

MONOCHROME

a dialogue between

BURRI
FONTANA
KLEIN
MANZONI
&
STINGEL

May 2 - June 10, 2017

NEW YORK—Nahmad Contemporary is pleased to announce ***Monochrome: A Dialogue Between Burri, Fontana, Klein, Manzoni, and Stingel***, on view May 2 through June 10, 2017. In a vivid installation organized by color, this exhibition of monochrome paintings brings together the work of postwar European masters Alberto Burri (1915–95), Lucio Fontana (1899–1968), Yves Klein (1928–62), and Piero Manzoni (1933–63) with contemporary artist Rudolf Stingel (b.1956) to examine the enduring artistic practice of working within the bounds of a single color.

Embodying the ultimate expression of abstract painting and denoting the distillation of the medium to its purest form, the monochrome is a historically subversive practice whereby a canvas is suffused with pure color and void of representation. Dating back to the 1900s, the iconoclastic tradition of the monochrome is indelibly associated with the prewar avant-garde artists of the Soviet Union, who defied the medium of painting by replacing representational subject matter with flat shapes, severe grids, and unmodulated expanses of paint to focus on formal properties. In the years following WWII, the monochrome was reinstated by European artists, such as those featured in the exhibition, who searched for artistic expressions emancipated from the horrors of the war and conducive to the spirit of reconstruction.

While many of the European postwar artists seized the monochrome for the spiritual and metaphysical capacities of color, some used the limits of chromatic criteria to emphasize the material existence of a painting, largely anticipating subsequent minimalist agendas. The works selected for this exhibition created during the late 1950s and 1960s characterize this dichotomy. Acknowledging monochromy's variegated past, Rudolf Stingel harnesses the trope of single-color painting in his immense contemporary works, tracing both the metaphysical and the formal capacities imbedded in its history.

The earliest monochrome in the exhibition is **Yves Klein's *IKB 208*** (1957). The sumptuous concentration of the artist's famous blue hue in this work exemplifies his quest to transcend material boundaries through saturated dispersions of color and is reiterated in his gold-leafed *Monogold* painting from 1961. Seizing the optical properties of space and light essential to the perception of color, Klein induces a limitless space that breaches the two-dimensional canvas and engulfs the three-dimensional reality of the viewer.

Likewise, **Lucio Fontana**—a notable attendee of the 1957 exhibition at Galerie Apollinaire in which Klein exhibited his series of identical blue canvases—emphasized spatial infinity by redefining the dimensionality of the picture plane. In his emblematic *Concetto Spaziale* (*Spatial concept*) series, which consists of single-color canvases pierced by vertical slashes, Fontana manually introduced a third dimension by violating the surface of the canvas.

Immersing the viewer in boundless immaterial space, the painted surface transcends outward while the dark chasm retreats into infinite depth.

As a pupil of Fontana, **Piero Manzoni** seized the boundlessness bestowed by the monotone surface through a series of pure white paintings called Achromes. By soaking raw canvases in wet clay, Manzoni created a white, colorless surface accented by furrows and folds. Although he shared similar cosmological ambitions with Fontana and Klein, Manzoni's paintings reveal a minimalist attention to neutrality and physical reduction through a profound negation of color. Pushing the notion of the single color to complete absolute, his achromatic paintings recall the reductionist origins of monochromy initiated by the white-on-white paintings of his Soviet forbearers.

Looking beyond the spiritual capacity of the monochrome painting, **Alberto Burri** illuminates its reductionist faculty by emphasizing its own physical existence. Working concurrently with Fontana and Klein, Burri stressed the materiality of a painting, experimenting with untraditional media and unorthodox techniques. The featured works created in the early 1960s form part of his *Combustioni Plastiche* (Plastic Combustion) series, which consists of molten sheets of black, clear, or red industrial plastic that yield immensely dense monotone abysses. Like Fontana, Burri breaches the single-colored surface with ruptures and deformations. However, Burri reprises the existing color of the prefabricated media in the resultant single-tone works.

Demonstrating a profound dedication to surface and materiality, contemporary artist **Rudolf Stingel** harnesses the power of color, or in some cases the absence of color, to enter the space of the viewer. Stingel screened oil paint through swaths of gauze to create monochrome striations on the black surfaces of his prismatic paintings from 1996–97. Generating a similar push-pull effect as seen in Fontana's *Concetto Spaziale* paintings, the vibrant blue and red paint in Stingel's featured works pulsates forward, while the black recedes into an infinite void. Likewise, Stingel's luminous gold (2013) and patterned, black-on-black (2007) paintings confound spatial orientation and espouse the illusion of depth. His white work from 2003, which he created by walking across Styrofoam panels in acid-drenched boots, confirms the artist's acute understanding of materiality. The painting's surface was transformed by alchemical means into a site of performative action and material decay.

The monochromists working in Europe during the 1950s and 1960s shared a unique vision that celebrated the vast possibilities of color, whether to transform space, perception, and consciousness, or to distill an art object to its physical essence. Their faith in painting as a powerful cognitive instrument was transformative to subsequent movements of minimalism, conceptualism, as well as to countless artists working today. Rudolf Stingel embraces this artistic legacy through a contemporary perspective, creating a body of evocative monochrome paintings imbued with impressions of their nuanced past.