

Brian Wall New Works

7 September – 1 October 2011

Private View Tuesday 6 September 6 - 8pm



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Zhao Stainless Steel 30.5 x 30.5 x 22.8 cm

Living among prominent artists at the height of their influence – in St Ives in the 1950s and London in the 1960s – Brian Wall was afforded new insights into sculpture. Ideas neither contrived nor steered by commonplace contemporary trends established him at the forefront of innovative British sculpture.

This exhibition of new works marks Wall's eightieth year. Throughout his career, Brian Wall's work has evolved continually, prolific in new elements and ideas, whilst fluid and precise in process and artistry.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Wall was at the centre of changes of direction within British sculpture. Arriving in St Ives after studying art in London and Paris, Wall turned from abstract painting to sculpture, having acquired welding equipment and taught himself to weld steel. Rejecting the carved or cast modernist figurative and surrealist sculpture of the period, he became one of the first artists to construct abstract work through the process of welding, earlier even than Sir Anthony Caro, who started to weld in 1960.

Wall was recommended to Barbara Hepworth for his skills with steel, and began working as her studio assistant in 1955. Six years later he left St Ives, having produced work distinctly different from Hepworth's.

Using the technology of welding, Wall's steel work soon evolved. Wall introduced dramatic cantilevering and painted his structures dark colours to emphasize their form, enabling him to *make a gesture and know it would stay*. Such techniques allowed Wall to inject spontaneity into his work and marked a complete break with the popular carving and casting of the time.

These new sculptures were more unambiguously three-dimensional: they change continually as the viewer moves around them and do not have a clear 'front'. At the same time, they are also more graphic as the steel lengths are like gestures made with charcoal or a brush.

Chris Stephens

Between 1956 and relocating back in London in 1960, Wall's work became increasingly respected and exhibited. Large solo shows in London at the Architectural Association (1958) and the Drian Gallery (1959) were critically acclaimed. In 1958 Henry Moore selected a sculpture to be purchased by the Arts Council from an exhibition at London's Woodstock Gallery.

In 1964 Wall's work developed substantially as he restricted the number of forms used, but incorporated new anatomies such as the cylinder,

cube and circle. Wall's reputation was increasingly assured as many pieces were selected for group exhibitions in Britain and abroad, and acquisitions made by the Tate Gallery and the Arts Council. The most celebrated piece of this period – *Four Elements II* – was installed on the plaza of The Economist Building and is included in the opening sequence of Antonioni's quintessential sixties London film, *Blow-Up*.

In 1972 Brian Wall moved permanently to California. Chris Stephens reflects on the following period:

In California for over thirty-five years Wall has, essentially, continued the project of exploration and experimentation on which he embarked in St Ives in the late 1950s. He has explored the basic elements of sculpture as he sees it: line and mass; mass and surface; surface and edge; material and space; gravity and lightness; light and shadow. He has done so through the gradual addition and subtraction of various elements: the sheet of steel, the cantilevered rod, the circle, the ring, the tube, the flat square, the square-section hollow form. The works have been black, primary-coloured, softly-coloured, painted with different, modulated colours, and left bare and waxed.

What is astonishing is that – despite such changes in his living environment – Wall has consistently maintained his unique artistic vision. His ability continually to drive towards new creative discoveries, demonstrated over the past forty years, is still clearly apparent. Wall's current work demonstrates how sculpture can define the space it occupies. Recent influences, such as Japanese culture and calligraphy, are translated into a sculptural language that lends fluidity to his work. This has been achieved only through Wall's faultless welding ability, a skill that permits his ideas to realize their full potential.

Wall believes in sculpture that is *nothing more or nothing less than itself. A sculpture which cannot be read and does not say anything other than what it is.*

For further information and images please contact Ceri Stock
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