREENLEAF

A true “boomerang,” Ken Greenleaf grew up in Damariscotta and returned to Maine after having lived in New York for 20 years. He has had solo and group shows at various New York galleries, including Tibor de Nagy, and in 1994 participated in a two-person show at the Farnsworth Art Museum with Dozier Bell, who is now his wife. Recent shows include a 2012 solo at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art and group shows at the National Academy in New York and the Bottega Gallery in Kiev, Ukraine. When Greenleaf was living in New York in the 1970s and 1980s, his work was highlighted in writings by art historian and performance artist Laurie Anderson and poet John Ashbery and received additional critical attention in the *New York Times*, *Artforum*, *ARTnews*, and *Art in America*. Greenleaf’s work is in the collections of the Portland Museum of Art, Farnsworth Art Museum, Indianapolis Museum of Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, among others. Greenleaf also writes art criticism for the *Portland Phoenix* and *Art New England*. He is represented by Berry Campbell in New York.

Greenleaf was first introduced to making things by hand in the mid-1960s through an apprenticeship with a harpsichord maker. Later, fortuitously, he assisted the sculptor Isaac Witkin, which in Greenleaf’s recollection “opened up a lot for me and set my artistic direction for a number of years.” Mass, scale, shapes, edges, color, and their interactions have since been the main focus of his work. Emphases have shifted over the decades, but these formal elements’ relationship to reality has remained at the core of Greenleaf’s investigation. The artist’s path of discovery has taken him from large-scale sculptures of metal, stone, and wood to intimate drawings on paper. Along with this move away from the sheer presence of mass toward more subtle statements, the viewer’s engagement has become

increasingly important to Greenleaf. “It’s like a gift to see somebody else think,” says Greenleaf.

Since switching from three to two dimensions, Greenleaf has created distinct series of paintings and drawings to which he returns periodically. His paintings feature black geometrical forms on shaped canvases, suspending the shapes in a field of energy. The forms enter the viewer’s field of vision at unusual orientations, neither horizontal nor vertical; for their full impact they often also ask to be seen from the side to reveal the continuation of a shape. A series of linear charcoal drawings on collaged paper entitled *Blackwork* introduces an interesting tension between the suggestion of spatial layering and the flatness of the drawn lines themselves.

Greenleaf’s *Gauge* series, to which the illustrated piece belongs, is his first foray

into sensitively chosen colors. Using oil pastel sticks, which add some texture to the drawings’ surfaces, trapezoids and triangles are arranged in intricate and resonant configurations of color and shape. Their interrelation introduces angles, intrusions, points of contact, and near-misses as the shapes precariously teeter or huddle into compact masses. There is a new joyfulness in this work, but also vulnerability and intimacy as interactions become concrete and transcendent at the same time. “I am aiming for a connection, a continuum of awareness between myself and the viewer,” says Greenleaf. Already well into his next series—paintings in shapes similar to the configurations in *Gauge*—Greenleaf continues to think like a sculptor, creating forms that invite not only perceptual and emotional engagement but also our movement in space.



■ ..... Gauge #33, 2012, oil pastel on paper, 8.5" x 11"