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David Ebony, Monday, September 22, 2014

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Roman Opalka, *Opalka 1965/1* (1965)
Photo courtesy of Dominique Lévy

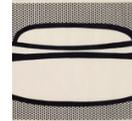
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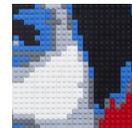
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1. Roman Opalka at Dominique Lévy, through October 18

“[Roman Opalka: Painting ∞](#)” is a rare US tribute to the work of the late French-born Polish artist whose obsessive, lifelong endeavor is unique in contemporary art. The infinity sign in the show’s title is key because at the core of the artist’s project, as he affirms in a statement in the exhibition’s excellent catalogue, is an “attempt at visualizing time.” In 1965 he embarked on a series of large paintings of uniform size (77 3/16

by 53 1/8 inches) filled with tiny rows of neatly inscribed white numbers on nearly monochrome gray backgrounds. A dozen riveting examples are included in the show. In the series, "1965 / 1- ∞," Opalka started with the numeral 1 and sought to reach infinity. He devoted the rest of his life to that goal, but his own mortality abruptly intervened. At the time of his death in 2011, at age 79, he had painted over five million numerals on 233 canvases. Each canvas bears 20,000 to 30,000 consecutive numbers.

Chronicling his physical existence as well as his life in art, he took a single black-and-white headshot photograph of himself standing before each completed canvas, and also regularly recorded himself reciting the numbers as he painted them. Seven self-portrait photos spanning his adult life are also included in the exhibition. Another highlight of the show is a group of early works making their US debut. Mostly ink-on-paper pieces, some double-sided, these abstract gestural compositions from the late 1950s and early '60s, correspond to European *tachisme* or *art informel*. The feverish, overwrought lines crowding these densely packed compositions bear the obsessive quality of his later endeavor.

