

Galerie Gisela Capitain is delighted to announce its second exhibition with early works by the British artist Richard Smith (1931–2016).

While in his early work in London Smith dealt mainly with American Abstract Expressionism, in the 1960s he began integrating elements of the then rising Pop Art into his work. Initially Smith pursued American culture in London, until he came into direct contact with the large-scale advertisements, neon signs, glossy magazines, and commercial packaging on a scholarship in New York from 1959 to 1966, which he then used as references for his large-scale, intensely colored paintings.

Continuing to follow the ambitions of Abstract Expressionism and color field painting, Smith lent the themes of Pop Art a formalist aesthetic. The fusion of these diverging artistic starting points and the resulting tension made his work unique in Britain in the 1960s.

In 1963 Smith began creating paintings that extend into the room. He called these three-dimensional constructions reminiscent of cardboard packaging “box or carton paintings.” To him, cardboard was an enduring theme of civilization, from cigarette packs to food product packaging. His originally very gestural painting style with soft, blurred contours (*First Fifth*, 1962) became increasingly abstract and formal beginning in the mid-1960s (*Four Corners IV*, 1965, and *Kodak 3*, 1966), while his reference points remained unchanged.

In the 1970s Smith developed his “kite paintings” out of three-dimensional canvases. In these works he replaced the traditional stretcher frame with aluminum rods, on which he stretched the canvases. Threads, strings, and ribbons are both the substrate for the works and a creative element. The diagonal orientation of the kite paintings as well as the geometric organization of the shapes point to the approaches of early Constructivism. Often the pastel colors and gestural painting style contrast with the rigid structure of these works. Smith continued to create his usually multilayered kite paintings—which, like his sculptural paintings, defy the conventions of the two-dimensional rectangular canvas—into the 1980s.

As experimental as Richard Smith’s works were, they always followed in the tradition of painting; he advanced new ways of working with the medium. Smith’s deconstruction of the elements of traditional easel painting deals not only with the construction of surfaces, but also with color contrasts, light, and a reformulation of drawing. His progressive engagement with painting and his highly individual approach made him one of the most radical and original artists of his time.

In 1966 Richard Smith was one of five artists to represent the United Kingdom at the Venice Biennale, and in 1970 he was the sole representative. In 1967 he won the Grand Prize at the 9th São Paulo Biennale, and in the 1970s he exhibited at museums in Europe as well as North and South America. His works are part of numerous public collections, including the British Museum in London, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and Tate Gallery in London.