

Captain Petzel

Malcolm Morley: Sensations

April 28 – June 10, 2023

And so seeing work from a long time period together is pleasurable because not only do you see the diversity, you also see some fidelity...Things change, but they are still true to something. And with that you've got it. Diversity and fidelity.

– Malcolm Morley

The fundamental aspect, the motor that drove Malcolm Morley's (1931 - 2018) passion for painting, was sensation. Sensation being the unmediated bodily response to the outside world through the senses; in this case, the sense of sight. Malcolm admired the art of Van Gogh, Cézanne and Picasso, artists whom he felt were more concerned with presenting the world as something made with paint, to create a new visual experience, rather than being concerned with what the subject matter was 'about'. Malcolm said he wanted to get the painting directly into the nervous system:

...the emphasis is very much on the idea of looking at. I paint them from the way in which I'm looking at them, which is really from the point of view of sensations. I feel the sensation of it, and pre-imagine it made of paint. ...So it's not just a question of looking, but of doing, in relation to this, in relation to that, in relation to the space between things. In a way, it's very classical.

As seen from a 60-year perspective, it seems that any material could be a potential painting for him; the range is overwhelming. But not everything was a final candidate for his painted world the images he chose were personal and idiosyncratic. Cézanne had his apples, Malcolm had his ships and airplanes from his childhood during WWII. These images were something that engaged Malcolm's attention, as an affectionately-remembered association or attraction, and then as a rigorous collaborator that held up to his prolonged scrutiny during the diligent painting process.

The grid he used to format and scale up the images ensured that every square centimeter of the canvas received his focused attention, heightening the experience so that the finished painting represented his initial sensation with the same concentration. Each square was treated as a small abstract painting of its own, taken all together they make one unified area. Unity in diversity, diversity in unity.

Looking over the course of his oeuvre, one sees he had invented many styles of painting, from Photorealism, Neo-Expressionism, his own brand of Surrealism, and beyond, using a vast assortment of images (postcard images, cruise ships, advertising, beach scenes, airplanes, sports figures, motocross racers, knights, castles, etc.), always primarily committed to the sensation of seeing. The paintings are akin to the intense encounter a child has when experiencing the outside world for the first time. When the unknown, the unseen, or the overlooked makes its appearance. Malcolm lived and painted the seeming paradox of manifesting one's innocence through a lifetime of experience.

Michael Short

Curated by Michael Short in close collaboration with the Estate of Malcolm Morley, the exhibition includes loans by private collections, and will be accompanied by a publication surveying the artist's work.

Capitain Petzel

Malcolm Morley

Born 1931 in London, UK
Died 2018 in Bellport, NY

Malcolm Morley is acknowledged as one of the earliest innovators of Superrealism, which developed as a counterpoint to Pop Art in the 1960s. Over the course of his distinguished career, Morley defied stylistic characterization, moving by turns through so-called abstract, realist, Neo-romantic, and Neo-expressionist painterly modes, while being attentive to his own biographical experiences. Morley studied at the Camberwell College of Arts and the Royal College of Art.

Over his lifetime, Morley had numerous retrospectives, hosted by institutions like the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (1983); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1983); Brooklyn Museum, New York (1984); Tate Liverpool (1991); Kunsthalle Basel (1991); Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht (1992); Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris (1993); Fundación La Caixa, Madrid (1995); Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo (1995); Hayward Gallery, London (2001) and the Hall Art Foundation, Vermont (2019).

Morley has participated in numerous international surveys, including Documenta 5 (1972) and Documenta 6 (1977), and was awarded the inaugural Turner Prize in 1984. His works are represented in major public collections such as The Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Tate, London; The Collection Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden; The Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht; The Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris; The Ludwig Museum, Cologne; and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid.