

LARGE PRINT

Callum Innes: From Memory

Notes to the Exhibition

Presented here is a selection of Callum Innes's paintings from the past fifteen years. The selection is not strictly chronological, although the majority of earlier works are in the Piper Gallery (to your left at the top of the stairs) while major paintings made especially for the exhibition in 2005 and 2006 dramatically occupy the right hand wall of the Upper Gallery.

Innes's work is characterised by the application and deliberate removal of paint from each canvas. Making his work in series over time, the artist has developed a number of distinct approaches all of which embody a tension between solid paint, often in a dark colour, and those areas he has removed. This tension can be seen to reflect how we live in the world, what we know and can be certain of and what we don't know. Many commentators on the artist's work speak of how the processes he uses visually spark emotive associations and hold our gaze through their presence.

John Piper Gallery

The framed work on your left as you enter is *From Memory* (1989). This important early painting has lent its name to the title of the exhibition, suggesting the way Innes's paintings reveal, to a greater or lesser extent, the memory of the processes involved in their making. Perhaps, too, the viewer is prompted to consider his or her own personal sense of time, place and history. Innes has painted in simple brushstrokes an image of a leaf, the paint having sunk into the unprimed, corrugated cardboard. Having begun his

career as a figurative painter, it represents the moment when Innes recognised how, working with his materials in a structured way, which would also allow for chance and accident, meaning could be communicated.

In the same space are two of Innes's works from the Identified Forms series. Reminiscent of flares in a night sky, each was made by running a brush dipped in turpentine up the canvas, allowing a small pool to form dissolving the oil paint before allowing the solvent to run back down the surface. In the second space, are three large paintings each from a different series. *Untitled 2* (2002) is one of a two paintings in the exhibition in which Innes spots the canvas with oil paint over shellac, a transparent varnish. The oil marks seem to be permanently resisting absorption by the shellac as if an experiment is still in progress. The writer Eric de Chassey has suggested that the paint could be interpreted as a sign of the self surrounded by ambiguity and uncertainty.

On the end wall hangs one of Innes's Monologue paintings, *Monologue Seven* (2003), of which only a handful have been made. The Monologues are among the artist's most spectacular works, created in a single session and most explicitly suggestive of natural processes and phenomena, such as jagged mountains during a haze of rain and mist.

Middle Gallery 1

In the larger middle gallery are two paintings from the series of Exposed Paintings and two smaller works. The Exposed paintings form the largest series of works by Innes. Increasingly sophisticated, each one is divided into several unequal areas: some painted, some where the paint has been removed or dissolved, and some where the surface remains unpainted.

Through the larger middle gallery is another room with a small shellac painting, *Untitled* (1992), and a second work from the Resonance series (a second work the series, in white, hangs in the Piper Gallery), *Resonance One/Black* (2004). This dense, black painting, appearing to have been much worked upon, seems contained and mysterious compared to the simple vertical gesture marking the trace of the artist's brush in the smaller *Agitated Vertical (white)* (2006) in the Middle Gallery.

The Upper Gallery

The Upper Gallery is solely devoted to Exposed Paintings. The earliest work from this series in the exhibition can be found to your left as you enter from the Middle Gallery. The right hand side has had all its paint removed leaving a nervous line down the centre and slight traces of paint behind. The five paintings to the right all titled *Exposed Painting, Dioxazine Violet* form a sequence of works made over a period of several weeks in late 2005 and early 2006. They are presented here in dialogue with each other and with the light filled space of the Gallery. Here the rubbed away paint is reminiscent of silk or traces from a primitive printing process. They have a majestic quality that reflects the assurance of an artist at the height of his powers.

A fully illustrated book featuring an interview with Callum Innes by Paul Bonaventura and essays by Fiona Bradley, Richard Cork, Eric de Chassesey and Michael Auping is available in the Entrance Space.

Callum Innes will be in conversation with Fiona Bradley, curator of the exhibition and Director of The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh at Modern Art Oxford on Thursday 8 March at 6.30pm. Please book.