Blinky Palermo: Retrospective 1964–1977
June 25–October 31, 2011
Palermo a gifted colorist and a singular successor to some of the century's foremost harmonizers from Henri Matisse to Rothko.

In 1973, all three of these concurrent approaches came to an end when Palermo relocated to Lower Manhattan, where he set up a studio that he would maintain for the rest of his life. Having traveled several times to the United States before making the decision to relocate, Palermo had long wished to establish a dialogue with American painters on their own ground. Despite some false starts and a fallow period of more than a year after his move, he evolved a novel way of working on small aluminum panels, bracketed slightly off the wall to enhance the intense chromatic presence of their multipartite compositions. Exceptionally, Palermo titled many of the modestly scaled pieces in this series with names of places—like Wooster Street, Coney Island, 14th Street—reference cities he so loved, even though he had failed to receive there the level of recognition that he had in Germany. The monumental multipartite work To the People of New York City, often deemed his magnum opus, takes its posthumous title from a dedication he wrote on the backs of the metal panels, while its palette is derived from the colors of the German flag. Executed in late 1976 back in Düsseldorf, it was discovered in his studio after his death in February 1977.

Palermo's sudden death cut short his work in medias res, as can be gauged by the diverse directions presaged in the latest works assembled for this exhibition. Until recently, Palermo has been very much an "artists' artist"—that is, primarily known and admired by generations of artists with widely divergent practices. This retrospective, the first comprehensive show of his work in the United States, is being presented in several discrete modes. Even before leaving art school, he had begun to make what he termed Objects: painted entities often based on found materials that take on quasi-sculptural properties, as in Schmetterling II (Butterfly II), 1969. Other early works, like Landschaft (Landscape), 1968, activate their contexts—the walls on which they are installed—so that the spatial matrices become integral to the pieces themselves. On occasion, Palermo's interventions into specific sites assumed a strictly architectural form, as when he painted a stairwell cornice at the Edinburgh School of Art in the summer of 1970, while other wall works, such as the frieze of signature blue triangles he installed at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels that same year, proved more decorative.

Seemingly at odds with the Objects and Wall Paintings and Drawings was a third type of work, known as the Stoffbilder, or Cloth Pictures. Beginning in mid-1966, Palermo purchased lengths of colored cloth from department stores, stitched them together, and attached them to conventional stretchers. Dispensing with pigment and completely dependent on commercially available hues, these disarmingly radical works, with their refined, subtle, and yet often unorthodox chromatic chords, proved palermo's a gifted colorist and a singular successor to some of the century's foremost harmonizers from Henri Matisse to Rothko.

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The presentation at Bard features early works, the Objects and Stoffbilder, together with documentation of his Wall Drawings and Paintings. The focus at Dia:Beacon is on the late works, the Metal Pictures, which Palermo began only after relocating to the United States in 1973. Viewed in the context of Dia's collection, this group of Metal Pictures confirms Palermo's conviction that his art is best viewed in an international context, one whose discursive parameters have been shaped by a modernist legacy rather than by local or nationalistic concerns.

Though his professional career spans little more than a decade, Palermo's independent, rigorous, and committed exploration of the continuing potential of painting as a vanguard art form, his probing of painting's contested relationship to both its literal and discursive context, and his enduring faith in painterly pleasures, at a time when painting was unquestionably beleaguered, mark his substantial contribution to the history of post–World War II art.

Lynne Cooke, curator
Dia:Beacon
checklist of works

1. Untitled, 1976
   Acrylic on aluminum
   48 x 13 inches (122 x 33 cm)
   Julian Schnabel Collection

2. Osten-Westen II (East-West II), 1976
   Acrylic and watercolor on steel
   Two parts: 39½ x 78¾ inches (100 x 200 cm) overall
   Private collection, Courtesy Hauser & Wirth

3. Coney Island II, 1975
   Acrylic on aluminum
   Four parts: 10½ x 8½ inches (26.7 x 21 cm), each; 10½ x 57½ inches (26.7 x 147 cm) overall
   Collection Ströher, Darmstadt

4. Himmelsrichtungen I (The Cardinal Points I), 1976
   Acrylic on aluminum
   Four parts: 10½ x 8½ inches (26.7 x 21 cm), each; 10½ x 57½ inches (26.7 x 147 cm) overall
   Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Collection Ludwig

5. Untitled, 1976
   Acrylic on aluminum
   Four parts: part 1, 108 x 7 inches (274.3 x 17.8 cm); parts 2-4: 108 x 3 inches (274.3 x 7.8 cm), each
   Private collection

6. Untitled, 1973
   Anti-rust paint on steel
   39½ x 39½ inches (100 x 100 cm)
   Courtesy Hauser & Wirth

7. Untitled, 1973
   Chromium-plated steel
   81½ x 81½ x 1½ inches (206 x 206 x 3 cm)
   Edition of two
   Private collection

8. To the People of New York City, 1976
   Acrylic on aluminum
   15 parts, comprising 40 panels ranging from 8¼ x 6½ inches (21 x 16 cm) to 39½ x 78¾ inches (100 x 200 cm)
   Dia Art Foundation, New York

   Acrylic on aluminum
   Four parts: 22½ x 20½ inches (56.8 x 52 cm), each; 22½ x 204½ inches (56.8 x 520 cm) overall
   Dia Art Foundation, New York

10. Times of the Day II, 1975
    Acrylic on aluminum
    Four parts: 22½ x 20½ inches (56.8 x 52 cm), each; 22½ x 204½ inches (56.8 x 520 cm) overall
    Dia Art Foundation, New York

11. Times of the Day III, 1975
    Acrylic on aluminum
    Four parts: 22½ x 20½ inches (56.8 x 52 cm), each; 22½ x 204½ inches (56.8 x 520 cm) overall
    Private collection

12. Times of the Day IV, 1975
    Acrylic on aluminum
    Four parts: 22½ x 20½ inches (56.8 x 52 cm), each; 22½ x 204½ inches (56.8 x 520 cm) overall
    Private collection

13. Times of the Day V, 1975
    Acrylic on aluminum
    Four parts: 22½ x 20½ inches (56.8 x 52 cm), each; 22½ x 204½ inches (56.8 x 520 cm) overall
    Private collection

14. Times of the Day VI, 1975
    Acrylic on aluminum
    Four parts: 22½ x 20½ inches (56.8 x 52 cm), each; 22½ x 204½ inches (56.8 x 520 cm) overall
    Private collection
CCS Bard
checklist of works

1. Komposition mit 6 roten Rechtecken (Composition with 6 Red Rectangles), 1964
Oil and graphite on canvas
37 1/2 x 33 inches (95 x 84 cm)
Collection Olga Lina and Stella Liza Knoebel

2. Untitled, 1964
Oil and graphite on canvas
37 1/2 x 33 inches (95,5 x 84 cm)
Museum Kückersmühle für Moderne Kunst, Duisburg; Collection Stöhr

3. Untitled, 1964
Oil on canvas
37 1/2 x 31 1/2 inches (95 x 80,5 cm)
Collection Stöhr, Darmstadt

4. Flipper, 1965
Oil on canvas
35 x 27 3/4 inches (89 x 69,6 cm)
Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; Wittelsbacher Ausgleichsfonds, Collection Prinz Franz von Bayern

5. Blaue Brücke (Blue Bridge), 1964-65
Oil on canvas
49 x 67 1/2 inches (124,4 x 170.5 cm)
Private collection, courtesy Kunsthalle Emden

6. Winkel Rot-Weiß (Angle Red-White), 1965
Oil, canvas, and wood
57 x 23 x 1 inches (145 x 51 x 2.5 cm)
Dia Art Foundation, New York

7. Untitled, 1965
Casein paint on cardboard
30 1/2 x 18 1/2 inches (77.5 x 48 cm)
Private collection

8. Untitled, 1965
Oil and graphite on canvas, metal frame
78 1/2 x 8 1/2 x 3/4 inches (199.5 x 20.5 x 2.1 cm)
Collection Olga Lina and Stella Liza Knoebel

9. Grünes Viereck (Green Quadrangle), 1967
Casein paint on synthetic textile, wood
18 1/2 x 27 1/2 x 3/4 inches (46 x 70 x 1 cm)
Private collection

10. Untitled, 1967
Casein paint on muslin, wood
135 1/2 x 16 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches (345 x 41 x 8 cm)
Glenstone

11. Untitled, 1968
Oil, chalk, and graphite on canvas
17 1/2 x 37 3/4 inches (45,1 x 95,3 cm)

12. Landschaft (Landscape), 1966
Oil on canvas on wood
Two parts: 3 1/2 x 59 inches (9 x 149 cm) and 4 x 78 1/2 inches (10 x 200 cm);
14 1/2 x 78 1/2 x 1 inches (37 x 200 x 2,5 cm) overall
Private collection, Baltimore

13. Blaue Scheibe und Stab (Blue Disk and Staff), 1968
Fabric tape on wood
Two parts:
Staff, 99 x 4 x 3 1/2 inches (251 x 10.3 x 8 cm)
Disk, 25 x 1/4 inches (65 x 2 cm)
Private collection, courtesy Hauser & Wirth

14. Tagtraum II (Nachstück) (Daydream II (Night Piece)), 1966
Casein paint on synthetic textile, wood
Two parts: 66 x 49 1/4 x 1 1/2 inches (166 x 125 x 3.5 cm) overall
Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; Wittelsbacher Ausgleichsfonds, Collection Prinz Franz von Bayern

15. Untitled, 1972
Casein paint on cotton fabric over wood and pressboard
Two parts: 97 1/2 x 2 1/4 x 1 inches (247.8 x 5.5 x 2.5 cm); 21 x 53 1/2 x 1 inches (53.5 x 135 x 2.5 cm) overall
Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; Wittelsbacher Ausgleichsfonds, Collection Prinz Franz von Bayern

16. Tagtraum I (Daydream I), 1965
Two parts:
Oil, synthetic textile, canvas, and wood
23 3/4 x 24 3/4 x 2 inches (60 x 63 x 5 cm)
Oil, canvas, and wood
9 1/4 x 18 x 3/8 inches (23.3 x 45.6 x 1.5 cm)

17. Schmetterling II (Butterfly II), 1969
Oil, canvas, wood, and composite board
Two parts: 119 1/2 x 36 1/8 x 1 1/8 inches (303.5 x 93 x 4.5 cm) overall

24. Untitled (Totem), 1964–67
Casein paint on canvas on wood
8 1/2 x 10 1/2 x 1 1/8 inches (219 x 27 x 4.5 cm)
Dia Art Foundation, New York

32. Untitled, 1969
Cotton fabric
78 1/2 x 78 1/2 inches (200 x 200 cm)
Private collection

33. Untitled, 1969
Cotton fabric
78 1/2 x 11 1/2 inches (200 x 30 cm) overall
Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

34. Dreieck über einer Tür (Triangle above a Door), 1969/2011
Ultramarine blue casein paint
9 x 18 inches (23 x 46 cm)
Courtesy Edition Block, Berlin

35. Blaues Dreieck (Blue Triangle), 1969
Cardboard with stencil, brush, paint tube with ultramarine blue casein paint, instructions, signed drawing of stencil
Edition in box: 20 x 25 1/2 x 1 1/8 inches (51 x 65 x 4 cm)
Edition of 50; Edition Block, Berlin

A selection of documentation panels for Palermo’s Wall Paintings and Drawings
All 30 1/2 x 26 inches (90 x 66 cm), framed
Kunstmuseum Bonn

36. For wall painting at Kunstverein Hamburg, 1973
10 panels: photographs, lithography, screenprint, glue, and cardboard

37. For „Ceiling Border,” Galerie Ernst, Munich, 1971
Photographs, glue, and cardboard

38. For „Grey Angle“ apartment Six Friedrich, Munich, 1971
Graphite, paper, photograph, glue, and cardboard

39. For wall drawing apartment Franz Dahlem, Darmstadt, 1971
Graphite, transparent paper, photograph, glue, and cardboard

40. For „Triangle above a Door“ (blue, black), apartment Franz Dahlem/Six Friedrich, 1971
Photographs, glue, and cardboard

41. For „Triangle above a Door“ 1971
Graphite, transparent paper, glue, and cardboard

42. For „Blue Triangle,“ Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1970
Graphite, photograph, glue, and cardboard

43. For wall painting in the big hall at Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, 1970
Graphite, ink, photograph, glue, and cardboard

44. For staircase wall painting at Documenta 5, Kassel, 1972
Ink, photograph, glue, and cardboard

45. Proposal for the Pedagogical Center of the Neusprachliches Gymnasium for Modern Languages, Mönchengladbach (not realized), 1971
Two panels: graphite, watercolor, glue, and cardboard

46. For „Staircase II“ Experimenter 4, Frankfurt Kunstverein, 1971
Photographs, glue, and cardboard

47. For wall drawing with graphite, Mönchengladbach studio, 1970–71
Graphite, drawing paper, screenprint, glue, and cardboard

48. For „Ceiling Border,“ Galerie Ernst, Hannover, 1970
Graphite, glue, and cardboard

49. For „Wall Show“ Lisson Gallery London, 1970
Felt pen, sticker, ink, and cardboard

50. For wall painting on facing walls at the Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Munich, 1971
Three panels: graphite, transparent paper, photographs, glue, and cardboard

51. For „Window II“ wall painting in the Maximilianstrasse underpass, Munich, 1971
Two panels: graphite, glue, and cardboard
Slinky Palermo was born Peter Schwarze in Leipzig in 1943 and was adopted by Erika and Wilhelm Heisterkamp with his twin brother later that year. In 1962 he entered the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where he studied with Joseph Beuys, and, in 1964, became known as "Slinky Palermo," a name he appropriated from an American boxing promoter and Mafioso. In 1968 Palermo created a wall drawing for the Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Munich. After visiting New York with Gerhard Richter in 1970, he established a studio there in 1973. Palermo died in 1977, while traveling in the Maldives. His last work, To the People of New York City (1976), was shown at the Heiner Friedrich Gallery, New York, in 1977, and at Dia in 1987. Before his death, Palermo participated in more than seventy exhibitions and represented Germany at the São Paulo Bienal in 1975. He has had posthumous retrospectives at the Kunstmuseum Winterthur (1984), the Kunstmuseum Bonn (1993), Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (2002), and the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2007).

selected bibliography


Blinko Palermo: Retrospective 1964–1977 is organized by Dia Art Foundation and the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College. The exhibition is curated by Lynne Cooke.

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