



Color . . . was shared with sculpture as well as with theater. Flatness, two-dimensionality, was the only condition painting shared with no other art, and so Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else.

Clement Greenberg in "Modernist Painting"

Morris Louis

***Beta Mu*, 1960**

Acrylic resin (Magna) on canvas

102 x 170 1/8 inches

Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth,

Museum purchase, The Benjamin J. Tillar Memorial Trust

Acquired in 1980

Morris Louis followed the generation of Abstract Expressionist painters whose work focused on the expressive possibilities of color and brushstrokes. This exploration was an investigation of the most basic properties of the tools of art, an exploration that would continue for years to come. The Abstract Expressionists wanted their canvases to be real spaces, not representational or imagined ones. The subject of their paintings was the energy and emotion present in the very materials they used and how they applied them. Morris Louis and his colleagues – often referred to as Post-Painterly Abstraction Painters – took this even further by exploring the nature of the paint and the canvas itself, eliminating the emotive potential they contained. Louis was interested in the most basic properties of paint – how paint moves and dries and how colors look different when placed next to each other. Because he was exploring the tools in the simplest way, he considered the canvas – how paint gets onto the canvas, the weave of the canvas, how paint rests on top of it or soaks into it, and how paint moves when it is supported by fabric. For *Beta Mu*, and many other works of the time, Louis poured the paint onto unstretched, unprimed canvas, tilting and folding the fabric, letting gravity pull the paint down to create the lines for him. As the paint moved down the canvas, it soaked directly into it, rather than resting on top of it, thereby eliminating any possibility for the creation of space built up on top of the canvas. Also, because Louis allowed gravity to control the paint, the lines have a soft, flowing quality often found in nature. The focus of his investigation was so pure that Louis created a work empty of all but the most essential elements.