

JOHN BERGGRUEN GALLERY

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Robert Kelly

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Work

June 25 – August 1, 2009

John Berggruen Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of recent paintings by Robert Kelly. *Robert Kelly: New Work* will be on view between June 25 and August 1, 2009. John Berggruen Gallery will host a reception for the artist on Thursday, June 25th between 5:30 and 7:30 p.m.

Robert Kelly's fourth solo exhibition at John Berggruen Gallery will feature 25 new paintings of various size and will highlight the formal aesthetics of shape, color, medium, texture and space that have become synonymous with his name. Taking a cue from both the Bauhaus and De Stijl movements of the early twentieth century, Kelly's work is informed by the simple formality and order, soulful harmony, marriage of design and craftsmanship, and the reduction to the essentials that defined the utopian ideals of these great artistic periods. Borrowing from an even deeper past, Kelly adopts the vocabulary of ancient archetypes – utilizing the age old icons of primary form and elemental color to create an aura of familiarity. While the collaged surfaces of his mixed media paintings are sweetly reminiscent of Romanesque alabaster and limestone, the surfaces themselves are constructed from archival newsprint and vintage posters turned backwards, allowing the bleed through of ink to form a haunting footprint over which Kelly constructs his paintings. Through this process, Kelly develops not only a sense of collaborative authorship, but also focuses on, as he states, the "haunting presence of memories," and the "intimacies of another time hovering in the background."

The background is a major component in Kelly's work, and it often tells many stories. As Lyle Rexer writes, "He builds meticulously on inhabited ground, layering materials, documents, and signs, covering them, wiping out their beauty, nearly, but allowing something of the labor and their languages to persist."¹ Created through a process of the patient build up of painted and papered layers in irregular grids which are then continuously edited and refined, each of Kelly's canvases serve as a palimpsest. The history of Kelly's formal and tactile decisions remain on the surfaces of his work and expose an aesthetic preoccupation with the search for compositional balance and rightness. There is a sense in his work, writes curator and critic João Ribas, that "each form could never be other than it is; were it sharper, more obtuse, or thicker, each angle, curve, or horizontal band would collapse into formlessness."²

¹ Rexer, Lyle. 2000. *Robert Kelly: Recent Paintings*. San Francisco: John Berggruen Gallery.

² Ribas, João. 2005. "Robert Kelly: Praxis and Poesis" in *Robert Kelly: Recent Works*. Milan: AR/Contemporary Gallery.