

press release

thornton willis: *in the grid*

march 17 – april 23, 2011

The Elizabeth Harris Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of new work by Thornton Willis. The exhibition will be up from March 17 through April 23, 2011, with an opening reception on Thursday March 17th from 6-8 pm. A full, color catalog of the show is available with an essay by Lance Esplund, Senior Art Critic for *CityArts Magazine* and a regular contributor to *The Wall Street Journal*.

"With each new surprising series, Willis's paintings get better and better—more direct, dynamic, and hardboiled." (Lance Esplund, from catalog essay)

As the artist Thornton Willis approaches his 75th birthday this year he continues to celebrate on a heroic scale with paintings that reaffirm the ideology of great abstraction. Exploring the possibilities of the grid since the late 1960's, Willis became a member of the Third Generation of Abstract Expressionists, with his "Wall" paintings where he worked in a unique wet-on-wet method creating linear colored bands across the surface plane. In the mid 1970's, he took the drawn-line in two different directions; one avenue led him to take the line along a cardiac-zigzag- movement where he would eventually isolate a single triangular form played against an energized field (hence his well documented "Wedge" or "Fin" series). At the same time, he pursued a post and lintel composition to develop the space in-between the lines creating a sense of weightiness within the colored blocks or volumes.

In 2009, at the Elizabeth Harris Gallery, he presented the "Lattice" series wherein line and field intersect; where woven lines dance over and in between seemingly weighted forms. In these most recent works, Willis utilizes the line to ascribe form; forms that literally "step up" or "step down" as architectonically as his earlier "Wall" paintings did- but now alluding to fractured building profiles and the modern cityscape. These two approaches, these two dualities; of line over form and form over line, have dominated Willis's thinking and this latest show at Elizabeth Harris presents some of his strongest statements to date.

Thornton Willis has exhibited extensively in the United States and Europe since 1969, and is in most major public and corporate collections (a full CV is available on request).

During the opening, and throughout the time of the exhibition, the gallery will debut the documentary "*Thornton Willis: A Work In Progress*" by filmmaker Michael Feldman. The film traces the creation of the painting, "*Freedom Rings*," from blank canvas to completion, and was shot entirely in the artist's studio over a period of several months giving a first hand view of Willis's creative process.

The gallery is located at 529 West 20th Street, 6th floor, and is open Tuesday through Saturday 11-6 pm.

For further information contact Miles Manning at 212.463.9666