

# bernard jacobson gallery

William Tillyer

Season

Part Three | The Watercolours

9<sup>th</sup> April – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2010

'However beautiful they are, and many of them are extremely beautiful, almost painfully so, Tillyer's watercolours never lead us away from the real world in favour of an Edenic vision. Rather, they bring us back to the here and now, to water and dirt, the basis of our existence... The artist's re-envisioning of the characteristic qualities of watercolour is a unique contribution to both contemporary art and the tradition of English watercolour, as exemplified by artists such as John Sell Cotman, Alexander Cozens, John Constable and J.M.W. Turner.' – John Yau, 2010

The third exhibition of our four-part William Tillyer Season will reveal the artist at his most lyrical and visually seductive. Following on the heels of our Print and Painting retrospectives, and charting the evolution of the artist's watercolours from the early 1970s to today, the show constitutes the most extensive grouping to date of this crucially important area of William Tillyer's practice. In utilising watercolour rather than linear drawings to explore his visual ideas, Tillyer has breathed fresh life into the historic material of English Landscape painting, making works of great sensual beauty and formal relevance.

Ranging from abstracted mediations on the organic flow of materials to large bodies of work made in response to Tillyer's extensive travels (from Sweden to Australia; a European Grand Tour to the American West; the artist's native Yorkshire to the coast of County Kerry), the show encompasses the wide ranging interests that characterise the artist's approach in all media. In isolating his watercolour practice, however, the show highlights the specific vitality which Tillyer has brought to a historic tradition. As Peter Fuller observed, 'in the medium of watercolours, and perhaps only in watercolours – the great cry of the romantic aesthetic (i.e. Truth to Nature), and the great cry of emergent Modernism (i.e. Truth to Materials) were, in fact, one and the same...I think it is this unique priority of this elusive medium that Tillyer seems to have understood so fully.'

The exhibition will trace the development of Tillyer's approach from the tight luminescent

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lattices of the early 1970's to the free-flowing washes of more recent years. Throughout, as Fuller had it 'Tillyer's watercolours invite us to share with him a tentative and tremulous sensation of physical and spiritual oneness with the natural world.' Conforming to Fry's description of 'pure art – '[they] set up vibrations in the deepest levels of consciousness...these vibrations radiate in many directions, lighting up a vast system of correlated feelings and ideas'.

It is just such poetic evocations that these works bring to mind and that has accounted for their tremendous popularity over the years. To coincide with the exhibition, 21 Publishing will release a major monograph on the watercolours with a text by the renowned New York poet and art writer, John Yau.

## 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.