

WHITE CUBE

Bram Bogart

29 January – 7 March 2020

White Cube Mason's Yard

White Cube Mason's Yard is pleased to present an exhibition of works by Dutch born, Belgian artist Bram Bogart (1921 – 2012). Featuring paintings produced between 1959 and the mid-1990s, the focus of the exhibition is the 1960s and 1970s – two key decades in Bogart's career.

Born Abraham van den Boogaart in Delft in 1921, Bogart was primarily an abstract painter who immersed himself in the formal concerns of painting. Foregrounding gesture, colour and the physical materiality of paint itself, his works are characterised by their rich, almost sculptural accumulations of painted matter. Working through numerous stylistic investigations, including figuration, pointillism and cubism, from the late 1950s onwards he focused exclusively on abstraction using his own signature medium: a dense mix of pure pigments, oils and water combined with other undisclosed materials. Constantly adapting the composition of his paint, he was able to achieve a variety of thicknesses, intensities and textural effects, 'building' with paint to fuse gesture with matter in muscular works that forcefully assert their three-dimensional presence.

In these paintings colour is both subject and object, their heavy masses of paint swiped, dabbed, pushed or drawn across the canvas surface. The earliest work in the exhibition, *Cristal Baroque* (1959), encapsulates the artist's interest in the gestural monochrome, whereby a composition emerges out of the physical manipulation of a single colour, through a charged and active application of paint. Considering himself both an expressionist and a 'sculptural painter', Bogart described his single coloured works as a 'refuge', since they have an inherent sense of tranquillity, derived from their unbroken tonal expanse. An example is the pale-grey monochrome *Linaabelina* (1960) composed from a minimal gestural 'script' embedded in a textured, wall-like surface that provides a calm expansiveness. By contrast, in the black monochrome *Printemps Néerlandais* (1959), paint flows down the picture surface, yielding to its own weight and piling-up in a thick mass towards the bottom of the canvas.

From the 1960s onwards, Bogart had begun to paint with the canvases laid on the studio floor, increasing the density of the paint to achieve an almost anti-gravitational effect, a quality that would come to define his later production. Treating the surface as a kind of wall, he focused on ideas of stability and objecthood, reducing his palette to just a few colours and building up images with large slabs or swipes of paint. His works from the 1960s and 1970s foreground the movement of the hand and also

the horizontal or vertical axes within a composition. In the work *Windzand* (1963), graphic lines of dark, soil-coloured paint sit atop a stained, patchy, bright white background, suggestive of figuration by recalling the light of an atmospheric, seaside landscape.

Using a variety of tools to make furrows in the paint, Bogart was able to create contrastingly smooth and raised areas across the painted surface, often the result of pushing or dragging the medium towards the edges or centre of the picture. Several works in the exhibition feature this approach, including *Blanc de Brabant* (1977) where a single vertical swipe down the centre of the painting and its residual pile of paint create a form akin to an exclamation mark. In the later black monochrome *Ardoise* (1981), paint is pushed towards the middle of the picture, resulting in two vertical ridges bifurcating two flat rectangles, pointing to both a window-like shape as well as to Bogart's interest in the pictorial value of 'empty' planes. 'It is difficult to control the empty plane in a painting', he has written. 'Although empty planes are monochromatic, the paint's skin remains full of life, and the tension of the touch is preserved.' By contrast, *Rondwit* (1974) has thick, concentric circles of white paint that create a target-like composition, sitting within a square border and against a smooth white background. These clearly defined circular forms relate to Bogart's earlier phase of gestural abstraction in the 1950s, where he employed signs or symbols set within compartmentalised areas of the painting.

During the 1980s Bogart began dropping his paint in thick mounds onto the canvas surface, resulting in the 'dabs' series of work which are composed of unconnected piles of paint – in different sizes and colours – jostling together in a colourful, undulating abstract field. The work *Binche* (1984) features a multitude of brightly coloured 'dabs', creating a vibrant, pop abstract landscape, while *Yellow jubel* (1985) employs a more restricted palette; a tonal field that varies from a near-acid shade of green to a pale, creamy yellow.

In a body of work spanning decades, Bogart has created sensual, organic paintings that sit somewhere between painting and sculpture: a fusion of colour, gesture and structure which breaks with pictorial tradition.

BIOGRAPHY

Bram Bogart was born in Delft, Netherlands in 1921 and died in Kortenberg, Belgium in 2012. Throughout his career he exhibited extensively in Europe, including solo exhibitions at Cobra Museum of Modern Art, Amsterdam (2012); Kunsthalle, Recklinghausen (2005); PMMK, Museum of Modern Art, Ostend (1995); Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (1964); and Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (1959). In 1970 he represented Belgium at the Venice Biennale. Bogart's work features in many museum and public collections including Tate, London; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Mudam, Luxembourg; Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney; Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar, Netherlands; National Gallery of Victoria, Australia; S.M.A.K, Ghent; and Yuan Art Museum, Beijing.

White Cube Mason's Yard is open
Tuesday – Saturday, 10am – 6pm.
Admission is free.

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