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AM I BLUE? RUDOLF DE CRIGNIS'S QUIETLY COMPLICATED WORKS AT BETTY CUNINGHAM REVEAL MINIMALISM'S DEEP AND EXPRESSIVE POTENTIAL

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Rudolf de Crignis, *Painting #92011*, 1992, watercolor and pencil on incised paper, 19½ x 25¾ inches.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND BETTY CUNINGHAM GALLERY, NEW YORK

These 14 paintings—six on canvas and eight works on paper, all from the mid

1990s—are as stunning and refined as minimalism can be—and as deceptively complex. Rudolf de Crignis, who died in 2005, was a Swiss-born artist who began his career in performance and video, and aspects of both make themselves felt, barely perceptibly, in his paintings and drawings.

For his canvases, de Crignis worked in oil paint over tempera on a base of gesso, creating intensely and complexly colored, largely monochrome works. These paintings reveal an extraordinary sense of depth and even motion as the many thin layers of different colors he applied push their way to the surface. The atmospheric conditions they evoke with their rich and varying blues call to mind Constable without the clouds.



Rudolf de Crignis, *Painting #96-20*, 1996, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 inches.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND BETTY CUNINGHAM GALLERY, NEW YORK

Applying the paint using a wide brush and moving it first horizontally and then vertically, de Crignis created an invisible grid, heightening the sense of depth and allowing for the appearance of illumination from within. In so doing he also managed to conjure the passing of time, both slow and fast, conveying it through the shifts in light.

Downstairs at Betty Cuninghams Gallery, the six oil paintings—in rich, unparalleled shades of blue—are installed to mesmerizing effect and play off against one another.

Upstairs, the drawings stand out for their modesty of means and materials but produce some of the same effects as the canvases. The cream paper, sometimes lightly tinted and shaded, and the fine lines and grids combine precision and free handed-ness. Some lines are simply incised into the paper drawing us in, as in *Painting #92011* (1992), which calls to mind musical staves and, again, progressions in time.

In their way, the drawings convey the artist's thinking process and his changing moods and emotions. It's not quite storytelling that we perceive but rather progressive patterns of thought, reflecting back on their evolution and on the memory of other works.

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