

# GALERIE ONRUST AMSTERDAM

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Alan Uglow

*Tuned In*

8 September through 7 October 2007

hours: Wednesday through Saturday 13.00 - 18.00 hrs

and Sunday 7 October, 14.00 - 17.00 hrs

<http://www.galerieonrust.nl/artists.php?cid=00017&page=1>

Tuned In

*On the work of Alan Uglow*

Seething away in the work of Alan Uglow is a struggle for the surface. The struggle goes on, painting after painting. That which initially comes across as being calm, simplicity, balance is misleading. Appearances are deceiving. Few painters show such a variety of surfaces, each of them different in size and tension – but always painted monochromatically. The harmony achieved by Uglow involves a great deal more than juggling things around, dividing and composing. The planes that he paints with geometric precision evidently derive their unusual tension through the effects of light, space, color, time. That is to say: through everything that arises in the world – in the observation and experience – of the viewer, on further contemplation.

Alan Uglow (Luton, 1941) can be placed within the twentieth-century development of abstract art – the art of Mondrian, Ad Reinhardt, Newman, Ryman. That holds true to the extent that it relates to the desire to transpose visible reality into form and proportion. But then without spiritual, religious or ideological intentions. What you see is what you get. His source is the world that he perceives through the senses: that which he sees, smells, hears, feels. A stadium fence, the form of a job advertisement, a newspaper heading, a soccer field, sound.

His earliest memory of observation is from the war: the nightly raids, deafening sirens, the smell and the shape of a gas mask, fire. *“It was strange to experience situations where I must have been two or three years old when I started to take in what was happening. It was an awakening that I could only give meaning to much later on.”*

In 1969 he decides to leave England and head for New York. Pubs that close at eleven, a metro that stops running after twelve: why stay? London life gives way to the overwhelming new freedom and turbulence of New York. His relationship to the outside world remains intuitive; it's never planned or strategic. That always causes him to work under great pressure and on the basis of immense inner tension that drive him on, time and again, to yet another painting, even

## GALERIE ONRUST AMSTERDAM

though in all its calm and simplicity the work looks as though it made itself. Uglow's work has a *cool* appearance. The soccer stadium could be regarded as a metaphor for his experience of the world: an orgy of emotion, movement and visual dynamics surrounding a green rectangular surface that is divided into smaller proportions with broad white lines. Chalk lines assume their arbitral meaning according to the viewer's position. The game takes place inside the lines; lines divide that which matters from that which remains. With Uglow, everything matters. The lines that define his painterly field correspond to the edges of the painting. The image is thereby equal to the painting. Nothing ends up outside of that. The image is complete, ordered, balanced: a hard-won harmony as the most normal thing in the world. Every painting has its own harmony, its own divisions, brought about by lines that cut across the entire surface and thus make new surfaces, always monochrome ones. Sometimes there is only the start of a division. At right angles to the edge of a canvas there are, now and then, narrow surfaces that suggest the division of a surface but do not actually carry it out. The start of one is enough; the real division takes place in the viewer's mind.

Alan Uglow draws the viewer into his work in another way as well: by occasionally hanging his paintings so low on the wall that a tension is created between that which is wall and that which is floor. Not only are the viewer's eyes, but his feet too are a part of this. Where do I stand? Where am I? It's as though the artist wants to keep the painting from becoming spiritual and pulls it back to earth. Back to the lines of a soccer field. He can take this a step further by actually placing the canvases on the floor and allowing them to lean against the wall. Here they seem to be waiting, for something or someone. By doing this Uglow puts an even greater emphasis on the material world, our existing world, the one in which his work operates.

The struggle for the surface also takes place on a more intimate level. The lines that bring about divisions have been considered carefully. That makes them compelling, so compelling that the monochrome surface seems to be pressed into the work. There is always pressure on the lines; the degree of this varies according to the color. It makes us aware of the color's characteristic qualities. Bordeaux red, nocturnal blue, black, ochre, grey and the strongest color in Uglow's work: white. Each color has its own warmth, solidity, expression, these being combined by the demarcations. Isn't it odd that a straight line, which is geometrically pure, nonetheless seems to display a curve? As if the pressure is too great, the line yields, and the color threatens to break out. How much color can the human eye observe in one glance before the surface of color changes in intensity toward the edges? Before the geometric surface thus becomes distorted in our perception. Before the straight line thus gives way? With Uglow, that isn't very much, and this says a great deal about the intensity of his monochromatically painted surfaces.

And if we focus our eyes even more precisely, then we arrive at the point where the fight really begins. With the brushstroke. Each surface on the painting is painted by Uglow with a different brush, varying in thickness and width. Or he applies the paint with a roller, the one surface being much more rolled than the other, causing the color to become more penetrating. In doing this, he also changes the direction of the application with each surface. All of that contributes to

## GALERIE ONRUST AMSTERDAM

the emergence of subtle differences in the degree to which light clings to the surface. Or in the direction in which light glides across the surface. In any case, it yields countless shades of white which fiercely distinguish themselves from each other. The ever-changing white: Alan Uglow's signature. When you manage, through differences in texture, color, light, absorption, to give even the smallest surface a character of its own, then composition is ultimately a harmony of opposites. In carrying on that fight for harmony, Uglow wards off chaos. Through the creation of beauty, through the sublime.

When the beauty is there, the struggle seems far away. That is the illusion rendered by Alan Uglow. In the achieved balance, where order and calm prevail, things seem to have come to a standstill. And yet never entirely, as another kind of light will be shining tomorrow. Then the struggle for the surface will look different again. On further contemplation.

*Frits de Coninck*

translation: Beth O'Brien

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### Alan Uglow

Born: Luton, England, 1941

Lives and works in New York City

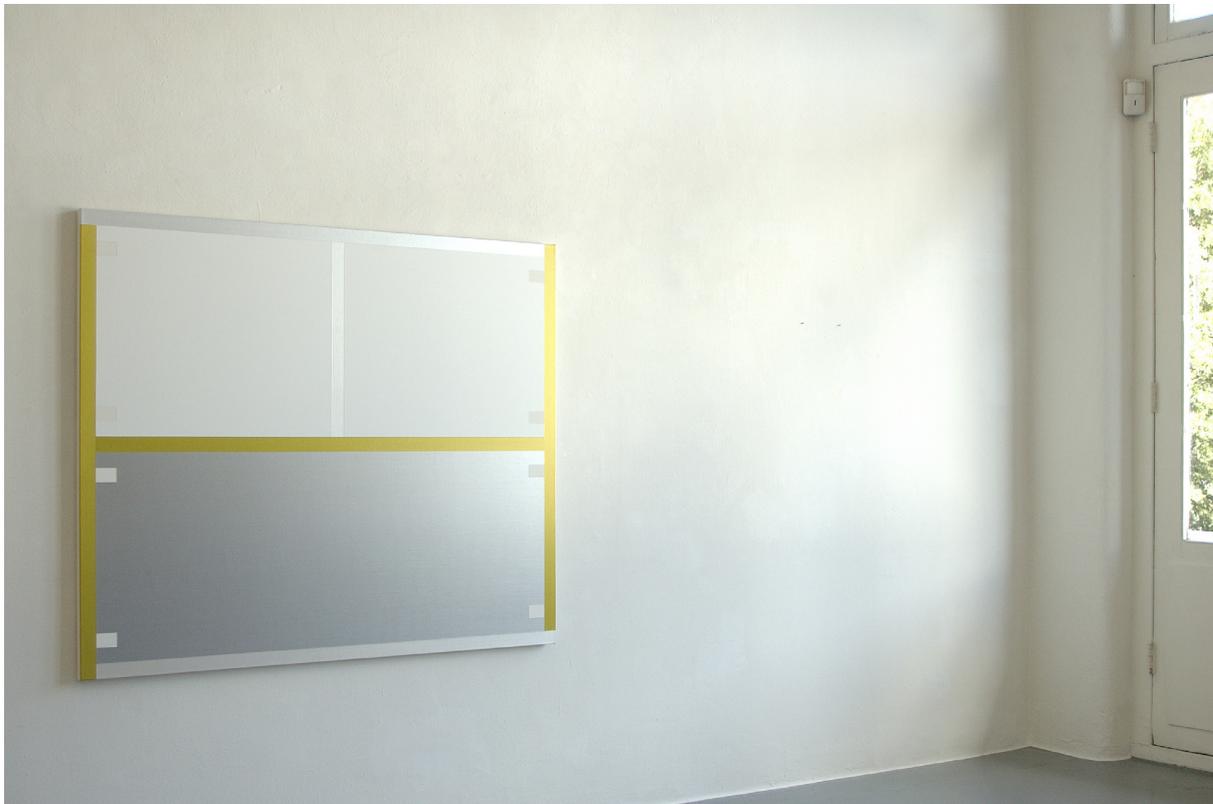
#### Selected one person exhibitions (from 1995)

- 2007 Galerie Onrust, Amsterdam
- 2006 Galerie Nordenhake, Berlin  
CCNOA, Brussels  
Galerie Michael Sturm, Stuttgart
- 2004 Gemeentemuseum, The Hague
- 2003 Galerie Onrust, Amsterdam
- 2002 Stark Gallery, New York
- 2001 Griedervonputtkammer, Berlin
- 2000 Galere Onrust, Amsterdam
- 1998 Stark Gallery, New York
- 1996 Galerie Onrust, Amsterdam  
Galerie Bob van Orsouw, Zürich
- 1995 *Nye Malerier*, Galleri Tommy Lund, Copenhagen  
*Standards*, Galerie Anselm Dreher, Berlin  
Gimpel Fils, London

#### Some group exhibitions (from 1995)

- 2007 *Minimal Pop*, Arti et Amicitiae, Amsterdam
- 2006 *an ongoing low grade mystery*, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York
- 2005 *The Painted World*, PS 1, New York  
*Minimal Pop*, Les Filles du Calvaire, Brussels / Paris
- 2004 *Infinite Possibilities: Serial Imagery in 20th Century Drawings*, Davis Museum & Cultural Center  
*Still Mapping the Moon – Perspectives of Contemporary Painting*, Kunstmuseum Bonn  
*Minimal Pop*, Florence Lynch Gallery, New York  
Collection Lafrenz, Neues Museum Weserburg, Bremen
- 2002 *Body Power / Body Play*, Württemberischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart  
Fussball-Seele, Helmhaus Zürich  
*Acht Malerische Positionen*, Galerie S 65, Cologne
- 1999 *Protoplasm: Paul Morrison, Carl Ostendarp, Alan Uglow*, Galerie Bob van Orsouw, Zürich
- 1998 *Dijon / Le Consortium – Collections*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris
- 1996 *Monochromie Geometrie*, Sammlung Goetz, Munich  
*Squares or Lines*, Art & Public, Geneva
- 1995 *Tim Ayres, Narcisse Tordoier, Alan Uglow*, Galerie Onrust, Amsterdam

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*Greengold*, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 114,5 x 134,5 cm