

# LISSON GALLERY

LONDON

## PRESS RELEASE

### **ROBERT MANGOLD**

**19 October - 17 November 1990**

Robert Mangold's work is remarkable for its originality, but it is also marked by a strong sense of continuity. This continuity is exhibited both within the internal development of the work, and at the wider level of art history.

In art historical terms Mangold's work may be viewed as a direct development from the work of the abstract expressionists - Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko in particular - and to be similar in orientation to the next generation of abstract artists who began to experiment with shaped canvases, most notably Frank Stella.

Since the early 1960s Mangold has worked with the idea of geometry and asymmetry in shape and form. The earlier work was influenced by architectural fragments - sections of walls with window breaks. Mangold has concentrated exclusively on painting, and has worked within specific self-imposed limitations. Most of his paintings have been made on one or more asymmetrically shaped canvases, painted in flat areas of one and, more recently, two or more colours, and inscribed with straight or curved lines and geometric figures. Mangold has continually revised and reconsidered the possibilities generated by this seemingly basic vocabulary of line-colour-shape to produce an extraordinarily rich variety of work. This serves to distinguish Mangold's painting, which is marked by a sense of quietness and patience, from the more baroque manifestations of the shaped canvas over recent years.

Many of the qualities of Mangold's painting derive from the precise processes he employs in the production of a finished work. It is generally known that he starts with small sketches which are gradually refined and edited into larger works on paper before being executed in a small scale acrylic on canvas or masonite. Only then is a full size painting produced. This helps to explain how the particular tension between shape and line is arrived at in each work and how the restrained and considered mood is evoked. It also serves to give the work a further historical aspect which connects it with the tradition of producing a large scale work from a series of studies and sketches. The origins of this tradition are more European than American, and it is a further indication of how Mangold contains within his highly original work a strong sense of historical continuity.

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Each of the six new paintings Mangold has produced for the exhibition at the Lisson Gallery consists of a single asymmetrical shape made of one or two canvases and painted in a single colour. This is dramatised by the addition of an elliptical form drawn in pencil which extends to touch each of the four framing edges, while the overall colour may be modified or changed entirely as the work emerges. The result is a tension where it is impossible to establish which element, line or shape or colour has determined the limits of the others. In each work there is a sense that the solution is arrived at on an empirical trial and error basis; such geometry that Mangold employs is not given in advance of the execution of the work.

While the work in this show develops themes which have preoccupied Mangold for the past four or five years, it also marks a significant new development: for the first time since the 1960s Mangold has produced a specific, closely related series of paintings. It is entitled the *Attic Series*. The OED defines the Attic as "of Attica or Athens: chaste, refined, classical, in taste, language, etc." This is a fitting description of Mangold's paintings in this exhibition, but the choice of title further indicates the extent of Mangold's involvement in, and understanding of, the tradition of European art.

While his work has for a long time been admired and collected by other artists, and a core group of significant collectors; it is only recently that the full historical significance of Mangold's work has become clear to a wider public. It has been made visible in part by the evident lack of staying power exhibited in much recent painting, figurative or abstract. Much of this work promised a final release from the constraints of modernism and a new freedom for artists to reintroduce whatever subjects and styles they chose.

Few such promises have been fulfilled. By the end of the 1980s it had become increasingly clear that it is from those artists who have sought critically to understand the last forty or so years of painting, rather than to detach themselves from it, that substantial and original work has been offered.

Robert Mangold was born in 1937, in New York. After studying at Cleveland Institute of Art and Yale University, he began to exhibit in America and Europe during the early 1960s. Since then he has had numerous one man shows worldwide. This is his fifth exhibition at the Lisson Gallery since the gallery first showed his work in 1973.

**For further information please contact Julienne Webster or Louise Flesh on 071-724 2739.**