

Exhibition: **Christopher Wool**
IVAM, Institut Valencià d' Art Modern
6 April – 21 May 2006

Curator: Marga Paz

Co-produced by: Institut Valencià d' Art Modern and
Musée d' Art moderne et contemporain, Strasbourg

The exhibition of Christopher Wool which the IVAM is presenting until 21 May includes 32 paintings and 18 works on paper belonging to a single series. This is Wool's first retrospective show in a European museum. Although the exhibition places special emphasis on his most recent work, it includes items from all his artistic periods, from his first works in the early nineties to his most recent output (2005).

The exhibition includes paintings and an important series of drawings, and it is enormously interesting to see these drawings in direct comparison with his paintings. Christopher Wool's work is recognized internationally nowadays as one of the most important and most innovative reflections on the present possibilities and mechanisms of painting. The show will subsequently be seen at the Musée d' Art moderne et contemporain in Strasbourg. The catalogue that accompanies the exhibition contains illustrations of the works exhibited, together with texts by the director of the IVAM, Consuelo Císcar; the director of the Strasbourg Museums, Fabrice Hergott; the curator, Marga Paz; and the art critic David Rimanelli.

The American artist Christopher Wool (Chicago, Illinois, 1955) is known particularly for the black and white paintings he did in the nineties, using words and phrases such as "FOOL", "BAD DOG" and, most famously, "SELL THE HOUSE SELL THE CAR SELL THE KIDS", often taken from songs, films, etc. These works were hailed by the critics as an acute postmodern fusion of black humour, concrete poetry and punk aesthetics, aptly marking a key point in the civilization of our age.

Christopher Wool originally belonged to the art scene that emerged in New York in the eighties, a group of artists belonging to the same generation who included Jeff Koons, Cady Noland and Robert Gober, among others. Although their works were strongly individual and each artist had his own characteristics, they all shared an interest in open confrontations with various aspects of mass culture in the form of films, television or music.

This led Wool to use iconic images and depersonalized mechanical inscriptions in his reductive paintings, with an economy of means inherited from Pop Art, like much of the American art of the time.

Christopher Wool carries out various operations aimed at updating pictorial codes: working in series, transferring the impersonality of the procedures of Conceptual Art to painting, painting on

aluminium, using serial images from the industrial world, and questioning the illusionist space of painting.

In the nineties, Wool made a radical shift in the construction of images in his paintings, turning to erasure or destruction as a method for producing images. In this process he painted layers of white over silkscreened patterns that he had used previously, converting them into a specific form of erasure.

The work of this American artist is exhibited regularly and is represented in the collections of numerous prestigious museums, foundations and private collections in the United States and Europe.

Christopher Wool's work represents the annulment of itself. It seems to swallow and digest everything that constitutes modern painting. Poor, monochrome pictorial elements, taken from the technique of reproduction, from cheap decorative modules, from trickles, erasures and smears, from the shadow of a passing dog, enlargements of details of photographs, or else from screens and polaroids of his own paintings. All these devices are used without complacency, as if drained of any literary or philosophical element that they might contain. He uses them to make calm, persuasive pictures which are like an echo of what we think we like but without resembling it.

In the catalogue for the Consortium's Christopher Wool exhibition, Anne Pontégnie associated him with a "dismantling of modernism starting from the foundations". It is all the more striking that this very radical "rejection" has made his work one of the great successes of contemporary art, and that it does not exclude "the work's ability to haunt", as the same text also says. It is astonishing that this twilight world, made up of ruins and ghosts, is now the only one in which we succeed in living, and with pleasure.

One of the common features observed in Wool's pictorial routines has to do with the preference for exploring the habitability of the world from the perspective of the specificity of fragments of it and from the viewpoint of experience. Wool likes to work with black and white, the colour of the newspapers that seize control of his retina every morning as he breakfasts with the reality that he tries to demythologize with brushstrokes, ever ready to shatter everyday symbols and stereotypes and convert them into other truths, other realities, which communicate just as much or more.

With his eye, Wool photographs everything that communicates in his everyday surroundings in order to obtain instruments with which to communicate in his milieu. In other words, every day he uses metalanguage or rather develops the ability of metacommunication in order to conduct a personal intercultural discourse. Thus he produces a multiplying effect with regard to the sign in the city, the sign being transformed into a symbol by the creative process that the artist performs.