

VIEWING ROOM

ROY NEWELL



13 MARCH – 14 APRIL 2018
SIMON LEE GALLERY, LONDON

As part of its Viewing Room programme, Simon Lee Gallery is proud to present work by American abstract painter Roy Newell (1914-2006), marking the first solo exhibition of the artist's work in the UK. This concise presentation showcases eleven paintings spanning over half a century of the artist's career. Characterised by their multi-layered surfaces, irregular geometrical patterns, obsessive reworking and luminous tonality, the works on display reveal an expressive power that aligns Newell with the Abstract Expressionist movement, of which he was an original member.

In the 1940s – before the emergence of Abstract Expressionism – the art reference room of the New York Public Library was a popular meeting point for burgeoning artists. It was here that Newell met his friend and life-long champion of his work, Willem de Kooning, and began his career on the same successful path as that of his contemporaries and fellow members of the soon-to-be New York school. While large-scale gestural painting was pioneered by most, Newell began moving in an entirely different direction. His paintings became smaller and more hermetic, with Newell himself becoming increasingly withdrawn from the art-world mainstream. He was fascinated by colour and texture, and his expressive brushstrokes, which emulate post-Impressionist artists such as Vuillard, Bonnard, and Cézanne, are juxtaposed with the rigidity of the grid that echoes the hard-edged abstraction of Malevich, Mondrian and Albers.

Producing less than 100 paintings over his lifetime, Newell's process was prolonged and often excessive, sometimes working on the same painting for as long as five decades in pursuit of perfection. Intimate in scale, the resulting paintings are immense compressions of both time and emotion: each work unveiling in its colour, texture and composition an excerpt from the life of the artist. Newell worked primarily in oil on panel or canvas, and due to continual reworking many of his paintings are up to an inch thick, bestowing a sculptural quality on the works. The pictorial space of the work is expanded further by painting over and around the narrow frames, contributing to the object-like feel of the paintings. Above all, the works on view reveal a remarkable consistency of vision, surveying the expressive depth of his oeuvre and the private mythology of this complicated artist.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Roy Newell was born in Manhattan's Lower East Side in 1914, and died in 2006. He was the son of Eastern European immigrants and was a largely self-taught artist. He was an original member of the Abstract Expressionist movement, and was a founding member of the 8th Street Artist Club, which also included Willem de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Franz Kline and Jackson Pollock. Newell exhibited infrequently and sold very few of his paintings during his lifetime. However his works are included in notable public and private collection such as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the New York University Art Collection, the Willem de Kooning Estate, the Elaine de Kooning Trust, and the Pollock-Krasner House, amongst others.

Image: Roy Newell, Untitled, 1957, Oil on board, 12.7 x 14.9 cm (5 x 5 7/8 in.)

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