

PRESS RELEASE

Pat Steir

Opens Thursday February 20, 2014 from 6-8 pm
Exhibition continues through March 29



Colors Without Names 2013 oil on canvas
132 x 132 in 335.3 x 335.3 cm

Cheim & Read is pleased to announce an exhibition of recent work by New York painter Pat Steir. The show is accompanied by a full-color catalogue with an essay by Raphael Rubinstein.

Pat Steir is known for paintings in which paint is dripped, splashed and poured on canvas, resulting in fields of lush, saturated color. Born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1940, Steir began showing in the early 1960s, soon after graduating from Pratt Institute in 1962. Loosely aligned with Conceptual Art and Minimalism, her career began amid a hotbed of artistic debate concerning not only the aesthetics and production of art, but also the role of the artist. Steir's early paintings questioned modes of both abstraction and representation, and led to works that attempted to eradicate any sense of narration or figuration. In more recent work, she, as the artist (her gesture, her intention), has also been eliminated. The act of painting is reduced to the materiality of paint itself. Compared to Abstract Expressionism, in which the artist's mark, and thus his myth, is celebrated, Steir's canvases express a Zen-like emptiness; she has made all attempts to extinguish the ego.

Steir's current working process began around 1989, with her celebrated *Waterfall* paintings. Pigment, oil and turpentine are mixed to different consistencies, their downward flow directed not by Steir, but by gravity and the paint's viscosity. As she pours and splashes paint on the canvas, Steir rarely touches the painting; her distance from its surface and the speed of her movements determine the effects of confetti-like drips and splatters, seen, for example, in the thin silver web of *Sweet Suite #11: Four*, 2012-13. Time is also an active element; sometimes Steir waits between pours for the pigment to slow and coalesce, resulting in stratified compositions and overlapping color. For example, in *Blue and Silver and Gold*, 2013, the luminous, lapis blue layers of the painting's right-hand panel seem to both advance and retreat, like silhouetted mountain ridges or an incoming tide. Steir embraces associations with nature; as she has said, "I...use nature to paint a picture of itself by pouring the paint." Rubinstein, in his essay for the catalogue, also comments on this "tautological relationship between process and image," calling it "a kind of visual onomatopoeia."

Steir's work conveys a sense of vast, infinite space while simultaneously bringing attention to the pigment-strewn flatness of the painted surface. This simultaneity is at the core of her practice, and is a reflection of her long-standing interest in ancient Chinese philosophy and artistic traditions. Though painted on one support, Steir's compositions are often bisected by a centerline, requiring the viewer to oscillate between both halves of the painting. As Rubinstein remarks, this has the effect of opening one side as it closes the other, echoing concepts of Chinese painting in which binary pairs, like "opening/closure," "empty/full," and "rising/falling," are integral to the work's realization. The two sides of Steir's paintings interact at their centers, sometimes merging together and sometimes separating: the centerline both divides and eternally connects. For Steir – who has said, "all my work is a search and an experiment" – harmony relies on the duality of opposites, and the unpredictability and spontaneity in their making.

Lynda Benglis continues through February 15.

Cheim & Read 547 West 25 Street, New York