

CAWDELL DOUGLAS

PRESS INFORMATION

Telephone: 020-7439 2822 Facsimile: 020-7287 5488

e-mail: press@cawdelldouglas.co.uk

RICHARD ALLEN – AN IMPORTANT RETROSPECTIVE AT OFFER WATERMAN & CO



Untitled Op Art painting (1966), 91x91cms, PVA on board.

Richard Allen was at the cutting edge of abstract art during a crucial phase in its development during the 1960's and 1970's, working alongside some of the best known names in British modernism such as Bridget Riley yet always remaining very much his own man. However his decision to move to the Channel Islands in 1977 took him away from the hub of the London art world and meant that subsequently he received less recognition than he deserved. ***Richard Allen: A Retrospective***, to be held at **Offer Waterman & Co** in London from **16 April to 10 May 2008**, will be the first major exhibition of his work since his death in 1999 and aims to restore him to his rightful place in the history of late 20th century art.

None of the paintings and works on paper in the exhibition at Offer Waterman & Co at **11 Langton Street, London SW10** have been on the market before and all have come from his estate following a decision by his family to sell them. “I have a very clear reason for doing this,” said his daughter Rebecca, who lives in Sheffield. “I felt awful that these works were in storage. The work was painted to be sold. He painted for his own pleasure and passion but he always wanted to sell the work so that it would be on view. We want the paintings to be on walls in other people’s homes and public galleries.”

Richard Allen: A Retrospective will include more than 40 works including Op art paintings, Pop art collages, charcoal paintings, colour studies and some of Allen’s ‘white paintings’ which he concentrated on in the mid-1990’s. Offer Waterman & Co plans a series of selling exhibitions of Allen’s work and also a touring retrospective show.



Richard Allen was born in Worcester in 1933 and, after working in agriculture and seeing active service with the Army in the Korean War, went to art college in Bath where his teachers included Howard Hodgkin and Gillian Ayres. After a year-long art scholarship in Italy, he returned to England and became a lecturer at Croydon College of Art in south London. Bridget Riley and John Hoyland were among his teaching colleagues and he later recalled: “Working with these people was very important, they all had a committed professional attitude.”

After a brief flirtation with Pop Art, Allen found that he was more at home with Op art which sought to give an illusion of movement by exploiting optical effects. “This really was more interesting to me than Pop Art because it was more concerned with the abstract,” he explained. By 1964 Allen was exhibiting alongside Riley and Peter Sedgley in

Op Art shows and joined their Match Shed co-operative which provided ample viewing space for his huge paintings in St Katharine Docks in London. In 1971 he joined Matrix, an influential group interested in exploring an even more systematic form of painting, which the following year had a major exhibition entitled Systems at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London which was put together by a young curator called Nicholas Serota. In the mid-1970's Allen decided to remove colour altogether from his art, confining himself instead to grid patterns made with charcoal and cellulose acetate on canvas or wax and charcoal on paper.

Throughout this period Allen was at the heart of the London art world exhibiting in a group show at the Hayward Gallery in 1974 and holding a solo exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts the following year. However in 1977 he and his wife Eve decided to turn their back on the capital and move to her native Jersey. A desire for a quieter life to focus on painting and the need to find good schools for their daughters Rebecca and Alice combined with an opportunity to buy an old house that had been in the family for many years.



White painting XXXIII (c1995/6), 38x30cms, oil on canvas

They remained on the island for 14 years, Allen working hard both as an exhibitions consultant and as an artist but with his work more often shown on the continent than in Britain. Riley and other leading artists such as Terry Frost visited their Jersey house but Allen was geographically removed from developments in British contemporary art and intellectually out of sympathy with much of what was happening in London.

In 1991 the Allens returned to England to live in Herefordshire and after nearly two decades of working without colour he started what was to become the series of 'white paintings' which would be his last works. Not long afterwards Eve became ill with cancer and shortly after her death in 1997 Allen was diagnosed with motor neurone disease. Typically his response was to move to London, buy a computer and start to use it to design paintings that could be executed by others. He died aged 66 on 9 February 1999.

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For further information and images:

Will Bennett

Cawdell Douglas

10-11 Lower John Street

London W1R 9EB

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7439 2822

Facsimile: +44 (0)20 7287 5488

Email: press@cawdelldouglas.co.uk