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The Unpainter

By Alexandra A. Seno



Edouard Malingue Gallery

Callum Innes says his works 'appear very clean, precise, when in fact they come from chaos.'

Callum Innes is best known for what critics dub "unpainting," and he has collaborated on exhibits with such non-painters as novelist Colm Tóibín. But for an abstract, boundary-crossing artist, his reflections on art can sound almost traditional.

"I like the idea of beauty," he says. "I see nothing wrong with the beautiful, for things to have a rightness about them."

His first solo exhibition in Asia, at Edouard Malingue Gallery in Hong Kong, recently opened. The 1995 Turner Prize finalist shared his thoughts on seeing sound and the biggest problem with art.



Edouard Malingue Gallery

The Innes exhibition at Edouard Malingue is his first solo show in Asia.

**Can we talk about your process?
Your work has been called
unpainting.**

I call it painting, but I know people call it unpainting. But yes, I take paint off. I make a painting and work with the surface, then dissolve it, taking it off with turpentine. In many ways I am dissolving an image that is in my head.

I like the idea that to many, these paintings appear very clean, precise, when in fact they come from chaos. The studio is chaotic — there is black everywhere because the paint has come off.

**You also work with watercolors. Do
you treat that medium differently?**

With watercolors, I put a solid color down. I put down opposites: If it's a green, then it's red. If it's a blue, it might be an orange. I put different combinations, then with water, I dissolve them. When I do watercolors, I lay the paper flat, and the paper has a tension and has its own viscosity.

With the [oil] paintings, I'd make a black made of many colors...until I dissolve it. Then the colors separate so that color will be revealed. With watercolor, I'm putting two colors together to make a new color, there is no combination that is the same.

**How do explain what you're trying to
do as an artist?**

The biggest problem with art is people always think they're getting ripped off...I make paintings that deal with space,

emotions, the physicality of space and time. My paintings capture a moment in time.

I work in a studio, I read the newspaper every day. The paintings are informed by the headlines that day, the book I was reading the night before, what my children are getting up to, what I've seen. I have a visual dictionary in my head. All that information is coming in



Edouard Malingue Gallery

Mr. Innes makes his paintings by working with the surface, dissolving it, then removing it with turpentine.

Do you collect art?

I only collect things that I like. I get great pleasure out of living with them. I mostly collect photography, videos. I like photography because it captures a moment. But I also have works by established artists by Louise Bourgeois, Donald Judd, younger artists like Rachel Adams from Edinburgh.

I only have one painting, by the Berlin-based Japanese artist Ikemura Leiko. It is a small painting of a battleship.

What questions do you struggle with in your work?

I find it challenging to make something complex appear simple. I think things have a sound. You can almost see and hear them.

A sound?

You just hear things, a rightness. I know that makes me sound like a madman. But often in the studio, I see paintings with a sound.

–Edited from an interview with Alexandra A. Seno