

Press Release

Peter Joseph: *The Window Paintings*

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2/F, 27 Huqiu Road, Huangpu District, Shanghai

“Paint is not just colour, it’s light and air that I’m trying to portray on the canvas, dark and light... I’m trying to paint the atmosphere, trying to paint light itself. My works are primarily sensualist in the sense of colour, light, tone.” — Peter Joseph

Lisson Gallery is honoured to present a body of rarely seen paintings by the late British artist, Peter Joseph, in his debut solo exhibition in China. Created between 2006 and 2011, this selection of works marks a relatively brief yet pivotal phase in the artist’s career, which saw the transition from his widely recognised early geometrical and minimal ‘Border’ paintings (1980s – 1990s), to a series of freer and more openly lyrical works known as ‘The New Painting’ (2014 – 2020). As one of only a handful of artists to exhibit at Lisson Gallery during its inaugural year in 1967, Joseph was the gallery’s longest serving artist before his death in 2020, with over five decades of collaboration and friendship with the founder Nicholas Logsdail.

After an initial career in graphic design, Joseph came to prominence as self-taught artist in the mid 1960s with a collection of abstract paintings comprising simple shapes in primary colours. In 1971 while at the cinema, he was mesmerised by a blank screen – the centre area lit, and with a black border – after the projector broke down. This experience led to the inception of his signature ‘Border’ series in the 1970s, which he then pursued with an unwavering focus for the following 35 years. Based on a deceptively simple motif, the series is characterised by a painted rectangle of a lighter tone set within a border of a darker colour.

In 2006, Joseph began to create works that retained a simplicity of form, which he called ‘The Window Paintings’, as presented in the Shanghai gallery. Each work remains limited to two colours and set in a geometric framework, but divided by a centre line, either horizontally or vertically, and with hitherto unseen areas of painterly gesture. Through the placing of two tonalities – one lighter, one darker – side by side, there is a sense of freedom that exists outside of the geometry of his earlier work, expressing an ultimate impression of balance. Understatedly elegant and graceful, the colours are shades of grey, ochre, blue and lilac.

Describing himself as a classicist, Joseph’s abiding interest was in the work of classical artists, particularly Claude Lorrain and Watteau, whose work he regarded as “vehicles for the imagination as well as transcriptions of so-called reality”. Observed from the hillside on which his home and studio were perched in the Cotswolds, Joseph’s work became increasingly suggestive of nature, and the shifting clouds and light in the valley below. The artist sought to conjure the density and structure of nature via the abstract relationships between colour, light and form.

About the artist

Peter Joseph had, over the course of decades, dedicated his practice to seeking the potential in constraint. He rose to critical acclaim in the 1970s for his meditative, two-colour paintings, which set one rectangle within a frame of a darker shade. These early works were characterised by perfect symmetry, where every decision about colour and proportion could be seen to be redolent of time, mood or place. While comparable to the work of Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman, Joseph's was an anomalous strain of Minimalism: his allegiance lay as much with Renaissance masters as with his contemporaries. More recently his format had departed from his established 'architecture' to divide the canvas into two planes, horizontally or vertically, wherein loose brushwork, natural tones and patches of exposed canvas tap into new feeling. As Joseph said: 'A painting must generate feeling otherwise it is dead'.

Peter Joseph (1929 - 2020) was born in London, and lived and worked in Stroud, Gloucestershire, UK. He has had solo exhibitions at Lisson Gallery (2022, 2021, 2019); Unité d'habitation Le Corbusier, Briey-en-fôret, France (1998); Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, UK (1994) and Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL, USA (1983). He has been included in major group exhibitions at Sotheby's S|2, London, UK (2018), Kinokino, Stavanger, Norway (2018); FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais, Dunkirk, France (2014); Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, Monaco, France (2013); Neues Museum Weserburg, Bremen, Germany (2010); Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland (2008); MuHKA, Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerp, Belgium (2007); Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art, Sunderland, UK (2005); Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany (2002); Fundacao Serralves, Porto, Portugal (1999); Kunstmuseum-Wolfsburg, Wolfsburg, Germany (1991); Stadtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf, Germany (1984) and the Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK (1977). He won the John Player Painting Competition in 1968.

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 promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across two spaces in London, three in New York, and one in Shanghai, and one in Beijing, as well as forthcoming gallery in Los Angeles. 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, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estate of Leon Polk Smith.

In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Ryan Gander, Van Hanos, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes, Wael Shawky and Cheyney Thompson.

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