

# LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

## Peter Joseph: *The Early Works*

7 February – 15 March 2025  
67 Lisson Street, London

Opening: 6 February, 6 – 8pm

British painter Peter Joseph's 17th solo exhibition with Lisson Gallery presents a selection of early and rare works from the 1960s and '70s that track Joseph's development from vividly coloured, geometric compositions and shaped canvases through to the muted rectangular and square paintings that would define the following decades of his career. Spanning the years from 1964 to 1978, the exhibition features 12 paintings, as well as previously unseen sketchbooks, which chart Joseph's experiments with colour and form. The presentation journeys from earlier paintings that focus on vibrant primary colour and performativity – for which he received wide critical and institutional acclaim, including exhibitions at Camden Arts Centre and Kenwood House in 1966 – to his *Cinema Paintings* which pre-figure Joseph's signature *Border paintings* of the 1980s and 90s.

From his transition to painting full-time in the early 1960s after a career in graphic design, Joseph emerged as a key figure in contemporary art, seeking to challenge the boundaries of abstraction, drawing influence from the Italian Renaissance through to modernist movements. Influenced initially by the approach to large-scale he observed in the work of the American abstract expressionists, and then in artists such as Ellsworth Kelly and Kenneth Noland, he subsequently rejected the 'public scene' of contemporary art for a renewed focus on older painting, eventually leaving London for Gloucestershire in the early 1980s. Early works such as the 30ft painting *Colour Continuum* (1966) captivated audiences with their immersive engagement with colour and light, while the monumental 70ft *Yellow Wall*, made for Camden Art Centre in 1969, completely transformed a traditional gallery space into a meditative environment, garnering Joseph critical and institutional acclaim. These works embodied the artist's philosophy of art as a "real situation", prioritising the viewer's experience of presence and introspection.

The show's chronology centres around a pivotal event in 1970 from which Joseph's *Cinema Paintings* were born. When the projector broke down during the screening of a Luis Buñuel film the artist found himself bathed in the pure residual light of the projector on the silver screen and sat staring at this blank space for some time; the flickering central zone of light of the empty screen edged by a darker border delineating the cinematic frame. Inspired by the nuanced relationship of these two elements, the artist set about devising paper collage studies to produce equivalent effects. This experience would come to define his oeuvre for many decades to come, containing what he described, in conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist, as "a delicacy about it. It wasn't just a simple tone or colour. And I realised that this, to me, had more possibility in it for what I could only call a reflection."

Through presentations at Lisson Gallery, Peter Joseph's work has been paired among a diverse array of artists – including Derek Jarman, Raymon Ginghofer and Keith Milow in 1967 (the year of the gallery's opening), and a two-person presentation with Carmen Herrera in 2006 – but he chose his own path, opting for subtle shades and pared back compositions, rather than boldly coloured architectural compositions.

Joseph's work remains distinguished for its emotional depth and resonance; he was fascinated by exploring the phenomenology of space, focusing on the way in which his work was experienced. As Joseph himself expressed, his paintings are "not so much to show as to live with," offering viewers an experience of both immediacy and timelessness. The exhibition celebrates Peter Joseph's enduring impact on contemporary art, showcasing his dedication to creating spaces of quiet transformation through the power of light and colour.

## About the artist

Peter Joseph, over the course of decades, dedicated his practice to seeking the potential in constraint. He gained 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 Galerie Greta Meert (2024), Bernard Bouche Gallery (2018, 2015, 2013); 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); Städtische 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 70 international artists across spaces in London, New York, Los Angeles, Shanghai and Beijing. 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 and others of that generation, from Carmen Herrera and Olga de Amaral to Hélio Oiticica and Lee Ufan. 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, Liu Xiaodong, Otobong Nkanga, Pedro Reyes, Sean Scully, Hiroshi Sugimoto and Wael Shawky. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists including Dana Awartani, Cory Arcangel, Garrett Bradley, Ryan Gander, Josh Kline, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost and Cheyney Thompson.

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