

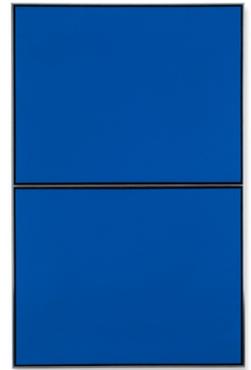
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PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

Tadaaki Kuwayama

7 June – 28 July 2017



Untitled (Blue), 1965
Acrylic on Canvas, Aluminum strip, 100 x 60 cm

The work of Tadaaki Kuwayama (b. 1932 Nagoya, Japan) is characterised by “radical neutrality,” as art historian Michio Hayashi describes it. Since the early 1960s, Kuwayama has adamantly broken from existing modes of artistic expression in order to create neutral art, which means, the artist removes all the characteristics from a painting to the degree where you can no longer judge the painting with aesthetic conventions. Kuwayama first eliminates all expressive elements from the painting to establish a unitary colour field. He then applies a layer of clear solvent to make the work’s surface reflective, so that it blends into the surrounding space. His most representative work from the mid-1960s comprised of four equivalent squares, each framed by aluminium strips and bordered by thin black lines. This structure has no top or bottom; hence, the work is free of composition. Since the cross-paintings come in sets of equivalent elements, their order is random and can be arranged in any way. More cross-paintings can be added to create an infinite space without beginning or end, and the totality of the works, rather than individual design, becomes important. His remarkably neutral panels challenge people, as they can no longer judge his painting as “good or bad.” In order to fully appreciate Kuwayama’s artworks, the viewers need to leave one’s own conventional ideas behind.

Kuwayama grew up in a militaristic society where individuals were embedded in a system that paved the way for all-out war. In 1952, he entered the *nihonga* (modern Japanese-style painting) program of Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, and encountered a similarly authoritarian system in the school’s pedagogical direction. Seeking for “*ko*” (individuality) and artistic freedom, the artist left Tokyo for New York in 1958, where the notion of painting was radically changing after Abstract Expressionists’ emotionally charged paintings. For example, Frank Stella’s four symmetrical stripe-patterned black paintings on display at MoMA’s *Sixteen Americans* (1959), denied expressiveness and symbolic aspect of painting, by reducing art into just “the paths of brush on canvas.” In the following year, Kuwayama came to realize that traditional “painting is not the sole definition of art,” and began removing all the characteristics from a painting and creating his own colours and formats. In the following year, Kuwayama had his first solo exhibition at Green Gallery, a prominent vanguard venue in New York that featured many up and coming artists, including Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Yayoi Kusama, Robert Morris, and Andy Warhol. In that year, Kuwayama already was part of the Carnegie International, and *Art in America* featured him as “New Talent USA,” in 1964.

It is noteworthy that the future Minimalist, Donald Judd, then a young critic with *Arts* magazine, had reviewed every solo exhibition of Kuwayama’s until 1964. However, unlike Minimalists, who were not reluctant to employ the commercially available fluorescent lights or industrial paints, Kuwayama acquires industrial effects in his work by using spray guns and mixing his own pigments and carefully building his work. In this respect, Kuwayama’s work aligns with his generation of European artists, such as the German Zero artist, Otto Piene and his collaborator Yves Klein. Emerging from the totalitarian societies, these artists sought for new materials and methods that can offer “an experience that is completely different from viewing conventional paintings,” so that their art could liberate the ideas and senses of their onlookers.

Visitor information:
Mon-Fri 10am-5.30pm; Admission: Free
Nearest Tube Station Green Park or Piccadilly Circus

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