

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Richard Serra

Blind Spot

2002-03

Gagosian Gallery

GOOD OLD BOYS

by Alexandra Anderson-Spivy

Some values are eternal, despite the gyrations of the economy. In the contemporary art world, this truism is represented by the handful of art stars who can be depended on to deliver the goods, year in and year out. This fall has seen shows by Philip Guston and David Hockney, both of which garnered praises in these pages from Charlie Finch [see "[Guston's Finger Puppets](#)" and "[A Walk in the Woods](#)"]. Also on view in New York galleries: major exhibitions of new works by Richard Serra and Red Grooms; a survey of light installations by Dan Flavin; and a show featuring new paintings by Philip Pearlstein paired with works by the late abstractionist Al Held.



Richard Serra

The appearance of these old reliables provides a chance to note how well their art survives in our time of extreme artistic pluralism. The original polemics and esthetic battles that provided this art with much of its verve are all but forgotten. Who cares today to defend abstraction over representation, or to argue for painterly expressionism in the face of Minimalism? One issue does remain, of course, and that's the question of gender equality. Let me be the first to note that the familiar figures I'm talking about here are all men.

Arguably the largest-scale undertaking in Chelsea this

Open Ended

2007-08

Gagosian Gallery



Richard Serra

Blind Spot

2002-03

Gagosian Gallery

Photo by Rob McKeever



Richard Serra

Blind Spot / Open Ended

installation view

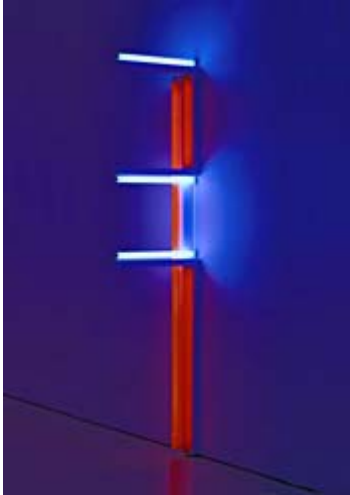
Gagosian Gallery

West 21st Street in Chelsea of two major new steel works, *Blind Spot* (2002-03) and *Open Ended* (2007-08), which draws to a close on Dec. 23, 2009. The 70-year old artist hasn't lost his groove -- the gallery thoughtfully provides his 23-page-long CV -- and the new works are more fastidious and elegant than ever, utterly dominating both the gallery space and the puny viewer.

Both sculptures are more or less spiral ellipses with 14-foot-tall walls. One leads you on an inwardly circling path (two complete circles, in fact) to a central dead-end, while the other is rather less claustrophobic, providing both a way in and a way out. Oxidized to a deep red earth color, these sinuous forged-steel mazes dance with gravity, suggest timeless tectonic principles and reject, as the man who abolished the sculptural pedestal (always) does, all conventions of representation.

Serra remains a creator of supremely interactive, poetic and ominous viewer experiences. Pure thrills! Upon entering the constricted passages of either maze, whose reverse-curve welded Corten panels radically compress the passageways, you think you know what to expect -- but a frisson of anxiety might still surprise. In the end, the sculptures' magnificent machismo provides a rare Apollonian calm. Conventionally categorized as a Minimalist, Serra is here revealed as an ambitious shirtsleeves romantic.

Calling the late artist Dan Flavin a Minimalist seems much too limiting, especially in the presence of the florescent light pieces that currently bathe the half-dozen rooms of David Zwirner gallery with unforgettable

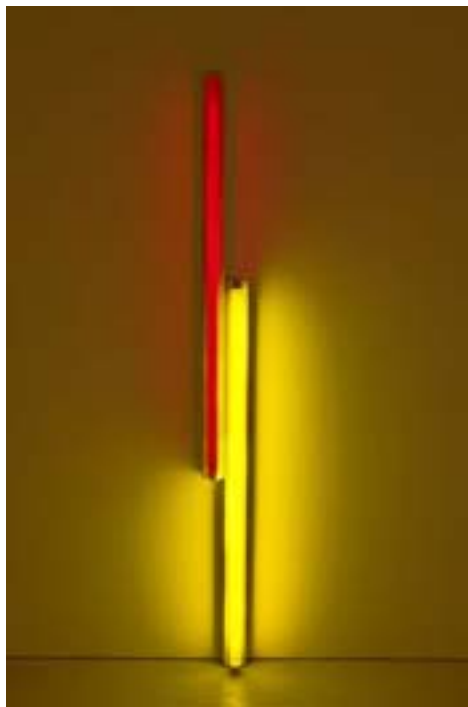


Dan Flavin

untitled (for John Heartfield) 3d

1990

David Zwirner



Dan Flavin

untitled

1968

David Zwirner

radiance. Zwirner recently began representing the artist's estate, and this first exhibition of Flavin works is a stunner. Each of these major works, defined by the geometric arrangements of light fixtures, inhabits a specific space and its very air with emitted colored or white light.

Flavin, who was 63 years old when he died in 1996, for over 30 years rigorously limited his materials to commercial, standard-sized fluorescent lighting tubes. This new show reminds us once again that the Queens-born artist was a brilliant poet of light who transformed utilitarian fixtures into transmitters of transcendent beauty. Each of his precisely orchestrated color combinations produces a different and immediate emotional response, ranging from euphoria to sadness. Now that LED and other radical new lighting technologies have made the florescent tube an antique, the works here take on an additional technological nostalgia.

Also favoring New York gallery-goers with new works is Red Grooms, the irrepressible, carrot-topped impresario who first made it big with *Ruckus Manhattan*, the antic walk-in environment made of papier-mâché, plastic and fiberglass that was installed exactly 23 years ago on the ground floor of an office building at 88 Pine Street. That kitschy extravaganza celebrated New York City with a riotous Pop Art spirit. Red went on to make wickedly witty paper cutout constructions, paintings and drawings that borrowed from cartooning but never succumbed to it.

Lately I'd been wondering where Red, whose hair now is



Dan Flavin

alternating pink and "gold"

1967

David Zwirner



Red Grooms

The Lindy Hop

2009

Marlborough Chelsea

gray (he's 73), had got to. Well, it was to the Tallix foundry in Beacon, N.Y., where he produced a series of new industrial-strength sculptures. "Dancing," his recent show at Marlborough Chelsea, displayed five jitterbugging, tangoing, pirouetting, Lindy Hopping, Flamenco-dancing couples. Super-sized and super-charged with color, each towering, silhouetted pair seems designed to best be seen sashaying down Park Avenue's median strips. Unfortunately, the bright enamel finishes on the aluminum figures that make them so suitable for the great outdoors was achieved with a certain loss of spontaneity.

Opposites Attract is Irving Sandler's title for the little brochure essay he wrote about Philip Pearlstein and Al Held's current joint appearance at Betty Cunningham Gallery on West 25th Street. In spite of what Sandler describes as the two artist's "antithetical esthetic positions," the show looks quite snappy. These two veteran artists each left Abstract Expressionism behind to pursue different directions that now actually have an interesting dialogue. Pearlstein, born in 1924, chose an objective kind of representation, supposedly banning from his work any narrative, symbols, poetry, politics, humor or religion.

In his most recent paintings, Pearlstein is definitely showing off the results of this manifesto, and why shouldn't he? He's been working for 50 years now and is clearly entertaining himself, and us, with his remarkably energetic and complex still-lives. He surrounds his signature objectified nudes with a wild assortment of objects, including a shiny chrome armchair that plays



Red Grooms

Flamenco Dancers

2008

Marlborough Chelsea



"Pearlstein / Held," installation view
at Betty Cunningham Gallery

havoc with reflections. It's late mannerist virtuosity and some of his strongest work ever. Even if these tours de force first appear too busy, Pearlstein's staying power and his control over his medium and his ideas should humble younger artists.

Complexity was no stranger to Al Held, who died four years ago when he was 76. Evolving beyond his early, heavily impastoed abstractions, Held ended up removing all evidence of his hand from his hard-edge abstractions that first played with flat color and then with swirling helixes, circles and geometric forms in perspective. His command of space and hue in his late paintings makes them look as contemporary as the latest video game. In one late work, Held even playfully included an earthly landscape and a horizon, as if to add a bit of narrative to the Star Wars geometrics.

Age is certainly no barrier to achievement in the art world -- in fact, it's barely worth mentioning. And while too much new art is about as interesting as wilted lettuce, these good old boys are only looking better and better as time passes.

Richard Serra: "Blind Spot/Open Ended," Oct. 27-Dec. 23, 2009, at Gagosian Gallery, 522 West 21 Street, New York, N.Y. 10011

Dan Flavin, "Series and Progressions," Nov. 5-Dec. 23, 2009, at David Zwirner, 525 West 19th Street, New York, N.Y. 10011

Red Grooms, "Dancing," Oct. 15-Nov. 14, 2009, at Marlborough Chelsea, 545 West 25th Street, New York,



Philip Pearlstein

Model with Chrome Chair, Kiddie

Car, Kimono and Bambino

2008

Betty Cuningham Gallery

N.Y. 10001

"Pearlstein / Held, Five Decades," Nov. 19, 2009- Feb. 13, 2010, at Betty Cuningham Gallery, 541 West 25th Street, New York City, N.Y. 10001.

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Al Held

Aperture I

1996

Betty Cuningham Gallery

