

LISSON GALLERY

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Press Release

Stanley Whitney

In the Color

November 3 – December 21, 2018

504 W 24th Street & 138 Tenth Avenue, New York

Opening: November 3, 6 – 8pm

Color inspires and informs the work of Stanley Whitney, whose paintings explore the many possibilities created by the tessellation and juxtaposition of boxes in varying shades of strength and subtlety. Within the composition of these adjacent nodes – a structure that fluctuates between freedom and constraint, between endless open fields and controlled boundaries – is ultimately a play between complementing and competing areas of color. This exhibition, Whitney's fourth with the gallery and the first solo show to occupy both of the New York gallery spaces, investigates his profound relationship to color and its spatial effects throughout his career. It features paintings and drawings dating back to the 1990s in one gallery and a suite of brand new works in the other. To accompany this double showing, Lisson Gallery will publish a catalogue featuring new scholarship by Andrianna Campbell.

Whitney settled on his signature format – stacked irregular rectangles of color within a square format canvas – following time spent in Italy and a visit to Egypt in the mid-1990s. However, in earlier work of the '70s and '80s, Whitney was seeking a sense of lightness and air in his compositions and worked to achieve this by allowing a great deal of space between gestures, which were then applied in loose, overlapping whorls. He has noted, "I didn't know at this point that the space was in the color. I kept thinking the space was around, and the color was all in the space. When I put the colors directly next to each other, I realized they didn't lose the air." Four paintings from this vital, transitional period, when Whitney first began to solidify his swirling strokes into intense colour grids, will be on view at 138 Tenth Avenue, alongside a series of drawings from 2013-14 which demonstrate Whitney's evolving exploration of the balance between hue and expression.

A series of new paintings on view at 504 West 24th Street celebrates Whitney's now mature approach to the gridded abstract. Over many years this style has been honed, tightened and defined, perhaps in response to the cumulative influence of everything from the meditative, multi-faceted landscapes of Paul Cézanne and the stacked structures of classical architecture, to the expansive color fields of monochrome painting and the bold, color-blocked quilts of African-American textile makers. Yet the sensitive and lively placement of color retains its importance in this newly discovered pictorial space and it is within the transitions between passages of color where Whitney evokes the most rhythmic qualities of painting. By varying the density and transparency of the rectangles, he is able to further adjust the amount and quality of color in space. The exhibition's title comes from the title of a recent work, *In the Color*, which also demonstrates this increasingly precise 'call and response' between each colored zone of paint. This work has been executed in the largest square format of Whitney's oeuvre, 96 inches by 96 inches, and is comprised of four rows containing a line-up of between five to six colors in each band. The individual rectangles retain a bold, opaque quality with less of the drips and swirling fluidity of the early grid work. The importance is, as always, in the color.

About Stanley Whitney

Stanley Whitney has been exploring the formal possibilities of color within ever-shifting grids of multi-hued blocks and all-over fields of gestural marks and passages, since the mid-1970s. His current motif, honed over many years, is the stacked composition of numerous saturated color fields, delineated by between three to five horizontal bands running the length of a square-formatted canvas. The cumulative effect of Whitney's multicolored palette is not only one of masterly pictorial balance and a sense of continuum with other works in this ongoing series, but also that of fizzing, formal sensations caused by internal conflicts and resolutions within each painting. Taking his cues from early Minimalism, Color Field painters, jazz music and his favorite historical artists – Titian, Velázquez and Cézanne among them – Whitney is as much an exponent of the process-based, spatially-gridded square in art as Josef Albers, Sol LeWitt, Agnes Martin and Carl Andre.

Stanley Whitney was born in Philadelphia in 1946 and lives and works in New York City and Parma, Italy. He holds a BFA from Kansas City Art Institute as well as an MFA from Yale University and is Professor emeritus of painting and drawing at Tyler School of Art, Temple University. Select solo exhibitions include 'Focus – Stanley Whitney' at the Modern Art Museum, Fort Worth, TX, USA (2016) and 'Dance the Orange' at the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY, USA (2015). Whitney has also been included in many prominent group shows, such as 'Inherent Structure', Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH, USA (2018); Documenta 14 in Athens, Greece and Kassel, Germany (2017); 'Nero su Bianco' at the American Academy in Rome, Italy (2015); 'Outside the Lines: Black in the Abstract', Contemporary Art Museum of Houston, TX, USA (2014); 'Reinventing Abstraction: New York Painting in the 1980s', Cheim & Read, New York, NY, USA (2013); and 'Utopia Station' at the 50th Venice Biennale (2003). He has won prizes including the Robert De Niro Sr. Prize in Painting (2011), the American Academy of Arts and Letters Art Award (2010) and awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship (1996). Whitney's work is included in public collections around the world, including the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, KA, USA; the Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA, USA; and Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT, USA.

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