

# MARY BOONE GALLERY

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## ERNST WILHELM NAY

On 7 September 2012, Mary Boone Gallery and Michael Werner Gallery will open a collaborative exhibition surveying the work of German artist ERNST WILHELM NAY (1902-1968). Presented simultaneously in three Manhattan galleries, this exhibition is the first significant presentation of Nay's work in the United States since his death.

The exhibitions focus on works that represent the pinnacle of Nay's artistic achievement: the late period of the 1950s and 1960s. Nay's earliest works were derived from the then-prevalent Expressionist style. Whereas many of Nay's peers eventually turned away from Expressionism, Nay formed his own way by extending the pre-War language and style of Expressionism into a modern pictorial language of abstraction. Nay's first breakthrough occurred in 1937 with the "Fischer-bilder" and "Lofotenbilder", two discreet series of pictures devoted to fishermen and the landscape of Norway's Lofoten Islands. These paintings synthesize Nay's early works with a newfound interest in the expressive potential of color. A second major breakthrough came in the 1950s, with paintings and drawings inspired by notions of synesthesia -- the relationship of musical sounds and rhythms with colors and forms. These so-called "Rhythmic Paintings" ("Rhythmischen Bildern") brought Nay definitively into the realm of abstraction.

Nay continued his investigation of color as form in a series of works characterized by modulated, circular color planes covering large areas of the picture surface. These would develop into the "Eye Paintings" ("Augenbilder") of 1963 and 1964, so named for their suggestive ocular forms. In 1965, the paintings underwent a rigorous simplification of form and palette, often limited to only a few clear, intense colors. At a time when most artists were creating second-generation variations on Abstract Expressionism, or enthralled with the newly emerging trends of Pop, Op and Minimalism, Nay developed a style that imbued abstract pictorial content with the capacity for deep conceptual and expressive meaning.

Ernst Wilhelm Nay was born in Berlin in 1902. He was admitted to the Berlin Art Academy in 1924 on the merits of his first, self-taught, paintings and quickly became the master student of Expressionist painter Carl Hofer. On leaving the Academy in 1928, Nay began exhibiting his work throughout Germany. He traveled abroad, first to Paris and then, on receiving the Prix de Rome in 1931, to Italy. These early successes were short lived. Like many avant-garde artists of the time, Nay's work ran counter to the ideals set forth by the National Socialists: they attacked Nay's paintings as "masterpieces of ugliness",

confiscated his works from state museums, and ultimately included Nay in their infamous exhibition *Degenerate Art* in 1937. Left with no opportunities to exhibit his work, nor the means to acquire basic materials, Nay briefly left Germany, traveling and painting in Norway thanks to the generosity of Edvard Munch. Beginning in 1940, Nay served in the German army as a cartographer. In 1943 he arranged for an exhibition of his wartime works on paper at Galerie Günther Franke in Munich; a short time later he traveled to Paris on a duty trip, where he befriended Kandinsky and other artists of the Parisian avant-garde.

Released from the army in 1945, Nay exhibited his work with increasing commercial and critical success. Nay first participated in the Venice Biennale in 1948 -- he would represent Germany there in 1956 -- and in 1950 Kestner Gesellschaft Hannover organized the artist's first retrospective exhibition. His first solo exhibition in America took place in 1955 at Kleemann Galleries in New York City. That same year Nay participated in the first Documenta, where he would exhibit again in 1959 and 1964. In 1960 Nay was granted a Guggenheim Fellowship and began to show his works extensively outside of Europe. He continued to exhibit internationally until his death in Cologne in 1968.

The exhibitions at both Mary Boone Gallery locations -- *Drawings* at 745 Fifth Avenue and *Paintings* at 541 West 24 Street in Chelsea -- are on view through 6 October 2012. Together with additional paintings at Michael Werner Gallery, 4 East 77 Street, the three exhibitions present a broad selection of Nay's late period work. A fully illustrated catalogue is forthcoming.

The New York exhibitions coincide with *The Polyphonic Eye*, a major survey of Nay's works on paper at Kunstmuseum Bonn from 20 September 2012 through 3 February 2013.

For further information, please contact Ron Warren at the Gallery, or visit our website [www.maryboonegallery.com](http://www.maryboonegallery.com).