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Stephen Mueller

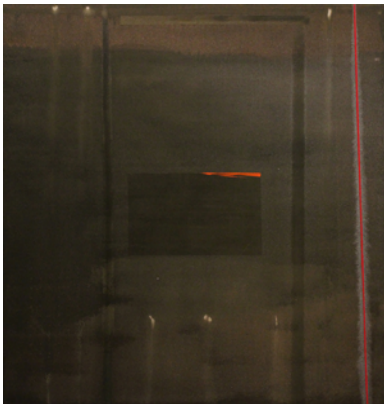
A Selection of Paintings, 1988 – 2011

February 28 – April 11, 2015

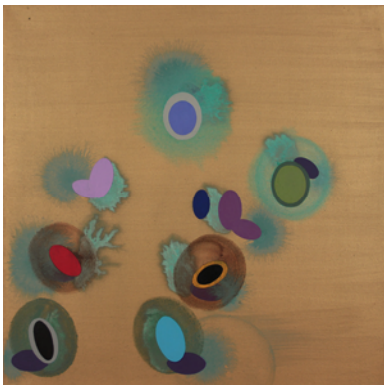
Gallery hours: Tuesday-Saturday 10am – 6pm



Saint Cicada, 1988



Morning This Evening, 1990



Untitled (Chi Stories), 1995

This is the third exhibition of Stephen Mueller's work at Lennon, Weinberg. The first took place in 2010, a show of works all painted in a single year. After his death in 2011, we organized a second exhibition of late work from a span of five years that provided an opportunity to reveal some of his final paintings. It now seems appropriate to look at work from a wider time frame.

The show begins with *Saint Cicada*, 1988. It was first shown at Annina Nosei Gallery and is a classic example from the period that earned Mueller a reputation as one of America's best young abstract painters and inclusion in a memorably strong Whitney Biennial the previous year. The painting is perfectly in tune with the extravagantly painterly ethos of the Neo-Expressionist decade but also finds Mueller right at the cusp of changes that substantially redefined his work. It contains, in somewhat embryonic form, many of the compositional elements that appear in his work of the following years, purified, clarified and serene.

It's an interesting title, *Saint Cicada*. It speaks to the ecstasies, torments, miracles and martyrdoms associated with saints and the ways that those states have been conjured in some of the most hallucinogenic and rapturous paintings in art history. It also alludes to rebirth, to passage from dark enclosure to the warmth of light, and the gorgeousness of the natural world. *Morning, this Evening*, 1990, a minimalistic and adumbral painting, allows the tiny intrusions of geometry among the muscular gestures of *Saint Cicada* a more prominent role and is a quietly meditative tour de force.

Stephen Mueller had a long-standing interest in Buddhist and Tantric art that was heightened by a large exhibition that took place in New York in 1991, "Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet" at the IBM Gallery. Klaus Kertess wrote this about Mueller's recent work in a 1993 article in *Artforum* magazine, "His vividly hued elliptical and circular shapes hover and buzz in shimmering mists; their manner, while less regimented, recalls the multiples of Buddha's beatific chubbiness that float so frontally on the flat and floreate ground of many Tibetan tanka paintings. Like those of Tibetan painters, Mueller's animated apparitions of the last two years are at once stunningly present and utterly elusive – by turns cosmic, comic, mystic, and erotic."



Untitled, 2002



Navigator, 2007



Owen, 2011

During the early to mid-1990s, while the spotlight of the art world turned toward societal and conceptual issues, Mueller made paintings that elaborated a celestial universe of drifting atmospheres and hard-edged shapes, playing with arrangements of transparencies and opacities that evidenced his increasing interest in the medium of watercolor. There is a grace and wonder in the work of this particular period that warrants a deeper look in an exhibition on its own. It is unmistakable that this is the era in which his mature style, for lack of a better word, came into being.

From this time on, circles, ovals, plaids, stripes, Tantric shapes, fans, auras and other optical flourishes traverse radiant fields with an insouciant impetuosity. *Navigator*, 2007, a painting that features a dial-like form abreast of overlapping circular bands, suggests one who has a vision of the way forward. The last work in the show, *Owen*, 2011, named for a friend who died not long before Stephen himself, is celebratory in regard to our ultimate destination. That Stephen Mueller's own journey was cut short too soon at the age of sixty-three should not diminish our enjoyment of the legacy of a singularly enlightened painter, one who was indeed among the best of his generation.

Stephen Mueller (1947-2011) was born in Norfolk, Virginia and grew up in Dallas, Texas. He received his BFA at the University of Texas, Austin and his MA from Bennington College. He has exhibited with Texas Gallery in Houston since 1974 and was represented in New York by Tibor de Nagy, Annina Nosei, and Bill Maynes between 1975 and 2001. His work has been exhibited in London at Fabian Carlsson, in Los Angeles at Daniel Weinberg, at Galerie Specht in Basel and more recently at Nature Morte in Berlin, Galeria Otto Zoo in Milan and Cardwell-Jimmerson in Culver City. Lennon, Weinberg has exhibited his work in New York since 2007 and presented solo exhibitions in 2010 and 2012.

Mueller was included in Whitney Biennial exhibitions in 1987 and in 1995. An exhibition of a series of Mandala paintings took place at Art/Omi in Ghent, New York in 2010. His works are included in many museum collections including the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the High Museum, the Denver Art Museum, the Portland Art Museum, the Joslyn Art Museum, the Birmingham Museum of Art, the Munson Williams Proctor Museum of Art and the Blanton Museum of Art.

He received grants and awards from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Gottlieb Foundation. He received a Guggenheim fellowship in 2000 and was a regular contributor to *Art in America* and *Artcritical*.