

# ARTFORUM



Peter Alexander, *Small Cloud Box*, 1966, polyester resin, 5 x 5 x 5".  
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## PETER ALEXANDER (1939–2020)

Peter Alexander, an American painter and sculptor closely associated with the Light and Space movement of 1960s Southern California, has died at the age of eighty-one. In contrast to his West Coast Minimalism counterparts like Robert Irwin or Douglas Wheeler, Alexander eschewed immersive, ephemeral environments in favor of contained microcosms of translucent polyester resin and Plexiglas to create works that radiated their own inner light. Though best known for his early experimentations in synthetic materials and their

pigment, scale, and shape, by the '70s the toxicity of his initial medium led Alexander to shift to painting and drawing.

Born in Los Angeles in 1939, Alexander initially studied under Louis Kahn at the University of Pennsylvania from 1957 to 1960, intending to become an architect. Following a stint at the Architectural Association in London, he matriculated at the University of California, Berkeley, then attended the University of Southern California, and eventually landed in the art department of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where he studied with Richard Diebenkorn. He continued his art studies at UCLA, during which time he began his resin sculptures, and graduated from its MFA program in 1968. These works began as line drawings and took the form of Plexiglas boxes before Alexander discovered the potential of resin, which can mimic the shape and volume of water, as in the foundational *Cloud Box*, 1966.

By the 1970s, Alexander had begun making his black velvet paintings, for which he further deployed found materials, including rhinestones, taffeta, velvet, and corduroy. His early preoccupation with light remained. Of Alexander's 1992 acrylic paintings, which are based on photographs he took of the Los Angeles riots as portrayed on his television, Alex Kitnick wrote in *Artforum* in 2015: "In a strange, almost perverse fashion, the paintings evidence a continued interest in Light and Space's primary preoccupations— atmosphere and architecture—albeit with a notably different spin. Light here is no longer associated with sun, but with heat and fire."

Alexander's work is held in the collections of the Broad Foundation, Los Angeles; the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, California; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.