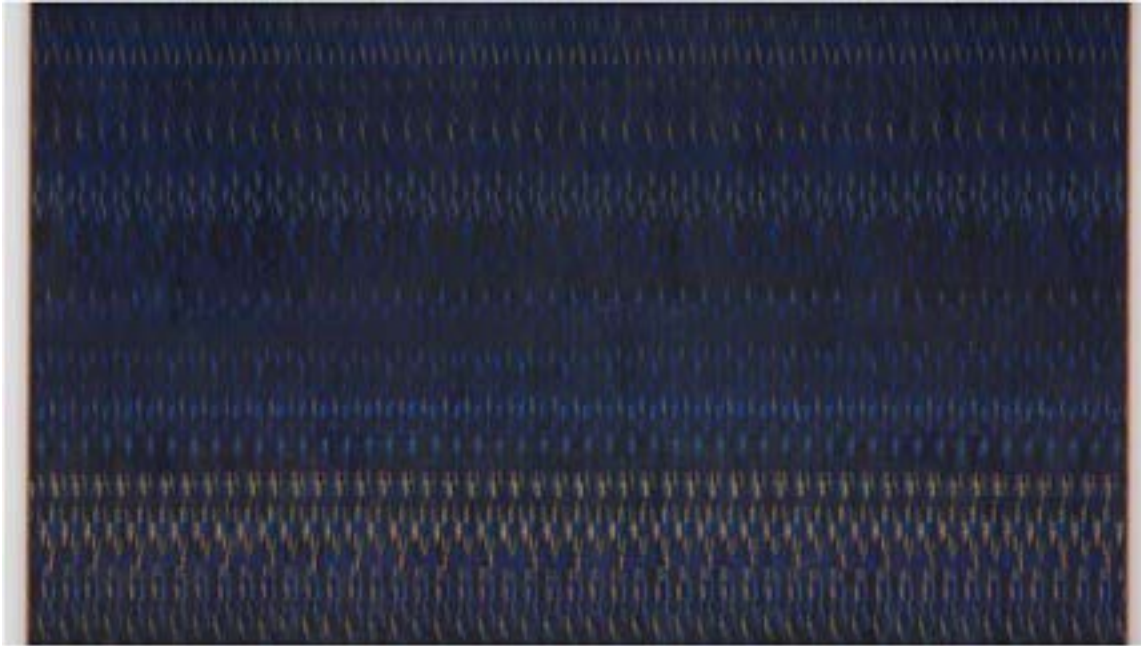## Lee Mullican's colors crackle with energy

In the mid-1970s, Lee Mullican (1919-98) stripped his paintings down to three elements: color, line and texture. At Marc Selwyn Fine Art, 10 of these oils on canvas hum with a kind of quiet dynamism that is simultaneously raw and refined.

The palette is pretty simple: midnight blue and autumnal orange. Sometimes Mullican sticks to one or the other, adding a range of brooding violets and baby blues to his dark paintings or jazzing up his rusty orange surfaces with hot red highlights and a flickering field of harvest golds. Mostly he mixes his cool blues with his warm oranges, creating a clashing symphony that is animated without being agitated, at once serene and stimulating.

Mullican's lines are even simpler: vertical streaks about an inch long and an eighth of an inch wide. Neither lined up in neat rows nor laid out in lockstep columns, each of his handmade lines looks as if it were intuitively positioned, its color and placement weighed against those around it so that the whole composition appears to be the offspring of woven cloth and rays of light.

Mullican's textures are the simplest of all: Each of his lines is a tiny ridge made with the edge of a putty knife. After dipping the tip of the knife into a puddle of paint on his palette, he pressed it, gently but firmly, on the canvas. As he pulled the knife away, the wet paint puckered upward, forming a small, three-dimensional ridge that catches the ambient light and casts a soft shadow.

In a sense, Mullican painted as if he were making crude prints or constructing exceptionally compressed sculptures. However you think of his patiently made abstractions, they are alive with the same visual energy that crackles throughout his influential oeuvre, as fresh as the day they were made and more sophisticated than their materials — and process — suggest. That's the magic that Mullican dedicated his life to delivering.

James Cohan