

Press Release

Ed Clark & Stanley Whitney. On the Path

28 May – 25 June 2022

Hauser & Wirth Southampton



Southampton...Hauser & Wirth will open its summer season in Southampton on 28 May with an exhibition of luminous watercolors and dry pigment works on paper by the celebrated American painters – and dear friends – Ed Clark and Stanley Whitney. Occupying the entire Southampton gallery space, this exhibition explores the two artists' shared interest in drawing and watercolor as distinct, critical components of their respective practices. This first-ever pairing of their works on paper will provide visitors insight into their sustained experimentations with color, form, and the seductive materiality of paint.

Throughout his pioneering seven-decade career, Ed Clark used color, form and materiality to extend the visual language of abstraction that had already been established by the abstract expressionist movement when he began painting. Clark's works in this exhibition, spanning five decades from the 1970s to the 2010s, typify his effort to push his art beyond the picture plane with broad, meditative swaths of color evoking the environments in which they were created. Whether in Paris, Crete, Nigeria, Mexico City, or Louisiana, Clark's surroundings influenced his palette and the quality of light depicted in his drawings. Rubbing the colored pigments directly onto the surface of paper with his hands, Clark achieved degrees of intimacy and immediacy that set these works apart from his bravura large-scale paintings, which were often made with the aid of a push-broom.

Stanley Whitney's vibrant watercolors are presented here in dialogue with Clark's drawings. The two men were close friends, with the latter serving as a role model for the former. When asked about Clark's influence on his practice, Whitney remarked that, 'Ed Clark painted paintings that were full of love. I discovered his work when I moved to New York in 1968 and I thought he was the best among the older generation of artists working in the city at the time. It was important for me to meet another African American artist who was an abstract painter, someone who was on that path before me. Ed was a real inspiration to me and still is.'

Whitney is known for using a gridded layout to explore the formal possibilities of abstraction within multi-hued, shifting blocks of saturated color. Marked by loose, gestural strokes, his watercolors on view in this exhibition were made in Sagaponack during the initial months of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and – like Ed Clark's –

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reflect the palette and visual phenomena of the environment in which they were painted. Filled with a palpable sense of movement, they are distinct from Whitney's oil paintings – decidedly more playful, with colors that spontaneously drip, bleed, and mix across the surface of the paper.

About Ed Clark

Born in New Orleans in 1926 and raised in Chicago, Clark emerged in the 1950s as a pioneer of the New York School. Over the course of seven decades, his experimentations with pure color, abstract form, and the seductive materiality of paint have yielded an oeuvre of remarkable originality, extending the language of American abstraction. Clark's breakthroughs have an important place in the story of modern and contemporary art: in the late 1950s he was the first American artist credited with exhibiting a shaped canvas, an innovation that continues to reverberate today. His search for a means to breach the limitations of the conventional paintbrush led him to use a push-broom to apply pigment to canvas laid out on the floor. Defying the discreet categories of gestural and hard-edged abstraction, Clark has masterfully interwoven these approaches into a unique form of expressionism.

After studying at the Art Institute of Chicago and L'Academie de la Grande Chaumiere in Paris, Clark continued to live and work in France, absorbing the influence of such European modernists as Nicolas de Staël, Pierre Soulages, and Jean Riopelle. He became a member of a social and intellectual circle of American expatriate artists and writers, including fellow African American creatives Beauford Delaney, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Barbara Chase-Riboud. Clark settled in New York in 1957, where over the ensuing decade he became part of the city's dynamic downtown scene and a co-founder of the Brata Gallery, an artist-run cooperative among the Tenth Street galleries of the East Village. From the late 1960s until the last decade, Clark split his time between New York and Paris, traveling extensively to other locales from Mexico and Brazil to North Africa and Greece. In 2019, while living in Detroit, Clark passed away at the age of 93. 'No matter what I do,' the artist said, 'there's not a day that I'm not an artist.'

About Stanley Whitney

Stanley Whitney was born in Philadelphia in 1946 and lives and works in New York City, Parma, Italy, and Eastern Long Island, New York. 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 Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Long Museum, Shanghai; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; The Buffalo AKG Art Museum, New York; and National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

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Caption and courtesy information:

Ed Clark

Untitled

2013

Pastel on paper

95.3 x 121.3 cm / 37 1/2 x 47 3/4 in

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Photo: Thomas Barratt

Stanley Whitney

Untitled

2020

Watercolor on Lessebo paper

50.2 x 62.9 cm / 19 3/4 x 24 3/4 in

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Courtesy Lisson Gallery