Monochrome No.2

Ordovas

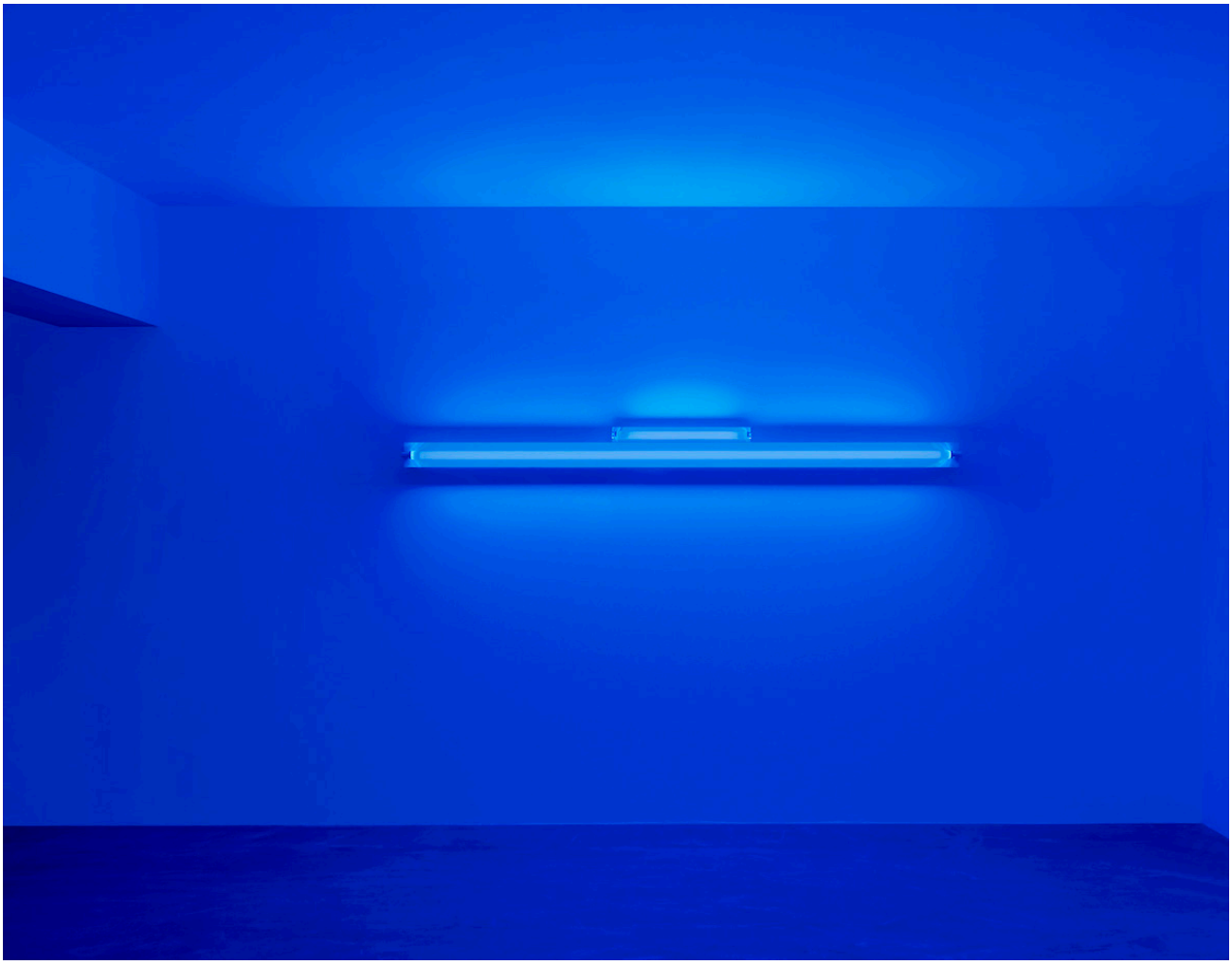
London

Tue 11 Feb 2020 to Sat 25 Apr 2020

Tue-Fri 10am-6pm, Sat 11am-3pm

Monochrome No.2 **focuses on a selection of blue works by contemporary European and American artists as they contemplate the colour's complex associations and aesthetic possibilities through a variety of media.**

Nothing of the kind exists.



The myriad hues that make up this enigmatic colour evoke the elemental as well as the emotional, tint our memories, and are apt, according to Goethe, 'to disturb rather than enliven'. *Monochrome No.2* is the second in a series dedicated to the formal exploration of the use of a single colour in the work of significant artists from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, featuring a commissioned essay by Dr James Fox, art historian and celebrated broadcaster.

The dawn of the twentieth century was heralded by Pablo Picasso's 'Blue Period' and the publication of Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. As the public's awareness of psychoanalysis grew, so did their interest in the colour blue, which became a popular metaphor for the mysterious terrain of the mind. In the late 1930s, Jackson Pollock undertook a course of psychoanalytic therapy. Fuelled by his therapist's belief that they could unlock his unconscious thoughts and provide clues for the causes of his depression and alcoholism, Pollock made dozens of drawings in cheap notebooks throughout his treatment. *Untitled*, created in blue ballpoint pen, circa 1939-1942, extends across both sides of a sheet of yellowing paper. Possibly produced with the aid of 'automatic' drawing techniques and clearly inspired by the surrealist imagery of Pablo Picasso and Joan Miró, it is a violently beautiful vision of an imagined universe.

Ten years later, another American artist was creating his own surreal blue monochromes. Robert Rauschenberg and his then wife Susan Weil began experimenting with cyanotypes in 1949, placing objects on sheets of photosensitive paper before exposing them to ultraviolet light. Over the next few years, Rauschenberg and Weil produced many such photograms – which they called 'blueprints' – though most have since been lost. One rare survivor, *A Birthday Picture for Hermine*, 1952, was originally made as a thirteenth birthday present for a friend's daughter.

Yves Klein's short life was marked by his perpetual quest for freedom and knowledge. He experimented with Zen and Judo before funnelling his prodigious energies towards art. By the mid-1950s Klein had focused his attention on the blueness of the sky, and, convinced that no existing blue pigment possessed such transcendental qualities, Klein asked the celebrated Parisian colour merchant Édouard Adam to help him invent a new one. After more than a year of experimentation, Klein and Adam came across an artificial resin called *Rhodopas M* which, when mixed with high grade synthetic ultramarine, created a blue colourant that was more brilliant than any of its predecessors. Klein subsequently patented it, under the name 'International Klein Blue' (IKB).

Throughout the late 1950s, Klein made a series of monochrome paintings in IKB and created a number of sculptures from IKB-drenched sponges, tools that he had initially used merely to apply the paint to his canvases. From 1958, Klein also applied IKB directly on people, using them as 'living paintbrushes'. *La Marseillaise (ANT 138)*, 1960, depicts Klein's studio assistant (and soon-to-be-wife) Rotraut Uecker as an allegorical representation of French *liberté*, constructed both from positive and negative marks: some of them impressed directly by Uecker's face, others sprayed, stencil-like, around her undulating body.

In the six decades since Yves Klein invented IKB, hundreds, if not thousands, of new blue pigments and dyes have entered the market and modern artists did not hesitate to exploit this newfound accessibility. Roy Lichtenstein used basic blue crayons found in children's colouring sets to decorate – or deface – his black and white drawings, such as *Seductive Girl (Study)*, 1996. Meanwhile, Felix Gonzalez-Torres was making sculptures from mass-produced blue glass and standard-issue blue paper, such as *"Untitled" (Loverboy)*, 1990, a stack of sky-blue sheets of paper, placed directly on the floor, which can be endlessly replenished as visitors remove them. In *Hi There, My Old Friend*, 1994, Ed Ruscha painted five formless cerulean patches, which hover like phantoms on an unprimed canvas, assumed to be concealing the words of the picture's title.

A Cy Twombly sculpture, made at his home in the Italian coastal city of Gaeta in 2005, is constructed from three crudely fashioned rectangles of wood and plaster, piled atop each other like miniature megaliths, then covered in a coat of blue acrylic paint. Like Yves Klein before him, Twombly surely aimed to harness and materialise the ethereal colours around him. Situated outside the media of painting and sculpture, the majority of Dan Flavin's work after 1963 consists of art made from light. As the viewer gazes at *untitled (for Charlotte and Jim Brooks) 4*, executed in 1964, the all-blue light does something that seems to defy the laws of physics: it produces the effect of darkness.

In the last few years, Joseph Kosuth has made a number of neon word works inspired by George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). In his most recent piece, he has selected a sentence from Orwell's dystopian novel that originally referred to 'The Brotherhood' – a secret organisation founded to bring down the all-powerful government, though one we later learn that was fictitious and invented by the authorities solely to identify potential dissenters. The glowing cobalt-coloured neon sign reads 'Nothing of the kind exists' – it is redolent not only of 'The Brotherhood' but also of the perennial paradox of blue, a colour that appears to be everywhere but is ultimately little more than an illusion.

Installation view of Monochrome No.2 at Ordovas, London, 2020. Photo: Stuart Burford and Andrew Smart.

exhibition artworks

Jackson Pollock
Untitled, circa 1939-42
© The Pollock-Krasner Foundation ARS, NY and DACS, London 2020

contact gallery about this work

Robert Rauschenberg
A Birthday Picture for Hermine, 1952
Private Collection, courtesy Artist Estate Studio, LLC, Brooklyn © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation/VAGA at ARS, NY and DACS, London 2020

contact gallery about this work

Yves Klein
Sculpture éponge bleue sans titre (SE 165), circa 1959
Courtesy of Private Collection © Succession Yves Klein c/o ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2020

contact gallery about this work

Yves Klein
La Marseillaise (ANT 138), 1960
© Succession Yves Klein c/o ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2020

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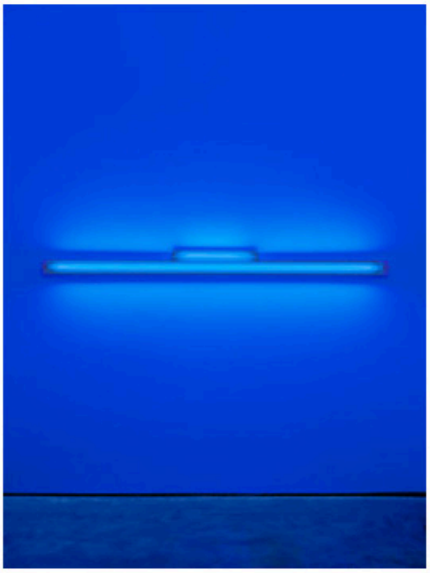
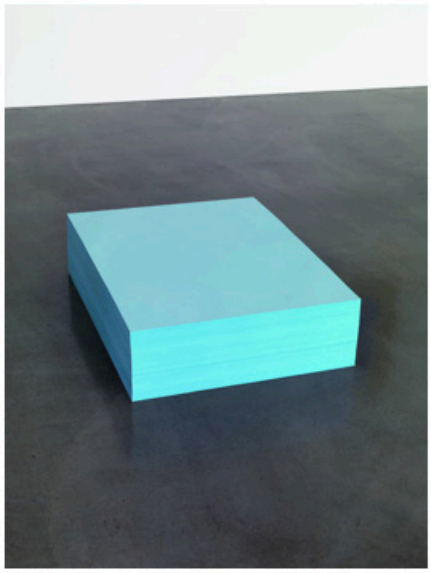


Dan Flavin
untitled (for Charlotte and Jim Brooks) 4, 1964
Estate of Dan Flavin © Stephen Flavin / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York 2020

contact gallery about this work



Felix Gonzalez-Torres
"Untitled" (Loverboy), 1990
Private Collection, Courtesy of The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation © Felix Gonzalez-Torres

contact gallery about this work

Ed Ruscha
Hi There, My Old Friend, 1994
© Ed Ruscha. Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian

contact gallery about this work

Roy Lichtenstein
Seductive Girl (Study), 1996
Private Collection, Courtesy Castelli Gallery, New York © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/DACS 2020

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Cy Twombly
Untitled, Gaeta, 2005
Collection Cy Twombly Foundation © Cy Twombly Foundation. Courtesy Archives Fondazione Nicola Del Roscio. Photo by Giorgio Benni

contact gallery about this work

Joseph Kosuth
Nineteen-Eighty-Four (Orwell) #4, 2019
© Joseph Kosuth. ARS, NY and DACS, London 2020

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