ALMINE RECH

Peter Halley in Spain

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In the context of its exhibition programme focused on the Blanca and Borja Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza is presenting an exhibition on Peter Halley (born New York, 1953), one of the classic figures of contemporary painting. This is the first retrospective devoted to Halley in Spain since the one organised by the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in 1992, in this case encompassing the artist's entire career from 1985 to 2024. The selection of twenty paintings from public and private Spanish collections has been made by the artist himself, who has also designed the installation. The exhibition has been organised with the collaboration of the City Council of Palma and Casal Solleric, where it will be seen in the spring of 2025.

Peter Halley's appearance on the art scene at the beginning of the 1980s signalled a departure from the tradition of 20th-century abstract-geometric art – dominated until then by idealist and formalist concepts – towards new social concerns. In contrast to the pioneers of abstraction, for whom geometry embodied an ideal rationality endowed with utopian value, Halley's painting and his critical and theoretical essays reinterpret geometry as a means of social confinement and control that is filled with dystopian overtones. The square, an object of quasi-religious worship from Malevich to Josef Albers, is transformed with critical humour into the painter's icons of prisons, cells and conduits.

In his compositions, reminiscent of microchips and flow charts, Halley anticipates our digital-age society, simultaneously characterised by systematic isolation and total interconnectedness. Finally, the artist's use of a palette of fluorescent Day-Glo colours, evoking the energy of electronic screens, has distinguished Halley as one of the boldest and most experimental colourists of our time.

Peter Halley began his career as a radical, independent artist and has always worked without the support of a major gallery, collaborating with gallerists in different countries with whom he has established long-standing relationships of trust.

The exhibition highlights the exceptional welcome that his work has received in Spain for almost forty years, where he exhibited for the first time in 1986, participating in *Art and its double: a New York perspective*, a group exhibition that presented the contemporary art scene in New York at the Fundación Caja de Pensiones in Madrid. Soon after that date, in 1992, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía presented a retrospective which had previously been seen in other European museums: in Bordeaux (APC Musée d'Art Contemporain), Pully/Lausanne (FAE Musée d'Art Contemporain), and subsequently Amsterdam (Stedelijk Museum). It was then that Peter Halley also began to exhibit with galleries in Spain, including Galería Senda in Barcelona, and a few years later with Javier López in Madrid.

Peter Halley's canvases are represented in Spanish public collections, including the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Fundación "la Caixa" and the IVAM (Institut Valencià d'Art Modern), as well as in private collections. There is also a permanent installation in the Biblioteca José Hierro in Usera, Madrid, (2002) based on Jorge Luis Borges's short story *The Library of Babel*.

The exhibition presents twenty large-format works spanning Peter Halley's entire career, from 1985 to 2024, which offer a clear vision of his artistic evolution. *Prison* (1985) and *Skin Trade* (1994) are simple monochrome compositions close to minimalism, while *Edutainment* and *Blackout* (both 2005) and *Gravity* (2006) reveal more dynamism and complexity, achieved through the repetition of rotated or flipped forms, the superimposition of planes and an increase in the number of colours.

Halley subsequently continued to focus on the ideas behind his first geometrical works, now with brighter, lighter and less intense colours than in previous decades, or multiplying the forms, as in *Half Magic* (2018), *Clemency* (2019) and *The High Note* (2020), which features three cells rather than one.

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