

# bernard jacobson gallery

## Marc Vaux at 90

### A Survey

7th December 2022 – 28th January 2023

Throughout Marc Vaux's more than sixty-year artistic career, he has consistently explored the possibilities of colours, forms, and materials. His early work, created in the 1960s, received attention from eminent critics of the time such as Lawrence Alloway, who positioned his art in relation to American Abstract Expressionists. If it originated in conversation with American Abstract Expressionists, Vaux's practice quickly diverged, and his own intense and singular investigation into the visual properties of colour and light began.

Born in Swindon on 29 November 1932, Vaux initially planned a career in chemistry. Following a period of service in the Royal Air Force, Vaux abandoned chemistry in favour of art – an interest which Vaux's secondary school art teacher helped cultivate. Vaux spent three years at the Swindon School of Art before enrolling at the Slade School of Fine Art in 1957. At the time, the Slade's teaching practices concentrated on figurative art and reflected the influence of William Coldstream, which conflicted with Vaux's enthusiasm for the Abstract Expressionism that he encountered at Tate Gallery's 1959 *The New American Painting* exhibition. The Slade nonetheless proved fruitful for Vaux: he developed relationships with artists like William Turnbull and Peter Stroud, exhibited in the *Young Contemporaries* show, and was awarded the Boise Travel Scholarship.

After completing his education at the Slade in 1960, Vaux's participation in the 1960 *Situation* exhibition quickly established his prominence in London's art scene. With Alloway and Turnbull among the organisers, the exhibition showcased 'the situation in London now.' *Situation* featured a younger generation of British artists that, in addition to Vaux, included Robyn Denny, Bernard Cohen, John Hoyland, and Gillian Ayres. Vaux contributed paintings such as *Composition Red and Green* (collection Tate), which exemplifies the exhibition's two central requirements: all works had to be nonfigurative and exceed thirty square feet in area. *Composition Red and Green* demonstrates Vaux's early admiration for Barnett Newman and Ellsworth Kelly.

Although Vaux's style changed considerably after *Situation*, the exhibition brought Vaux international group exhibitions in cities such as Paris, Rome, and Leverkusen, Germany. His first solo exhibitions soon followed. In 1963, London's Grabowski Gallery hosted a two-person show with Vaux's then wife Tess Jaray, and in 1965 London's Hamilton Galleries presented Vaux's first solo exhibition. In contrast to the bold geometric shapes of his *Situation* paintings, Vaux's

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subsequent work in the early 1960s disrupted linear forms with gestural elements, as in *Black Fall* and *Blue Thunder*. By 1965, Vaux dedicated greater attention towards the possibilities of colour, as acrylic paint became more widely available in London. From then until the mid-1970s, his work situates hard-edge bands – and even finger-painted shapes – against bold colour fields, this is true of *Union Brand*. Vaux played jazz clarinet in his youth, and a musicality plays out in these works: like music, Vaux's compositions invite viewers to register elements in both their individuality and totality.

Vaux held a variety of part-time teaching positions throughout the 1960s but began teaching full-time in 1973 when he was named principal lecturer in paintings at London's Central School of Art and Design. In the late 1970s, Vaux also began using MDF and aluminium to create works such as *3 x 1G*. Though Vaux's work appears increasingly Constructivist or Minimalist following this period, the effects of colour remain his primary concern. In these works, the colour effects move from the centre of the works to the edge, where the colour can react, reflect, and adjust the surrounding wall. MDF and aluminium offered Vaux opportunities for experimentation and by 1986 resulted in a series of MDF and aluminium squares, as seen in *SQ 25*. In 1986, Vaux became head of painting at the Central Saint Martin's School of Art. Vaux resigned just three years later to concentrate full-time on painting, and from this time, his work has continued to combine colour with the sculptural. In his most recent work, Vaux has accomplished this fusion without limiting himself to horizontal or vertical axes. Instead, through trapezoids and ovals, Vaux imbues works such *OV.L2.10* and *OV.S.9* with a sense of weightlessness and motion, all while investigating colour and its interplay with light.

Since 1998, Bernard Jacobson Gallery has represented Vaux and regularly exhibited his work. Solo exhibitions on Vaux have included *Colour Edge to Edge: Paintings from the mid '60s* (2007); *New Paintings: Triptychs and Ovals* (2010); *Full House: Paintings from 1964* (2012); *New Ovals* (2014); and *The Edge and Beyond* (2017). *New Paintings: Triptychs and Ovals* coincided with a one-room retrospective at Tate Britain from 2010 to 2011, which showcased paintings Vaux created between 1960 and 2004.

## **PRESS ENQUIRIES**

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