

Jerry Allen: *Timeline*

### Exhibition Text

On a Vancouver day in 2008, Jerry Allen initiated *Timeline* as an indexical experiment in restraint. The prompt was concise: a painting to be made within the confines of a single month, where the flip of calendar's page – still in widespread usage at the series' onset – marked the work's completion, never to be returned to again. As the clock expired on one work, it would immediately wind back up for the next, which was soon to meet a similar fate in the coming weeks. Despite the formal congruency throughout the series, it would be reductive to conclude that this method carried on as planned in perpetuity. Over the past seventeen years, restrictions have shifted, and once discrete timelines have now blurred into a continuous process of rework and return. New concepts and contexts have crept in while others have been laxed or abandoned over time. *Timeline* is an exercise in filiation that slowly alters and reconstitutes itself in ways that only practices in duration can shape.

The exhibition presents only a small fraction of the nearly 500 *Timeline* works to date, but, through careful observation, subtle permutations found within the series at large are revealed. Notably, both the first and most recent *Timeline* drawings bookend the presentation. These selections mark a shift in the series' parameters to include a host of new mediums – all of which the artist considers to be drawing mediums – expanding on the earlier stipulation of oil paint and canvas. In the inaugural *June, 2014*, oscillating bands of teal, violet and grey contain the spirited trepidation that only a fissure in the terms of a longstanding engagement can incite. At the drawing's edges, Allen's mark-making juts past the principal areas like the fraying threads of well-trodden rug. Changes in density across the plane produces a pulsating sensation, and the work teems with the anticipation of an image in the microseconds before coming into focus.

Through a decade of repetition, the drawings have become increasingly precise. Working in vertical columns, east-to-west across the work's surface, the left-handed artist has engrained a mark-making motion of utmost consistency into muscle memory. This cyclical labour harkens back to Allen's agricultural roots in Rosetown, Saskatchewan, where his intimate fascination with the temporal ebbs and flows of nature took form. While one's gut instinct might tie *Timeline* to the region's history of post-painterly abstraction – a history of which the artist is well-versed – the works, Allen asserts, are to be encountered as landscapes, calling to mind Agnes Martin's articulation of the sublime experience of encountering the vast prairies. Whether expansive topography or time itself, a form of immanence always takes hold.

It is fitting that this exhibition marks the first ever presentation of *Timeline*, back where its germinal seed was sown. And, like this landscape, we see in Allen's work those fascinations that only time can inscribe; those fuzzy horizons that can never fully resolve.