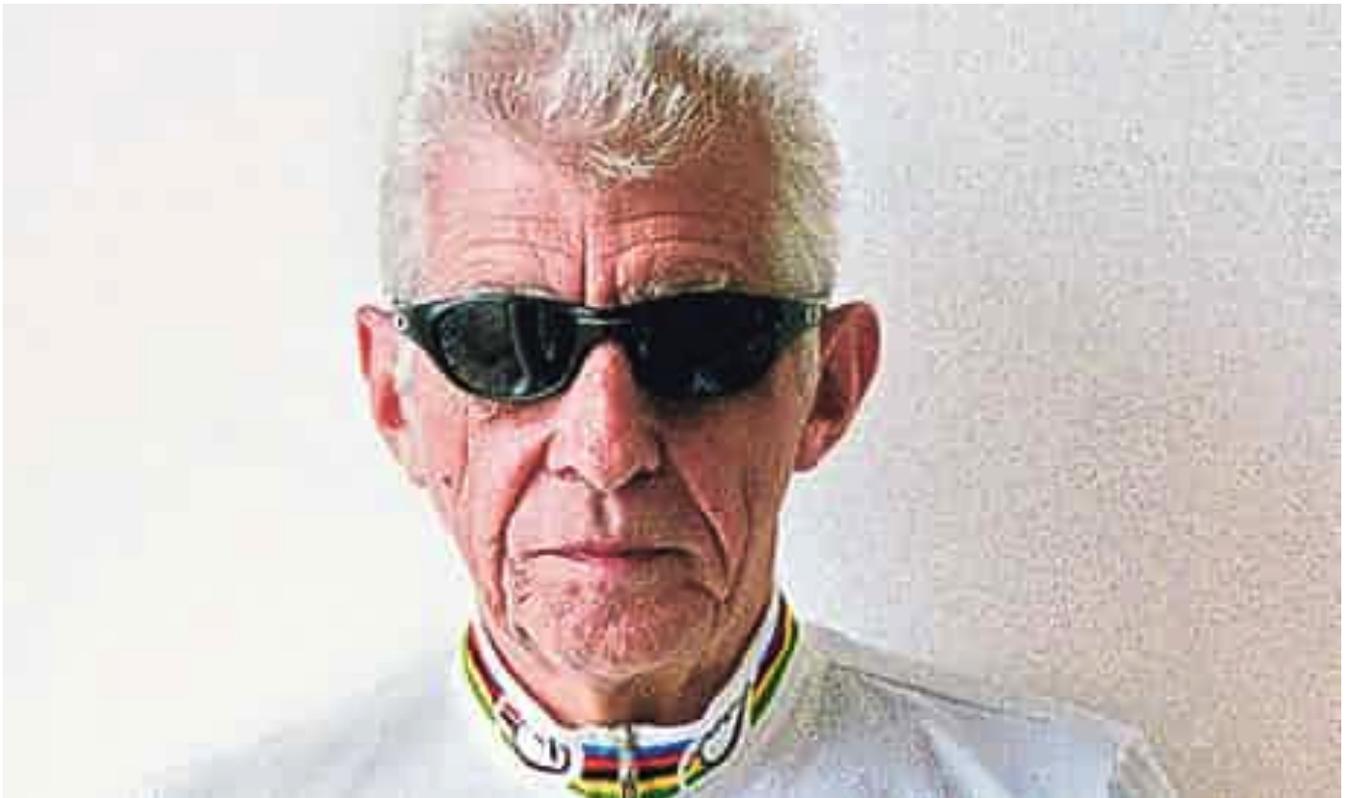


Alan Uglow obituary

British-born abstract painter, he became a quintessential New York art-world figure



Despite moving to New York in 1969, Alan Uglow remained a devoted Chelsea FC fan. Photograph: Tim Ayres

Christopher Finch

Sunday 27 February 2011 18.06 GMT

Alan Uglow, who has died aged 69, was a British painter, installation artist, photographer and musician, who, despite retaining the vocal inflections and passion for football that were legacies of his upbringing, became a quintessential New York art-world figure. His career was characterised by a highly principled devotion to the values of classic modernism, and a disdain for fashion that won him devoted admirers among both artists and collectors. His eloquently economical paintings epitomised Mies van der Rohe's dictum that less is more.

Born in Luton, the son of a master carpenter, Alan was brought up there, and in Danbury, Essex and in Peterborough. He studied at the Leicester College of Art and the Central School in London, exhibiting at the Young Contemporaries from 1960 to 1964, and at the Grabowski Gallery in 1965. As the 60s progressed, he was drawn to a kind of non-figurative art that reflected the influence of Piet Mondrian and, less obviously, Alberto Giacometti, as well as American artists including Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt.

In 1968, he made his first visit to New York and moved there permanently the following

year, renting a loft in SoHo, then a nameless industrial neighbourhood, and establishing himself as a fixture among the painters, conceptualists and performance artists who congregated at bars such as Fanelli's, Max's Kansas City, and St Adrian's. He supported himself by printmaking for more established artists such as Jim Dine, and painting and decorating.

He absorbed everything the New York art world had to offer, while working slowly and patiently on his own paintings, which became increasingly refined, tending at first towards the monochromatic or the chromatically neutral. In 1974, the curator Klaus Kertess included him in a group show at the influential Bykert Gallery. By the time of his first solo exhibition at the Mary Boone Gallery, in 1978, Uglow's art had been pared down to the interplay of subtly modulated whites deployed within the framework of a highly reductive geometry.

By the early 1980s, Uglow was beginning to find himself out of step with a Manhattan gallery scene increasingly in thrall to commerce. Continuing to paint, he found an alternative outlet for his creative energy playing bass guitar, performing in New York and Europe with his second wife, the dancer and poet Elena Alexander, and becoming a founding member of the band Hard Labor.

He began to exhibit at the Lorence-Monk Gallery in New York from the mid-1980s, and later at Stark Gallery. Defying the tide of postmodernism, Uglow remained an unrepentant if undogmatic modernist, and increasingly his reputation came to depend on recognition in northern Europe, especially Scandinavia, Germany and the Netherlands. In 1986 and 1992, he and Alexander spent year-long sojourns in Europe, and in 1995 he exhibited in London at Gimpel Fils. European trips were relished for the opportunity to visit Stamford Bridge to support his beloved Chelsea FC.

Painting in series that evolved slowly over decades, he remained faithful to his central vision while pushing boundaries in ways sometimes apparent only when the work was installed in a gallery. Beginning in 2000, there was a radical shift in Uglow's use of colour, which became bolder and more varied, often being employed to articulate space in surprising and illusionistic ways. Some paintings displayed the graphic simplicity of a playing field or ice-hockey rink seen from above, without ever becoming merely diagrammatic.

Occasionally a piece would be freestanding, breaking with conventional notions of painting altogether. In 1998, he had a full-sized "Coach's Bench" fabricated out of wood, with a corrugated fibreglass roof and a concealed sound system that broadcast crowd noises recorded at football stadiums, as well as readings from texts by Vladimir Nabakov, Albert Camus and Harold Pinter.

With his punk black T-shirts, drainpipe jeans and his ravaged but striking features, Uglow remained a familiar figure in the bars of downtown Manhattan until a series of illnesses, culminating in a diagnosis of cancer, confined him largely to his studio. Long before, Uglow had become a cult hero to many younger artists, and the exhibition of a new work at the contemporary art space MoMA PS1, or a one-off at the Paula Cooper Gallery, came to be seen as an event.

His obstinate dedication to the values of high modernism gained growing respect in mainstream circles, and the last year of his life saw the publication of a handsome

monograph devoted to his work (Alan Uglow, edited by Martin Hentschel), and major exhibitions in Germany at Museum Haus Esters in Krefeld and Museum Wiesbaden, and at Galerie Onrust in Amsterdam, the headquarters of his Dutch art dealers.

He is survived by Elena.

Alan Philip Uglow, artist, born 19 July 1941; died 20 January 2011

Since you're here ...

... we have a small favour to ask. More people are reading the Guardian than ever but advertising revenues across the media are falling fast. And unlike many news organisations, we haven't put up a paywall - we want to keep our journalism as open as we can. So you can see why we need to ask for your help. The Guardian's independent, investigative journalism takes a lot of time, money and hard work to produce. But we do it because we believe our perspective matters - because it might well be your perspective, too.

I appreciate there not being a paywall: it is more democratic for the media to be available for all and not a commodity to be purchased by a few. I'm happy to make a contribution so others with less means still have access to information. *Thomasine F-R*. If everyone who reads our reporting, who likes it, helps to support it, our future would be much more secure.

Become a supporter

Make a contribution

Topics

- Art
- New York
- Pop and rock
- Chelsea
- obituaries