

**RUDOLF
DE CRIGNIS**

Swiss Institute, New York

RUDOLF DE CRIGNIS

September 15-October 19, 1989

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a pleasure to open the Swiss Institute's 1989/1990 cultural season with an exhibition of works by Rudolf de Crignis and Laurent Veuve.

"Two Aspects of Abstraction: Rudolf de Crignis and Laurent Veuve" demonstrates two totally different, and innovative approaches to abstraction. The Swiss Institute hopes that this joint exhibition will familiarize a larger audience to the works of these two talented Swiss artists.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the Swiss Society of New York, that permitted the catalogues on Rudolf de Crignis and Laurent Veuve to be realized. Furthermore my gratitude goes to PRO HELVETIA, Swiss Council for the Arts, Swiss Center Foundation, and Cassinelli Vogel Foundation for their generous contributions to this project.

My various conversations with Rudolf de Crignis, and Laurent Veuve were instrumental in understanding their concepts, ideas, and works. They deserve my heartfelt thanks.

Z.W.

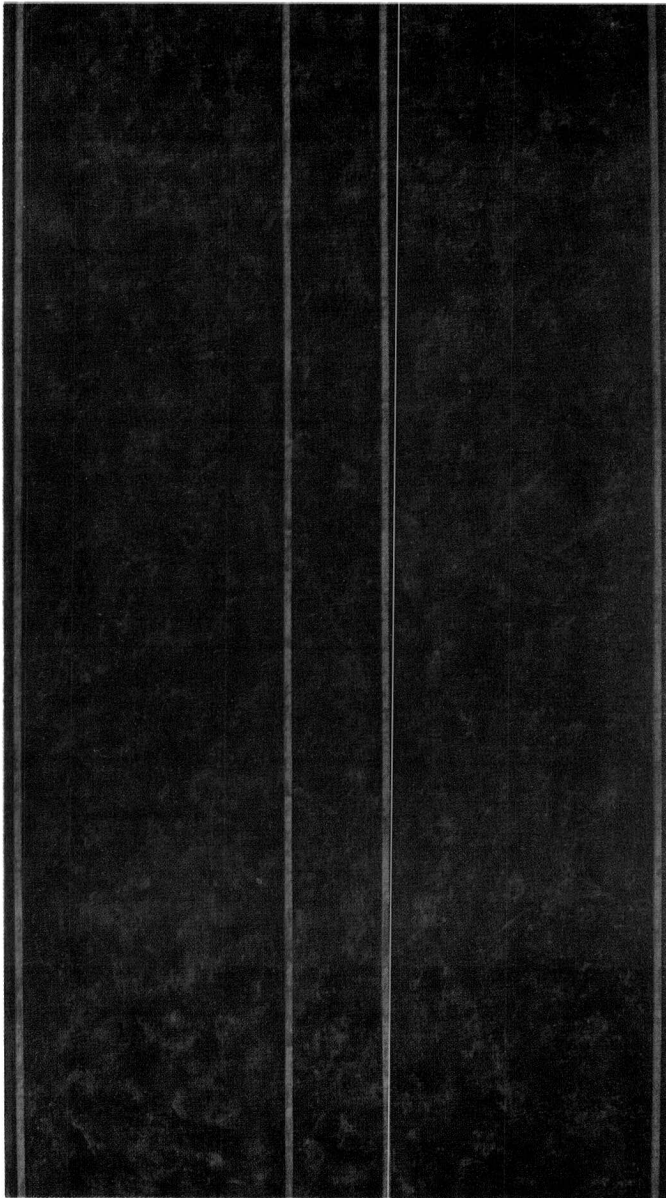


Fig. 1 Untitled 1989
Tempera on Canvas
96 × 52 inches
Collection of the artist

Whether in the paintings, freestanding sculptures, or wall reliefs of Rudolf de Crignis, the work's formal aspect always defies its content. De Crignis's work is never immediately accessible to the beholder, but rather incites him to further investigation and closer examination.

At the first glance, de Crignis's recent works, such as *Untitled*, 1989 (fig. 1), appear to have their roots in the hard-edge aesthetics of Constructivism or Minimalism. He paints straight lines of bright colors on darkly painted canvas, overlaps painted rectangular boards to construct wall pieces (fig. 2), or joins the latter to build freestanding sculptures (fig. 3). Yet a closer examination uncovers the works' real content, belying the apparent importance of their formal aspect. The artist's own deep sensibility is thus laid bare.

In the early eighties, and after several years of working in other media such as video and performance, de Crignis embarked in painting. At the beginning, these were figurative works, landscapes, and still lifes. His subjects, frequently isolated from their ordinary contexts, were painted on backgrounds created by the application of many thin layers of paint, which suggest indefinite space and open into a myriad of interpretations.

A naked figure outlined with painted twigs (fig. 4) poses awkwardly in a nonspecific surroundings. Worked in layers of various hues of green and brown, the figure and the space it inhabits are physically interconnected, but it is difficult to determine whether the figure

grows from its surroundings, or the surroundings emerge from the figure. The same ambiguity applies to coloration; indeed one wonders where the brown ends and where the green starts. To emphasize this ambiguity de Crignis employs tempera paint, an opaque material capable of concealing the artist's feelings. Furthermore, the same material—twigs—that outlines the figure gives the background a sense of space. Everything is intertwined, and nothing is specified. The artist is clearly confronting the basic formal problems of presenting content, foreground, and background. Although the figure occupies almost the entire canvas and appears to be the painting's main subject, the overall work strikes us with the delicate handling of its surface and the emotion it generates. These demonstrate de Crignis's deeply felt hesitation to decide what is more important to him.

In the mid-eighties, de Crignis moved to New York. The city's urban environment—skyscrapers, geometrical grids of streets and piers—strongly affected his aesthetics. Living in lower Manhattan, nature was gone from de Crignis's sight and possibly his thoughts. Human figures and landscape disappeared altogether from his work, replaced by abstract, geometric shapes, such as intersecting lines and jagged forms—an allusion to Manhattan's architecture (fig. 5).

The change from organic forms to strict, geometric ones also brought about a tighter use of colors. De Crignis would usually choose two colors, such as dark gray with yellow or blue, to apply thin layers over the canvas. In addition he often gave the

gray tempera a different effect by mixing it with a small quantity of yellow or blue tempera. Then he would paint intersecting or jagged lines in the same bright color he had used for the background. The resulting image had a naturally dark surface, because of the dark gray, but the thin layers of tempera created a hazy atmosphere and allowed the viewer to imagine a deep space beyond the canvas's flat surface. Furthermore, the lines on the canvas are not simply unmodulated on the canvas, but rather appear to come out from the haze, continue on the surface for a short distance, and disappear again into the haze. As if they were present within the space and depending on how the haze moves, they become visible or invisible to the viewer.

Once de Crignis had found his way into abstraction, he carried his experimentation a step further. In his 1988 works the lines of color do not appear and disappear at random, but rather are the solid components of his compositions. And it is right to use the word *composition*, because de Crignis's works of this year are more formal than they ever had been. In some instances they even have been compared to "Neo-Geo" paintings. In these series of works the lines—up to a dozen—are arranged to form stripped canvases. In other works, lines and planes are combined to create architectonic structures.

Working in a planar mode permitted de Crignis to experiment with space, so, it is not quite accidental that at this time he also made sculptures (fig. 3). De Crignis's sculptures at first appear primarily formal, because of their physicality, solidity,

and stark appearance. However, the special handling of paint on their surface belies such an emphasis.

1989 heralded a different mood in de Crignis's work. His paintings have become meditative, extremely elegant, and undeniably quiet. De Crignis still employs two colors—gray and a brighter color tempera—to paint, but the surface is now denser and darker. The lines in striking tones of turquoise, deep blue, purple, and ocher, have become thinner and appear in smaller numbers, sometimes in the center and sometimes on the sides or on the lower and upper edges of the canvas. The relatively large surface of the canvas, where patches of dark gray and color intermingle, is opened. The elements exist both next to each other and also on top of each other, suggesting an almost endless space for the viewer to wander in, and to reflect upon.

There is a transcendental element in de Crignis's recent paintings. The viewer observing such works is taken to a realm beyond the present and is encouraged to meditation. Above all de Crignis's works are proof of his sustained effort to find a perfect balance between formalist concerns and a depth of content.

Ziba deWeck



Fig. 2 Untitled, 1989
Tempera on Wood
34 × 29 inches
Collection of the artist



Fig. 3 Sketch for a Sculpture, 1988
Tempera on Wood
79 × 26 × 14 inches
Collection of the artist

Fig. 4 Untitled, 1982
Wood and Tempera on Canvas
87 × 138 inches
Collection of Michele Zeller Gallery
Bern, Switzerland

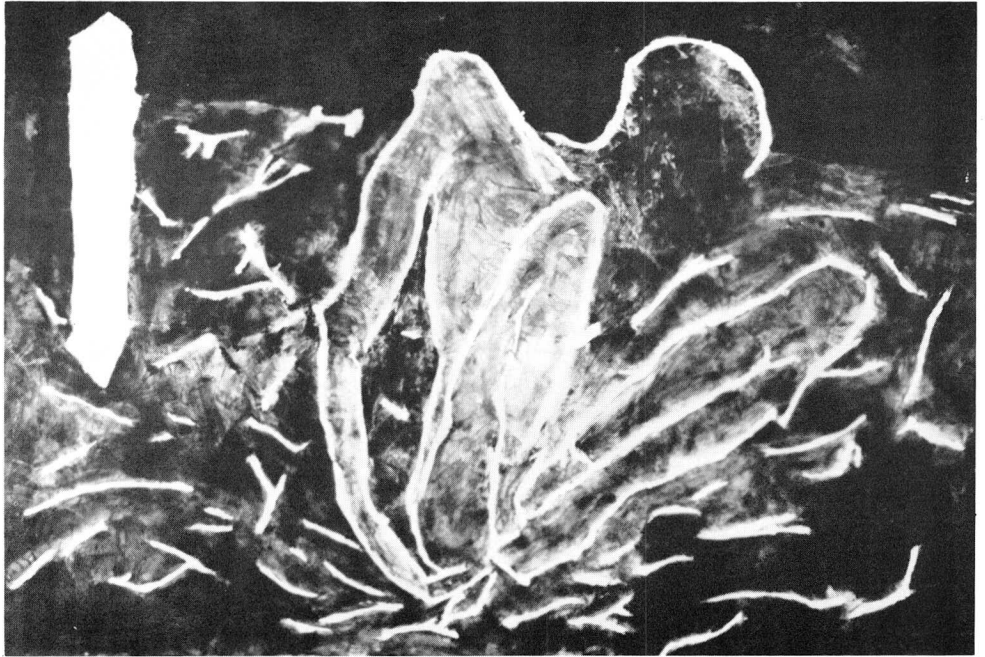


Fig. 5 Untitled, 1985
Tempera on Canvas
46 × 96 inches
Collection of the artist

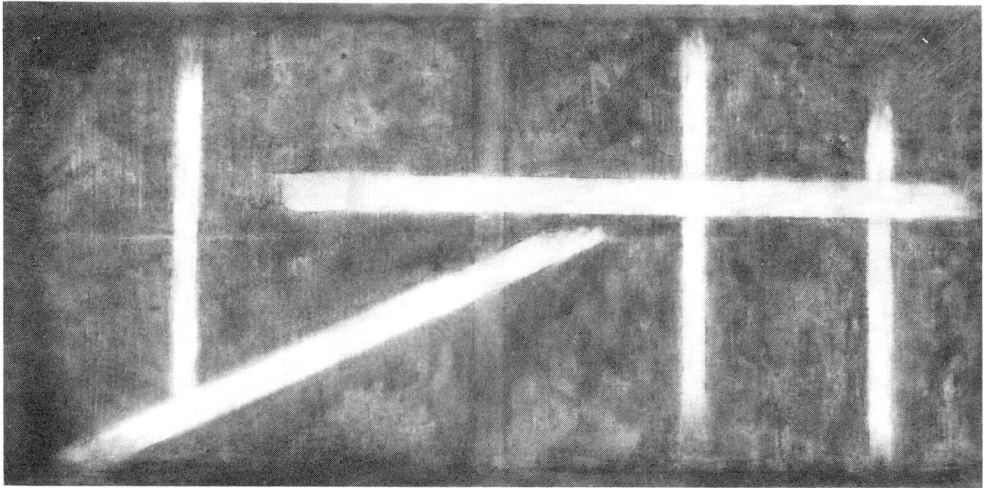


Fig. 6 Untitled, 1989
Tempera on Canvas
58 × 96 inches
Collection of the artist

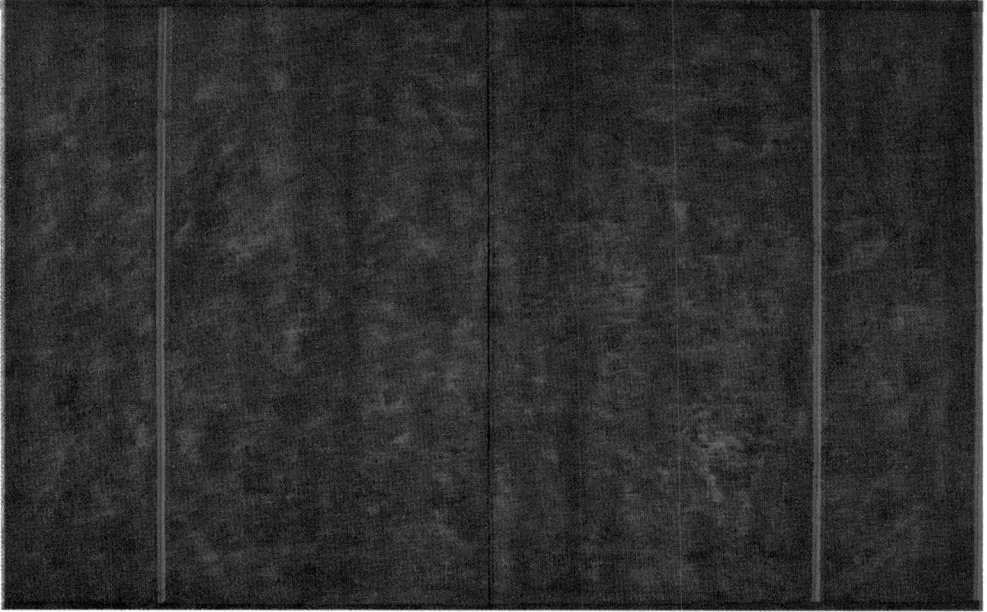
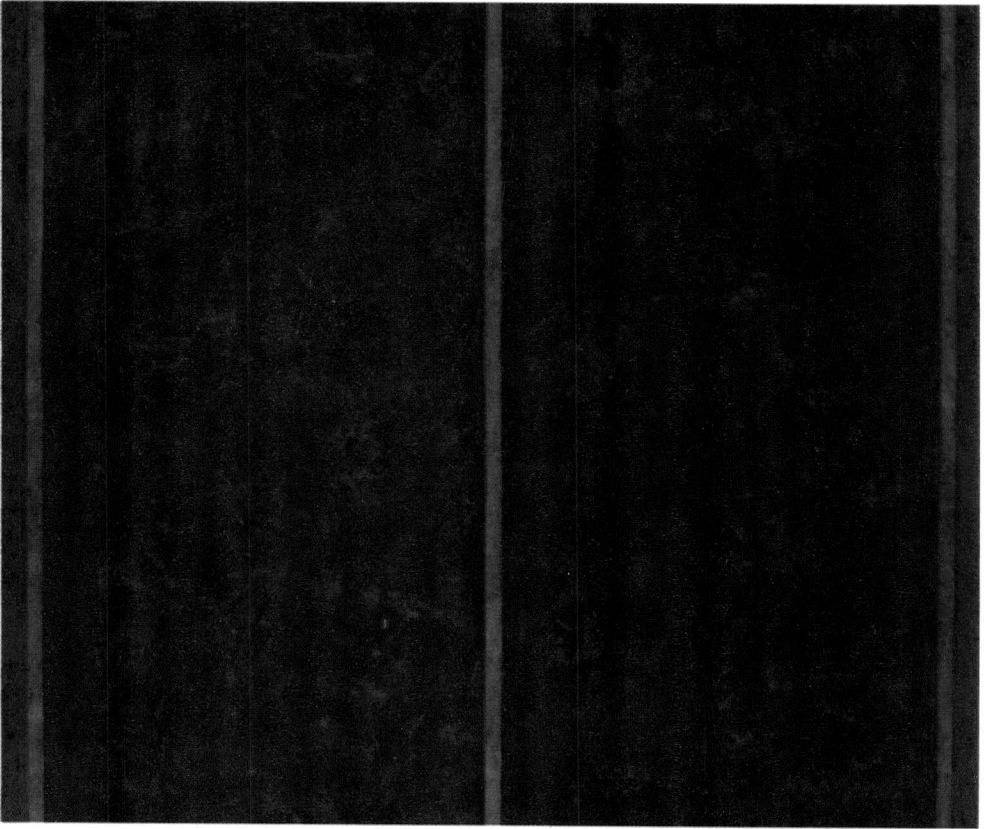


Fig. 7 Untitled, 1989
Tempera on Canvas
48×58 inches
Collection of the artist



RUDOLF DE CRIGNIS

ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 1978 Stok Theater, Zurich
- 1980 Palette Gallery, Zurich
Apartment Gallery, Geneva
- 1983 Rosenberg Gallery, Zurich
- 1984 Kunstverein, Schaffhausen, Switzerland
- 1985 Zeller Galley, Bern, Switzerland
- 1986 Rosenberg Gallery, Zurich
- 1988 Art Fair, Basel
- 1988 Rosenberg Gallery, Zurich

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1976 Venice Biennial
- 1980 INK, Zurich
- 1984 Art Fair, Basel
- 1986 Art Fair, Basel
- 1987 Art Fair, Basel
- 1988 Biennial of Swiss Art, St. Gallen, Switzerland
- 1988 GMHC Contemporary Art Auction, Sotheby's, New York
- 1989 All-Harlem Art Exhibition, Aaron Davis Hall, New York

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Dimensions are in inches:
height precedes width precedes depth

Untitled, 1989
Tempera on canvas
96 × 52
Collection of the artist

Untitled, 1989
Tempera on wood
79 × 26 × 14
Collection of the artist

Untitled, 1989
Tempera on canvas
58 × 96
Collection of the artist

Untitled, 1989
Tempera on canvas
58 × 48
Collection of the artist

Untitled, 1989
Tempera on canvas
48 × 58
Collection of the artist

Untitled, 1989
Tempera on canvas
48 × 58
Collection of the artist

Swiss Institute
35 West 67th Street
New York, New York, 10023
Phone: (212) 496-1759

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Gallery Assistant: Ariane Braillard

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Closed Wednesdays

Gallery talks and group tours:
will be organized by appointment

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