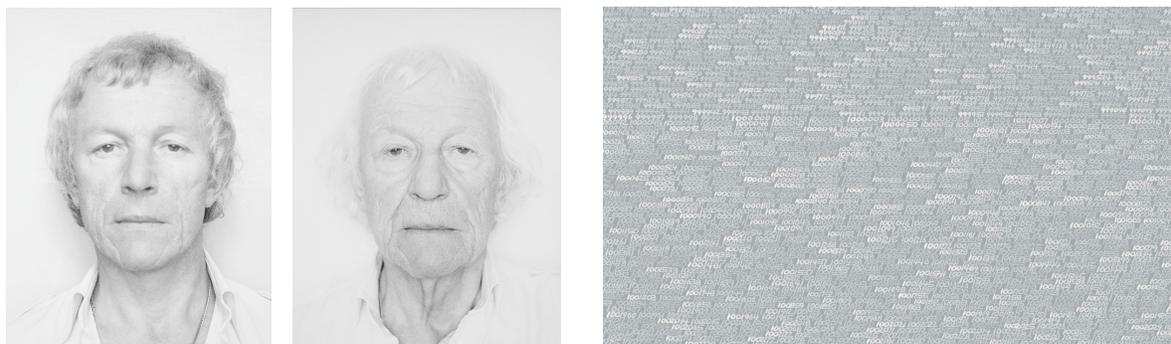


DOMINIQUE LÉVY

For Immediate Release

Media Contact
Andrea Schwan, Andrea Schwan Inc.
info@andreaschwan.com
+1 917 371.5023

ROMAN OPALKA: PAINTING ∞ REVEALS AN ARTIST REACHING FOR THE SUBLIME THROUGH FIVE-DECADES OF COUNTING



Roman Opalka: Painting ∞
September 4 – October 18, 2014
Dominique Lévy
909 Madison Avenue
New York City

Opening Reception: Thursday, September 4, 6-8PM

New York, NY...In 1965, French-born Polish artist Roman Opalka picked up a delicate No. 0 brush in his Warsaw studio and placed the number “1” at the top left-hand corner of a canvas. With this gesture began an enterprise later titled *1965 / 1 – ∞*, that would consume the rest of the artist’s career in a determined but deliberately quixotic quest to paint every number to infinity. By the time of his death, Roman

Opalka had placed more than five million numerals on 233 canvases and made unblinking photographs of his face each day in front of the work. The artist’s numbers increased as his body deteriorated, and together these inverse phenomena – the overlapping fates of body and soul – yielded an unstinting visual diary of one man’s



simultaneous rage against and embrace of the mortal conundrum. Viewing that diary reveals the philosophical daring behind Opalka's discipline, the poignancy in his strategically dry but ultimately breathtaking search for the sublime within the methodology of his counting. Today, Roman Opalka's *1965 / 1 – ∞* stands as one of modern art's most powerful and poetic inquiries into the mutability of time and the spirit's response to it.

Beginning September 4, 2014, Dominique Lévy gallery will pay tribute to Opalka's unique art of body and soul with **Roman Opalka: Painting ∞**. The exhibition will present a key group of paintings (each titled *Détails*) from *1965 / 1 – ∞*, complemented by a selection of the artist's related *Self-Portraits* photographs and audio recordings in which Opalka intones, in his native Polish, the numbers he is painting. **Roman Opalka: Painting ∞** will also present antecedents to *1965 / 1 – ∞* can: Two rare *Chronomes* paintings of 1963 will be on view, as will the entire series of Opalka's ten *Etude sur le Mouvement* works on paper from 1959-60. These works will be shown together with the *Détails* for the first time in the United States.

Roman Opalka: Painting ∞ will remain on view through October 18th. The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue featuring a text by curator and art historian Lorand Hegyi, a close friend of the artist; an essay by independent curator and historian Charles Wylie; an original text by French poet Jacques Roubaud; and a conversation between Marie-Madeleine Opalka, the artist's widow, and François Barré, a close friend, that serves as a narrative chronology.

The exhibition at Dominique Lévy provides an overview of Opalka's career, revealing his œuvre to be a grand metaphor for human existence and a deceptively restrained expression of the artist's vitality and passion in the face of an unstoppable evaporation. "Time as we live it and as we create it embodies our progressive disappearance," Opalka wrote in a 1987 essay. "We are at the same time alive and in the face of death — that is the mystery of all living beings."

After a period of experimenting with the phenomenon of disappearance in such works as the white-and-black *Chronomes* paintings and *Etude sur le Mouvement* works of 1959 – 1960. Opalka turned himself over to *1965 / 1 – ∞*. Rows of tiny numerals flowed in perfect horizontal order from one painting to the next. Each new canvas -- called a *Détail* and inscribed with approximately 20,000 to 30,000 consecutive numbers -- took up counting where the previous left off. 'All my work is a single thing, the description from number one to infinity,' he stated. 'A single thing, a single life.' The artist's acute awareness of the mutability of time and mortal existence surfaces not only in his affectless, progressively ageing *Self-Portraits* photographs, but also in the formal aesthetic evolution of his *Détails*. The first canvases bear white numbers on a black background. In 1968, three years into the series, Opalka changed this black background color to gray. Four years later still, as he passed the one million mark, Opalka began adding an additional 1% of white paint to the background color after each canvas in order to lighten his surfaces gradually. Integral to the project was the artist's parallel documentation: Opalka recorded himself speaking each number into a tape recorder as he worked and shot passport-style photographs of himself in front of each canvas at the end of each work session. By 2008, he was painting white numerals

on a white whose color he dubbed “blanc mérité”: “well-earned white.” Whereas some critics view Opalka’s decades-long *grand projet* as an analog for suicide in slow motion, this literal evolution away from dark to light in his paintings, along with his fundamental acknowledgement of ungraspable infinity, suggests a deeply philosophical and even spiritual gesture toward sublime.

About the Artist

Roman Opalka was born on August 27, 1931, to Polish émigrés in Hocquincourt, in northern France. The family returned to Poland in 1935, only to be deported to Germany after the Nazi invasion. After being liberated by the United States Army, they returned to Poland, where Roman studied lithography at a graphics school before enrolling in the School of Art and Design in Lodz. He later earned a degree from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and began experimenting with abstract and monochrome paintings, which he called *Chronomes*. In 1970 he gave up all other painting but his 1965/1 - ∞ series, begun in 1965.

Opalka began exhibiting his work in Poland in the mid-1960s, and by the early 1970s was represented in solo and group exhibitions throughout Europe and in Asia and Latin America. Opalka’s first trip to the United States came in 1972, and his first American exhibition opened in 1974 at the John Weber Gallery. In the 40 years since then, Opalka’s work has been showcased in scores of gallery and museum exhibitions worldwide, and resides in the permanent collections of leading foundations and museums internationally, including The Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York; The National Gallery in Berlin; The Menil Collection in Houston; the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris; and the Toyota Municipal Museum of Art in Japan. Opalka’s retrospective exhibitions and writings in several languages, as well as his participation in events as Documenta 6 in Kassel Germany (1977), the XIX Biennial of Sao Paolo (1987), and Venice Biennale (1995, 2003), brought him global recognition.

In 1977 Roman Opalka moved to France, settling at Teillé, near Le Mans. He took French citizenship in 1985, and in 2009 he was named Commander of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (Order of Arts and of Letters).

Opalka died in Chieti, Italy, in August 2011.

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For additional information please contact:

Andrea Schwan, Andrea Schwan Inc.

info@andreaschwan.com

+1 917 71.5023

Left: ROMAN OPALKA, *OPALKA 1965/1 - ∞, Détail – Photo*, 2787231, 9 7/16 x 12 inches (24 x 30.5 cm). Photo Credit: Vincent Lespinasse. **Center:** ROMAN OPALKA, *OPALKA 1965/1 - ∞, Détail – Photo* 5489936, 9 7/16 x 12 inches (24 x 30.5 cm) Photo Credit: Vincent Lespinasse. **Right:** ROMAN OPALKA, *OPALKA 1965/1 - ∞, Détail* 993460 –1017875, Acrylic on canvas, 77 3/16 x 53 1/8 inches (196 x 135 cm). Photo Credit: André Morin.