

# bernard jacobson gallery

Ben Nicholson

## Paintings, Reliefs, and Drawings

4<sup>th</sup> April – 11<sup>th</sup> July 2012

Bernard Jacobson Gallery is delighted to present a show of works by celebrated British artist Ben Nicholson.

As two major museum exhibitions currently on show in London demonstrate, Ben Nicholson is a master of 20th Century Art. 'Picasso and Modern British Art' at the Tate shows him as a young man intoxicated by the European avant-garde, working through the issues and ideas raised by Picasso and the cubists. Whereas the exhibition at the Courtauld Gallery, 'Mondrian and Nicholson in Parallel', shows him to be an equal if younger colleague of Mondrian, working towards a pure abstraction that culminated in Nicholson's celebrated White Reliefs. However Nicholson's long and successful career transcended both of these moments.

The works on display at Bernard Jacobson Gallery date from throughout Ben Nicholson's distinguished career and range from his 1930s and 40s geometric abstract paintings such as *Painting*, 1939 and *Painted Relief*, 1941; paintings on canvas and board from the 1950s, through to his later reliefs (*Untitled Relief*, 1960-69), and to his last works in oil and felt tip (1979 (*Elephantine*)).

It was during the 1950s that Nicholson achieved real fame; his paintings of this period owe much to older art, particularly the works of the early Italian Renaissance painters such as Giotto and Piero Della Francesca. Often using a rubbed down surface that reminds one of frescoes, (*Italian Wall*, 1955) or working on aged wood panels (*Still Life (Lorca)*, 1949), these works, mainly abstracted still-lives, display an elegance and sophistication which was rare in a British art scene which was in thrall to the so-called 'Geometry of Fear' of the post-war period. After being commissioned to make a mural for the Festival of Britain in 1951, he had his first retrospective outside Britain at the Detroit Institute of Art in 1952 and in 1954 he represented Britain at the Venice Biennale. Retrospectives at the Tate and a first prize at the Sao Paulo Biennale followed. In 1968 he was awarded the Order of Merit from Queen Elizabeth II, and in '69 had another major retrospective at the Tate. His reputation continued to grow, with major exhibitions in Japan and in the USA. Nicholson died in 1982 in London.