

Press Release

Stanley Whitney *Afternoon Paintings*

2 October – 2 November 2019
67 Lisson Street, London

In his studio, surrounded by a carnival of colours, reds, oranges, blues, purples, grays, Whitney says, “I don’t take colour for granted.” The world is in colour, and people do — I do — forget it. A majority see in colour, so when presented with black and white, Franz Kline’s paintings, say, or a black and white photograph by Rosalind Fox Solomon, colour’s absence is obvious, palpable and no longer taken for granted. In these *Afternoon Paintings*, there’s usually one black square or rectangle settled into the composition, on a row at the top or at the bottom or to the side, usually not in the middle. Whitney tells me he sees the darker colours as creating more weight, a kind of gravity: “I don’t worry about what the colour does. If it feels right, if it sits right....To me, it’s all about how things feel. I never know what the colours are going to be....I’m trying to open up space, for people to wander.”

- Lynne Tillman, *Afternoon Paintings*

For his second exhibition in London, Lisson Gallery is pleased to present Stanley Whitney’s ‘Afternoon Paintings’, works executed by the New York-based artist at a smaller scale. A new publication will accompany the exhibition, featuring an essay by the novelist, short story writer and cultural critic Lynne Tillman.

Central to Stanley Whitney’s approach to painting is the process. To create his signature style — stacked irregular rectangles of colour within a square format canvas — he works in a sequential manner. The exhibition at Lisson Gallery will include a selection of 12-inch, 24-inch and 40-inch square size paintings, which retain the same line-up of four rows containing between five to six colours in each band. Using the parameters and refined structure he establishes by moving methodically from square to square, row to row, left to right, top to bottom, Whitney opens the possibility for ‘call and response’ between each passage. Deeply inspired by music, his paintings lend themselves to a similar compositional integrity as that of sheet music. Each painting is a score, each row is a ledger line and each colour is a note, which, based on their sequencing and juxtaposition, combine to create a unique melody. Thus, while the format and colours may show a degree of consistency, their execution always varies, much like how each musician plays the same sheet with their own singular timbre.

The importance of this spontaneous dialogue between the colours also means Whitney moves fluidly between the rectangles, omitting time for over-analysing or judgment. He had noted, “I have to let the colour take me wherever it takes me...The idea is that colour cannot be controlled and that it has total freedom.” As such, when Whitney begins a painting session in the morning, he often finishes work on his large-scale paintings by midday. The act of finishing up any paints leftover in the studio is an instinctual process which allows Whitney to work intensively on these different sized canvases, echoing the rhythms and colours derived from the previous painting session, only now remixed and recalibrated by experience and a new freedom of gesture in smaller format. Apart from their informality and spontaneous nature – involving fewer layers and less overpainting than Whitney’s large compositions – these works reveal Whitney’s dedication to his ‘practice’, which he likens to athletic training or the ‘wood-shedding’ that jazz musicians refer to when describing time spent honing their improvisatory skills behind closed doors.

To coincide, Lisson Gallery will present a dual booth of work by Stanley Whitney and Joyce Pensato at Frieze London (3 –

6 October). Colourful new large-scale abstractions will be presented alongside a survey of Pensato works. The artists, who were friends and peers in the New York contemporary painting scene, planned the presentation prior to Pensato's passing in June.

About Stanley Whitney

Stanley Whitney has been exploring the formal possibilities of colour within ever-shifting grids of multi-hued blocks and all-over fields of gestural marks and passages, since the mid-1970s. His current motif, honed over many years, is the stacked composition of numerous saturated colour fields, delineated by between three to five horizontal bands running the length of a square-formatted canvas. The cumulative effect of Whitney's multicoloured palette is not only one of masterly pictorial balance and a sense of continuum with other works in this ongoing series, but also that of fizzing, formal sensations caused by internal conflicts and resolutions within each painting. Taking his cues from early Minimalism, Color Field painters, jazz music and his favourite historical artists – Titian, Velázquez and Cézanne among them – Whitney is as much an exponent of the process-based, spatially-gridded square in art as Josef Albers, Sol LeWitt, Agnes Martin and Carl Andre.

Stanley Whitney was born in Philadelphia in 1946 and lives and works in New York City and Parma, Italy. He holds a BFA from Kansas City Art Institute as well as an MFA from Yale University and is currently Professor emeritus of painting and drawing at Tyler School of Art, Temple University. Select solo exhibitions include 'Focus – Stanley Whitney' at the Modern Art Museum, Fort Worth, TX, USA (2017) and 'Dance the Orange' at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY, USA (2015). Whitney has also been included in many prominent group shows, such as 'Inherent Structure', Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH, USA (2018); Documenta 14 in Athens, Greece and Kassel, Germany (2017); 'Nero su Bianco' at the American Academy in Rome, Italy (2015); 'Outside the Lines: Black in the Abstract', Contemporary Art Museum of Houston, TX, USA (2014); 'Reinventing Abstraction: New York Painting in the 1980s', Cheim & Read, New York, NY, USA (2013); and 'Utopia Station' at the 50th Venice Biennale (2003). He has won prizes including the Robert De Niro Sr. Prize in Painting (2011), the American Academy of Arts and Letters Art Award (2010) and awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship (1996). Whitney's work is included in public collections around the world, including the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, KA, USA; the Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA, USA; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT, USA; and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY, USA.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and develops 60 international artists across two exhibition spaces in London and two in New York as well as its new space in Shanghai. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie, to the international public for the first time. The gallery represents leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Liu Xiaodong, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully, as well as a number of renowned artist estates, including Roy Colmer, the Leon Polk Smith Foundation and the John Latham Foundation. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes and Wael Shawky.

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