

CARDI GALLERY



Paul Huxley, *Untitled no 29, 1963* Oil paint on cotton duck 172 x 172 cm 67 3/4 x 67 3/4 in

PAUL HUXLEY AN ANTHOLOGY

Curated by Piero Tomassoni

October 15 - November 29, 2025
22 Grafton Street, London W1S 4EX

'The painter has only to lay one brush-mark on a canvas for all the ambiguities and tensions and secret inner life of a painting to have been set in motion. That one mark is immediately both a dab of paint and an image, part of a whole but also an independent unit. It can already be read as an activation of the surface, emphasizing its flatness, or as something existing separate from the surface in some kind of self-generated space. And it is from this duality of the "mark-as-image" and the "image-as-mark" that Huxley's painting mainly grows. It is the subject matter of his work.'

Bryan Robertson, Catalogue note 'The New Generation', 1964

'Each painting operates like an equation whose terms are deliberately unstable. The field is measured, but its measure leaks. Geometry, once a law, becomes a mood.'

Piero Tomassoni

Cardi Gallery is pleased to present Paul Huxley: An Anthology, its first exhibition dedicated to British artist Paul Huxley RA (b. 1938), on view in London from October 15 to November 29. Curated by Piero Tomassoni, the exhibition brings together seminal large-scale abstract works from the 1960s alongside recent canvases and sculptures, tracing six decades of Huxley's pioneering practice.

A central figure among the 'New Generation' of young British artists who emerged in the early 1960s, Huxley has devoted his career to exploring the possibilities of geometric abstraction as both a formal language and a field of intellectual discovery. Operating in a postmodernist tradition, his paintings challenge and expand on the legacy of early twentieth-century abstraction by distilling its lessons to a set of fundamental pictorial elements – scale, colour, plane, gesture, perspective – which he manipulates to achieve different emotional and perceptual responses.

Shortly after graduating from the Royal Academy in 1960, where he enrolled at the age of seventeen and met fellow artist John Hoyland, Huxley adopted his signature square format, eliminating any association with traditional genres of portraiture and landscape in favour of a direct, phenomenological encounter with the viewer. His use of bold, synthetic colours, inspired by contemporary developments in American post-painterly abstraction, equally signalled a break from the natural world of the senses and the intention to create an all-encompassing optical dimension within the bounds of the painting.

Huxley received early critical acclaim for his monumental Fluid series, first shown at the landmark group exhibition 'The New Generation' held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1964. Rendered in striking tonal contrasts, these works playfully subverted the flat, monocentric compositions of Abstract Expressionism by introducing spatial ambiguity and implied perspective, as well as biomorphic motifs that indirectly evoked real-life objects. Works like *Untitled 29* (1963), where an elongated black letter 'i' appears suspended over a brilliant orange background while seemingly receding into space, channel the graphic quality and self-awareness of Pop Art. Other examples from this period, such as *Untitled no 35*, see Huxley emphasizing the liquid characteristics of the medium and, as curator Bryan Robertson wrote at the time, complicating the relationship between figure and ground, mark and image.

After a first formative visit to the US in 1964, Huxley returned to New York the following year upon receiving a Harkness Fellowship, remaining there for two years, a period which proved foundational to his creative evolution. It was at this time that he met and, in some cases, formed lasting relationships with the foremost exponents of the New York avant-garde, including Barnett Newman, Lee Krasner and Robert Motherwell.

"I was searching for luminosity, I wanted the colour to hover," Huxley has said of the large-scale paintings he produced in his American period, which expand on his previous colouristic research, albeit with a stronger emphasis on geometry and a more analytical approach to composition. Working within a rigorous system of proportional and tonal relationships derived from Bauhaus teachings, and aided by the use of acrylic paint, paintings like *Untitled no 86* explore the tension between two- and three-dimensionality via purely orthogonal shapes that variously suggest flatness and volumetric fullness. The resulting works produce a state of perpetual instability, wavering between concrete objecthood and the immateriality of pure perception.

Huxley arrives at his compositions through an iterative process, with extensive preparatory drawings and studies that break down each individual shape to a single syntagm-like component inside a larger system of meaning. The formal construction of *Untitled no 113*, defined by its dynamic top-down composition and punctuated by carefully spaced intervals between each rectangle, transposes the relational logic of written language into purely abstract territory. The colour-key device the artist began embedding in his paintings in the late 1960s, and which resurfaces in recent works such as *Equilibrium*, offers an access point to Huxley's deeply analytical, rigorous yet ultimately self-aware practice.

BIO

Paul Huxley was born in London in 1938. He first studied at Harrow School of Art and then at the age of seventeen, he was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools where he graduated in 1960. In 1964 he was selected by Bryan Robertson for 'The New Generation' at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, the exhibition that first introduced emerging artists of the sixties to a wider public. Works in this show from Huxley's 'fluid series' of paintings became highly influential within the genre of new abstract painting at the time and won him an award that took him to the USA where he met many of the leading American artists of the period such as Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Robert Motherwell, Lee Krasner, Helen Frankenthaler and Jasper Johns, often visiting their studios and in some cases forming lasting friendships. In 1965 he was awarded a Harkness Fellowship that extended his residency in New York for a further two years culminating in his first solo show there. During this time he made the initial studies for his 'key series', works in which he deconstructed the traditional monocentric format of current abstract painting. These were seminal to the development of the divided canvases that have largely characterised his work ever since. The 'studio series' reintroduced the theme of the standing form that had previously been a feature in works of the late sixties and now was continued in subsequent paintings, for instance in the *Modus Operandi* series of the late 1980s and the *Anima Animus* series of the 1990s, where Huxley presented the concept of interactions between differing hypothetical renderings of image, flat colour field, line, chiaroscuro and collage.

Huxley has also taught in art schools throughout his career and has contributed to policy in the academic and curatorial fields. He was a member of the advisory panel for the Serpentine Gallery, a Trustee of the Tate Gallery, acting for a period as chairman of its Exhibitions Committee. He was Professor of Painting at the Royal College of Art from 1986 until 1998 after which he was elected Honorary Fellow and Professor Emeritus. Many of his students from these years such as Dinos Chapman, Nigel Cook, Dexter Dalwood, Andrew Grassie, Tracey Emin, Chantal Joffe and Chris Ofili are now established artists. In 1987 he was editor of 'Exhibition Road - Painters from the Royal College of Art', a book to coincide with the exhibition of the same title, which he co-curated with Susie Allen. For their joint work on this show the National Art Collections Fund (now The Art Fund) gave them an award for Outstanding Service to the Arts. He has been a Royal Academician since 1987 acting as their Treasurer for fourteen years.

Over the last four decades Huxley's work has been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions both in the UK and internationally. Recent projects have included a series of steel sculptures and large-scale wall drawings including in the Azerbaijan International Pavilion for the 56th Venice Biennale. In 2016 the Mark Rothko Centre in Latvia held a retrospective of his work.

PRESS

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