

WADDINGTON CUSTOT

Press Release

Colour is

1 March–28 April 2017

Waddington Custot is pleased to present 'Colour is', a group exhibition which focuses on the wide-ranging and sometimes contradictory investigations of colour by artists from the mid-twentieth century to the present. The exhibition draws together painting and sculpture from an international group of artists who consider colour central to their practice: **Etel Adnan, Josef Albers, David Annesley, David Batchelor, Anthony Caro, Ian Davenport, Paul Feeley, Sam Gilliam, Peter Halley, John Hoyland, Donald Judd, Joseph Kosuth, Jeremy Moon, Kenneth Noland, Hélio Oiticica, Yuko Shiraishi, Frank Stella, Joe Tilson and William Tucker.**

The discourse around the significance of colour in the twentieth century was almost exclusively developed by artists who grappled with the inherent fluidity of its definition. Josef Albers's landmark publication *The Interaction of Color* (1963), based on over thirty years of teaching at the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College, was motivated by the idea that, in order to make art, students must have a knowledge of all facets of the nature of colour. In his own work, Albers uses core compositional structure to examine colour relationships and visual perception. His 'Study for Homage to the Square: "Persistent"' (1954–60) and 'Variant / Adobe' (1956), are part of this exploration.

In 1994 in his last published article, Donald Judd stated that, 'the necessities of representation inhibited the use of colour'.¹ The move away from representation, in abstraction and Minimalism, allowed colour to become a central subject. In the 'color field' paintings of Kenneth Noland, John Hoyland and Etel Adnan, for example, pure planes of colour dominate and individual gesture becomes secondary to colour and line, and their interactions. Frank Stella also pursued the idea of pure colour, describing his intention to keep paint, 'as good as it was in the can'.² His use of household paint, produced on an industrial scale, and the subsequent idea of using colour as a 'readymade', is continued in David Batchelor's 'Colour Chart 58' (2012), and the meticulously manipulated pours of Ian Davenport's Circle paintings.

Brazilian artist, Hélio Oiticica, was occupied by the attempt to liberate colour from a flat, two-dimensional plane and the removal of the space between the art object and viewer. His sculpture 'V6 Spatial Relief, Red (V6 Relevô especial, vermêlho)' (1959/1999) is a folded construction designed to hang in space, enabling the viewer to experience colour and light from every angle. American painter Sam Gilliam, in contrast to other members of the Washington Color School who emphasised flatness in their work, began as early as 1967 to fold and crumple the surface of his paintings before staining them with watercolour or thinned acrylic. His recent work 'Parade IX' (2015) uses the same technique, handmade paper is manipulated and contrasting colours bleed and seep into one another within the folded, architectural structure of the surface. British sculptors of the sixties such as David Annesley, Anthony Caro and William Tucker used the potential of sculpture to explore colour more explicitly, using simple geometric shapes placed directly on the floor, as a vehicle to play with the viewer's experience of colour in three-dimensions.

The traditional understanding of colour and formalism has been critiqued by the New York based painter Peter Halley; he identifies colour not as a passive, decorative element but as a signifier of meaning. His often lurid, Day-Glo palette disrupts the compositional components of his work and plays with notions of 'bad taste'. Similarly, the American artist Joseph Kosuth in his conceptual text work sees colour almost linguistically and toys with processes of representation. In his neon work 'II 49 (On Color / Multi #2)' (1991), Kosuth uses colour to confuse the literal meaning of language, deliberately pairing colour and word. The idea of colour and language as fixed signifiers is conflicting. As David Batchelor states, 'colour is a kind of embarrassment to language. It exposes the limits of language very quickly'.³

As the exhibition will show, the artistic investigation of colour is still a fertile ground for exploration and, whilst an immense amount has been done, the conversation is still ongoing.

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue which includes an ongoing project by David Batchelor, a collection of thoughts on colour from notable thinkers and artists from antiquity to the present day.

1. Donald Judd, 'Some Aspects of Color in General and Red and Black in Particular', the artist's last public statement before his death in 1994; Donald Judd memorial issue, *Artforum* (Summer 1994) pp.70–8
2. Bruce Glaser, 'Questions to Frank Stella and Donald Judd', *Art News* (no.5, September 1966); as quoted in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (ed.), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1996, p.121
3. David Batchelor and Andrea Schlieker, 'A Conversation about Colour and Two-Dimensional Work', *David Batchelor: Flatlands*, The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2013, p.84