

bernard jacobson gallery

Bram Bogart Large Paintings

9th September – 3rd October 2009

'..the struggle between power and style that Alfred North Whitehead thought was at the core of civilization seems to end in a draw in Bogart's works, which are at once eminently civilized and uncompromisingly powerful'. - Donald Kuspit, 2008

Born in 1921 in Delft, the Netherlands, Bram Bogart has pioneered a single-minded breed of abstraction that has placed him at the forefront of the European scene for close to half a century. Executed in his trademark, heavily-thickened paint, the large works on display reveal the limits to which Bogart has continued to push paint's physicality whilst maintaining the richly harmonious compositional sense which carries his work far beyond mere formalist invention.

Trained from the age of twelve as a housepainter, at the close of the Second World War Bogart moved to Paris, determined to pursue a career as an artist. Over the next two decades he moved between avant-garde capitals across Europe, making friends with some of the most progressive painters of the age from the CoBrA group to the matiÃ©rists. The same period saw his work move from the darkly toned, Van Gogh inspired still-lifes of the pre-war period, through impasto divisionist landscapes and cubistic figuration, to abstract accumulations of geometric signs, which through the 1950s gave way to increasingly tachiste applications of monochrome impasto paint.

In the early 1960s Bogart began to mix a diverse range of materials including mortar, siccative, powdered chalk, varnish and large quantities of raw pigment, to create a paint of unprecedented thickness in the history of Western Art. Working on large reinforced wooden supports laid flat on the floor, Bogart has been able to create thoroughly abstract works which push paint's physicality to new heights - enlarging single strokes of pure tone to unprecedented scales (sometimes well over 10 cm thick, and 3 metres across), and pushing them well beyond the edges of the supporting structure. The resultant unmediated relationship between paint and the viewer imbues Bogart's work with an emotive directness that invites comparison with the work of compatriots like De Kooning and Van Gogh.

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From densely 'scripted' works in which trowelled heaps of highly toned paint nestle into and against each other, to calm upright works in which austere white planes are enlivened by occasionally erupting flecks of bright colour, the exhibition bares witness to the diverse range of effects Bogart's technical mastery enables. Throughout, the viewer is struck by the artist's unrivalled ability to combine power and control, creating works which rank amongst the most physically challenging objects in the history of art, yet are possessing of a harmonious beauty and tactile grace.

Bogart's work is held in major collections around the world, and has been the subject of retrospective exhibitions across Europe.