

FINE ARTS

Meet the Artist: Callum Innes – works of great poetic and contemplative power

The Scottish-born abstract painter's new exhibition, San Sebastian, resonates with the history of art and brings a contemporary aspect

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Callum Innes: creates paintings which carry a powerful tension between control and fluidity. Picture: Tom Nolan

Scottish-born abstract painter Callum Innes creates paintings which carry a powerful tension between control and fluidity. His process of subtraction, applying and then removing paint from the surface, creates an enigmatic quality.

Though Innes's works may seem minimal or geometric at first glance, they are in fact always slightly off kilter, governed by imperfectly drawn lines and slightly softened shapes. This fallibility and humanity, put in contrast with the artist's skill and precision as a painter, results in works of great poetic and contemplative power – cementing Innes's place as one of the most significant abstract painters of his generation.

Over the past two years, Innes has continued to develop and refine his oeuvre by introducing colours of heightened intensity and depth and by advancing a new series of circular or 'Tondo' paintings. The paintings in St Sebastian are the result of this intense period of work, paintings that resonate with the history of art and redefine its contemporary potential.

St Sebastian, an exhibition of new paintings by Callum Innes, runs until November 12 at the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin; see: kerlingallery.com



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How did your artistic journey begin?

Art was a very important part of our lives, as a family. As a child, I had an uncle who was an artist and who had a studio. He was a weaver as well as a painter. The magic of his studio space was quite important in my head – going into it always felt like a privilege. That slowly progressed into wanting to go to art school.

Where did the title for your current show come from?

In all the paintings that I know of St Sebastian, arrows are fired into his side. There's something about the quality of the Tondos – the slight fleshiness of the colours in some of them, and the way the paint dissolves, and leaves marks on the surface, that feels like a slash – almost like the arrows going into St Sebastian. It felt like that physical piercing, that wound. Figurative paintings of that time [the Renaissance] are very important in my head.

What do you want your audience to feel when visiting the exhibition and viewing your work?

I want people to pause and look, and take it from there.

Artists who have influenced me

Blinky Palermo, Lucio Fontana. Titian. Many artists influence you in many different ways. You take some things from some artists and other things from other artists.

I have a collection of . . .

Many things. I have a very catholic collection – it's widespread between photography, painting, sculpture and film. Collecting is something I have done since an early age. At the age of 16 I bought my first work of art, a ceramic. I saved up my wages from my Thursday-evening job in a shoe shop to pay off the gallery over five weeks. Ever since that point, I've been collecting.

An artist whose work I would collect if I could

Vermeer.

A place that means a lot to me other than my studio

Seacliff Beach in East Lothian, looking upon the Bass Rock – at all times of year.

A place I'd like to visit

Japan. I'm fascinated by Japan and all things Japanese, but I've never been.

In another life I would have been . . .

I never think I'd like to do anything else.

The best piece of advice I ever received

When you make a mistake, do it again, and do it again, and do it again – and it will become right. The idea of repetition is very important. It works.