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Malcolm Morley
Frieze Masters
Stand F4
5–8 October 2017

At Frieze Masters 2017, Sperone Westwater will present a survey of painting and sculpture by the distinguished British-born American artist Malcolm Morley. Born in London in 1931, Morley studied at the Camberwell College of Arts and later at the Royal College of Art. He moved to New York in 1958 and has remained in the area since. His first retrospective in London took place at the Whitechapel in 1983 and prompted his receipt of the inaugural Turner Prize in 1984. This will be the first presentation of Morley's work in London since his 2001 retrospective at the Hayward Gallery.

One of the most innovative artists of his generation, Morley is notoriously difficult to categorize. His long and influential career has involved diverse styles and media, and strategies ranging freely from conceptual to romantic to surreal. The work bears a complex relationship to surrealism, photography, installation, and other tendencies in recent art history, as though Morley churned through and assimilated the succession of art movements into his uniquely personal practice. Its seemingly panoramic vision encompasses military and natural history, mythology, travel, and much besides. "Malcolm wants to have his cake and eat it too," writes Norman Rosenthal, "and he does."

The self-consciously heroic American art of the postwar period was a lodestar for Morley and other British painters, particularly in the wake of the Tate Gallery's important 1956 exhibition of American painting. After moving to New York, Morley sought out Barnett Newman, a major influence. "I feel Barney Newman emptied space and I'm filling it up again," Morley later observed.

Morley first established his critical reputation in the 1960s for "Super-Realist" paintings, particularly those of ships, utilizing vernacular imagery drawn from postcards, brochures, calendars, souvenirs, telephone books, et cetera. He later changed course, contributing to the revival of expressionistic painting throughout the 1980s. His work of the last thirty years has synthesized an extremely wide array of imagery, with noteworthy forays into documentary photography and naval, aeronautic, Native American, and medieval subject matter. The collision of motifs and styles in Morley's work produces an anachronistic effect unified primarily by the intense and haphazard intellectual pursuits of the artist himself. Over the past four years, Morley's work has become markedly more freeform, with the artist jettisoning his longstanding use of the preparatory grid to set out his compositions. The recent work, as described in "Artnews," has become "even more fluid and disembodied than before."

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The Frieze Masters presentation will include painting and sculpture from every decade of Morley's mature career, beginning with "State Room with Eastern Mural," 1966, from an important series of cruise ship interiors represented in major museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Hirshhorn Museum, and the Centraal Museum, Utrecht. Another highlight of the booth is "Day of the Locust III," 1979, the alternate version of "The Day of the Locust," 1977, in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art. "Day of the Locust III" belongs to a series of disaster paintings found in the Broad Collection, the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, the Centre Pompidou, and the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna. At Frieze Masters, "Day of the Locust III" will be paired with a recent painting, "Hobby Horse," 2015, in which Morley rehearses similar motifs around the central theme of the Trojan Horse. Over the course of his career, Morley has regularly circled back to earlier subject matter, constantly bringing new perspectives to bear, both conceptually and physically. His longstanding fascination with models has generated an extremely varied body of work which fully bridges the gap between painting and sculpture. Later examples of this at Frieze Masters include a large painting of a clipper ship with a three-dimensional painted model hot-air balloon, a painting of a mortally wounded knight pierced by a model arrow, and two rarely-exhibited 1980s bronze works.

Since his first New York exhibition at Kornblee Gallery in 1964, Morley has had numerous exhibitions in Europe and North America and has participated in many international surveys including Documenta 5 (1972) and Documenta 6 (1977). Morley's work featured prominently in the Royal Academy's landmark 1981 exhibition "A New Spirit in Painting." His first retrospective, organized in 1983 by Nicholas Serota for the Whitechapel Art Gallery, traveled to the Kunsthalle Basel; the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam; the Corcoran Gallery, Washington; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; and the Brooklyn Museum. Subsequent noteworthy presentations of Morley's work include an exhibition of watercolors at Tate Liverpool, which travelled to the Kunsthalle Basel, the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht, and the Parrish Art Museum in Southampton, NY (1991-92); a retrospective at the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (1993); an exhibition organized by Fundación La Caixa, Madrid, which travelled to the Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo (1995-96); and the survey "The Art of Painting" at the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami (2006). Other notable exhibitions include "Malcolm Morley in a Nutshell: The Fine Art of Painting 1954-2012" at the Yale School of Art (2012) and an exhibition exploring the role of paper in Morley's art-making process at the Parrish Art Museum (2012-13). The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, exhibited historical and recent works in collaboration with the Hall Art Foundation in 2013. Currently on view at the Hall Art Foundation at Schloss Derneburg, Germany, is a large solo exhibition of historical and recent work.

In addition to the Turner Prize, Morley was awarded the Painting Award from the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 1992 and the Francis J. Greenburger Award in 2015. He has been inducted into both the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Morley's work is represented in major museums worldwide, including Tate. He has presented five solo exhibitions at Sperone Westwater since 1999.