

bernard jacobson gallery

William Tillyer

The Cadiz Caprices

12th September – 11th October 2008

'The Cadiz Caprices are the greatest abstract paintings about Spain by a non-Spaniard since Robert Motherwell began working on his 'Elegies for The Spanish Republic' around 70 years ago'. - John Yau, 2008

From September 12th, 2008, Bernard Jacobson Gallery is proud to present The Cadiz Caprices, a series of new abstract works by the renowned English painter William Tillyer.

A man of contrasts, William Tillyer has for many years walked the tightrope between divergent forces. Conceptual and perceptual, classical and romantic, modernist and traditional, formalist and psychological, Tillyer's art stands as a testament to the interconnectedness and compatibility of disparate modes. The Cadiz Caprices, at once the latest proposition in a long-term investigation into the nature of representational traditions and formal problems, and an exuberant cycle of free-flowing abstract paintings relating to the artist's engagement with Andalucia, are no exception to this tendency.

The twenty-five works which make up the new series were executed in Tillyer's North Yorkshire studio, and yet recall the complex of impressions and experiences the artist gained during his three month residency, in the Castillo de Santa Catalina, Cadiz, in 2006, at the invitation of the municipal government. The series invites multiple readings on the part of the viewer. On one level, as with Goya's majestic Caprichos, (from which the series derives its name), the works offer an abstracted panorama of Spanish life. From the flowing edges and swirling forms of works like Viva to the underlying menace of Falla, there are presented a wide range of impressions rooted in the movements, colours and ambiances Tillyer observed in the Iberian peninsula.

The more strictly formal elements of the pieces work both into and against these subject-based observations. The works consist of grids of industrial steel cladding suspended in front of a graduating or flatly coloured wooden support. Across the rigid geometric structure of the steel grid, the freely applied acrylic paint seems variously to float, sink, ooze or drip as it

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interacts with the supporting structure, sometimes piercing through it with trompe l'oeil illusionism and sometimes overpowering it through the sheer thickness of its application. All this serves on the one hand to undermine the integrity of the picture plane as a site of resolute meaning. Conversely, the heightened physical drama that such play creates compounds the psychological elements of the works, variously adding pathos, melancholy, tension or exuberance, as the work demands.

As such, The Cadiz Caprices manage to simultaneously lure and withstand the viewer's gaze, inviting one to participate in their compelling dramatics, whilst remaining the self-declaring products of artifice. In creating such works Tillyer shows a forward path for painting; beyond the crudity of dada negation, the isolated formalism of much constructivist abstraction, and the falsity of pure illusionism. In his own words Tillyer's work points towards a painting which 'must again embrace the world of illusory depth', having, 'absorbed and annexed the lessons of constructivist reality'.

A fully illustrated catalogue with texts by John Yau and Saul Ostrow are published to coincide with the exhibition.