

bernard jacobson gallery

William Tillyer

Season

Part Two | The Paintings

3rd March – 3rd April 2010

“Far from seeking to purge his painting of the imitations of nature, Tillyer seems to want to give expression to a new (and modern) vision of it. I believe this is why his art is attaining a new beauty and subtlety at a time when that of so many ...appears to have entered a fatal cul-de-sac.” - Peter Fuller, 1987

To the uninitiated contact with William Tillyer’s paintings can be de-stabilising. Pitting paint against support, formal allure against a wealth of conceptual allusions, industrial materials against organic flourishes of paint, they are objects that at once lure and retract - demanding the viewer negotiate between their disparate modes and multiple assertions. Tracing the evolution of Tillyer’s practice across five decades, March’s painting retrospective will reveal the diversity of Tillyer’s means and the unity of his concerns, providing unrivalled insight into the career of one of the most thoroughly innovative artists of our times.

The show begins with a look at Tillyer’s late 1960s works. Utilising cool, precise, industrial forms, mis-titled pebbles and maze-like abstractions – these pieces teeter between some of the foremost advances of hard-edge abstraction, minimalism and conceptual art and yet refuse to succumb fully to any one such interpretive framework. Rather, they establish an open-ended conflict between such modes, forcing the viewer to interact with their poetic labyrinths of conceptual and perceptual intrigue.

By the late 1970s, inspired by a protracted engagement with printmaking, Tillyer began to make paintings which utilised a steel lattice open to the wall behind to structure representational scenes. With this method he was able to make works which combined the dynamic conceptual and perceptual intrigues of his late '60s works, with an exploration of the physical world. The supporting lattice structure addresses the viewer as at once painterly support, pictorial structure and industrial reality, suspending the viewer within a free-flux of intersecting assertions played out in the representation of landscape scenes and still-lives.

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In the years since Tillyer has constantly re-invented his methodology, making works which explore paints motion across anything from flat canvas to expansive and projecting architectural supports. The pictorial content meanwhile has ranged from the Baroque figuration of his 1983 Victorian Canvases to the harmonious abstractions of his 1990s Kachina works. Throughout, the artist has succeeded in balancing his formal innovations to the multiple demands of subject matter, making works which establish new equivalences between form and content, art and the world, and thus offer rich and considered reflection on art's role in the world – man's existence in the natural sphere.

Spanning close to fifty years of such experiments March's painting retrospective will offer insight into one of the most singular and ambitious painting careers of recent years.

About the William Tillyer Season exhibition series

To mark the 40th anniversary of the day that William Tillyer walked into Bernard Jacobson's newly opened print gallery in Mount Street, Mayfair, carrying a portfolio of his etchings - a meeting of historic importance to the two young men - the Bernard Jacobson Gallery is proud to announce a four-part exhibition season devoted to the work of one of the most consistently challenging British artists of recent history.

PART ONE | THE PRINTS

5th - 27th February

The first show will look at Tillyer's extensive print output. Although his degree was in painting, he was also lucky enough to study etching under Anthony Gross at the Slade and in 1963 won a scholarship to apprentice at Stanley William Hayter's world famous Atelier 17 in Paris. Since that point printmaking has always played a significant role in Tillyer's practice, both informing and feeding from his work in other media. Relentlessly innovative, his print work covers the gamut of techniques from etching to digitally manipulated imagery.

PART TWO | THE PAINTINGS

3rd March - 3rd April

A painting retrospective will confirm his innovation. From the uncompromising, non-referential, proto-conceptualist works of the '60s to the rich organic distillations of the late '80s or the

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audacious theatricality of his most recent works, Tillyer has constantly defied categorisation. The show will highlight the range of his output while also illuminating the fundamental consistency of purpose that underpins this - his unceasing fascination with the physical world, his firmly held belief in the interconnectivity of opposing forces and his investigations into the nature of the art object and its role in the world.

PART THREE | THE WATERCOLOURS

9th April - 15th May

Tillyer is without doubt the most accomplished practitioner of that most English of art forms, the watercolour. A survey of 40 years work will demonstrate that Tillyer has rescued the medium from the world of Prince Charles and local watercolour societies and placed it as firmly in the world of contemporary art as it was for Constable and Turner.

PART FOUR | NEW PAINTINGS: CLOUDS

19th May - 19th June

The final show will be the first glimpse at this artist's latest body of work. The series sees him return to his recurrent theme, the English Landscape. It will reveal an artist exploring new solutions to the problems that have occupied him for more than half a century. Coming as it does at the end of the season it will complete a portrait of a man whose relentless innovations and enduring commitment are singular, inspirational and ongoing.