

bernard jacobson gallery

William Tillyer

The Golden Striker and Esk Paintings

26th September – 24th November 2018

Bernard Jacobson Gallery is delighted to announce The Golden Striker – Esk Paintings; a special exhibition of new paintings staged in celebration of William Tillyer's 80th birthday this September. The Golden Striker of the exhibition title is an extraordinary, 9m long painting, creating an immersive, panoramic experience of light and saturated colour across the entire back wall of the main gallery space. Complex, sophisticated and heroic, this sublime work exists on many levels but is first a homage to the colour gold and the elemental role it plays in paintings of importance to Tillyer.

Painted directly on to 5 free hanging panels of industrial plastic mesh, The Golden Striker is a challenge to the formal constraints of the flat picture plane and an open invitation to the viewer to interact and move with it – as Tillyer did whilst painting. The paint is applied from behind the picture plane and through the mesh grid as well as from in front, the paint is woven into the painting, which allows us to encounter and explore the spaces behind and within the work and that special tension, described by Tillyer as the 'kiss', where void meets painting.

Tillyer says: Often when you paint on a straight canvas, you don't do anything to the picture plane. I think paintings been like that for too long. You think, 'what the hell can I do about this?' It has to be physical. There's always pretence and illusion. So I wanted to countermand that with reality, (with) Something physical.'(1)

While inspired by nature and often described as a landscape artist, Tillyer is also fascinated by the conceptual artifice of painting. The Golden Striker is an expression of both this and the beating, performative aspect of painting made manifest in a title which also references the virtuoso percussion at the heart of a work by the John Lewis Jazz quartet.

Tillyer is in many ways a contradiction; a painter in a romantic tradition of British landscape painting, including Palmer, Constable and Turner, who is also immersed in the history of art and the conceptual progression of seeing and understanding. Whilst Tillyer describes the allure of Constable's The Cornfield as the 'bounty of a mature golden cornfield...the colour and the growth' he is not afraid to deconstruct it for Golden Striker, creating a vast, sometimes pixelated, 'field' of colour with a molten core of golden paint and the pulsating dynamism of square, rectangle and circle.

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There is nothing austere about Tillyer's 'conceptualism' however, his process of making and understanding is also driven by an attempt to recreate the spiritual force which he believes connects and animates us all. He says, 'Essentially I see the paint as 'the life force' and the 'controlling grid' as the circumstances of life itself, the artist being the master of ceremonies'.(2) We see this also in his abiding fascination with the Yorkshire landscape of his birth and current home, he says, 'I have sought to couple my feelings and understanding of landscape, particularly my local North Yorkshire landscape, with a personal view of painting'.

The exhibition will include two other works from this group of Tapestry paintings, a still life and an Esk Bridge landscape, accompanied by a group of smaller paintings. The River Esk and the arching bridge over it has been a long-time fascination, appearing in numerous paintings during Tillyer's 60 years as an artist and it is fitting that he has returned to this subject again for this special exhibition which marks such a significant milestone. The subject conveys both the passage of time and the solidity and unchanging quality of the landscape in which they reside as well - as the enduring appeal of form and particular subjects for this remarkable British artist.

Almost 50 years have passed since Bernard Jacobson first encountered the work of William Tillyer and as well as being a celebration of a great artist and his life's work, this exhibition stands testament to a uniquely long and consistently creative relationship between artist and dealer. Few would have attempted the ambitious range and scope of exhibitions and special publications presented by Tillyer and Jacobson this year and this exhibition is undoubtedly the most important of them all, revealing an artist energized rather than diminished by the passage of time.

*1-2 Quotations from an interview feature with Tillyer and Jonathan McAloon appearing in the Summer edition of the London Magazine

PRESS ENQUIRIES

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