

CRAIG F. STARR GALLERY

PRESS RELEASE

NEW YORK – Craig F. Starr Gallery is pleased to present *Red*, a thematically focused exhibition which includes works by Stuart Davis, Peter Halley, Jasper Johns, Donald Judd, Eleanore Mikus, Bruce Nauman, Susan Rothenberg, Ed Ruscha, and William Turnbull. Each in their own way, these masters of 20th and 21st century art explore a limited chromatic range, mining the color red—in its multiple hues across varied media—to achieve varied formal, technical, and symbolic ends.

Red, in addition to its sensory effects favored by artists in this exhibition, is the eternal color of blood and fire, and comes with a charged set of associations ranging from love and passion to life and death. The reductive nature of their themes, processes, and palettes amplifies both the symbolic resonance and sensory effects of these works which, despite their prominent use of red, remain open to a wide range of possible interpretations.

The earliest work in the exhibition, Stuart Davis's oil on canvas painting, *Composition for Red Polygon*, 1941, is a study for a later work, *General Studies*, 1962. This small-scale composition, which was included in his first retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in 1945, distills the essence of the later painting down to its most diagrammatic parts, with Davis utilizing the brushy red polygon as a foil to the strict linearity of the black scaffolding enclosing it.

William Turnbull's unique linocuts from 1953, much like Susan Rothenberg's *Untitled* 1977 mixed media work over a lithograph, explore explicitly figural themes while foregrounding their mutual love of technique and process. Their use of red lends both vigor and vitality to their human and animal forms, which appear to be caught in between stasis and movement, much like how these works exist somewhere between drawing and printmaking, unique and multiple.

Both Peter Halley and Eleanore Mikus set their strictly limited palettes against the rigidity of their gridded compositions, which in the case of Halley in particular, in both color and imagery evokes themes of political power and control. Mikus, on the other hand, uses red as a means of setting off the delicate hand-folded grid of her intimately-scaled paper support, a loving gesture of an artist acutely aware of subtle chromatic and textural effects.

More explicitly than Halley, Nauman's 1971 lithograph evokes the political and martial connotations of red with his sly palindrome, "Raw War," echoing the somber visual atmosphere created by the use of red text on a dark ground. Ed Ruscha's 1969 lithograph, *Adios*, depicts its namesake word in *trompe l'oeil*—one of his many iconic "liquid words"—as if it were about to evaporate off the paper, with an implied rising temperature hinted at by the subtle-gradient of lighter red at the bottom to darker red on top. In characteristic Ruscha fashion, its red background also implies the dramatic setting sun over the Hollywood Hills, amplified by the city's legendary smog. The word itself—"adios"—implies alternately notions of California's Latin American culture or our collective myths about the American West.

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Donald Judd and Jasper Johns both select a very specific hue—cadmium red—though each with different intentions and effects. Judd, discussing this particular color in an interview with John Coplans, explains, “I like the color and like the quality of cadmium red light,” which, he elaborates, “seems to be the only color that really makes an object sharp and defines its contours and angles.” For Judd, it was this color’s specific material properties which conveyed a particular objecthood to those subjects rendered in this hue, a palpable presence underscored by his use of the overtly tactile medium of woodcut. In contrast, Johns’s use of cadmium red is softened by the intaglio medium, specifically his use of aquatint. This unique proof on handmade Amate paper was made for artist and papermaker Fred Siegenthaler, who provided Johns with the unusual support. Johns, although known for his often cheeky use of bright, primary colors, may or may not have been aware of the significance of Amate paper in Ancient Mesoamerica, or the outsized role that the color red played in their symbology, spirituality, and politics, variously suggesting political power, life-giving vitality, or religious significance.

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