

MASTERPIECES MODERN

GOTTHARD GRAUBER
ANDY WARHOL
JIM DINE
PETER HALLEY
SAM FRANCIS
ROBERT MOTHERWELL
GÜNTHER Uecker
SIGMAR POLKE
LUCIO FONTANA
IMI KNOEBEL

GALERIE THOMAS MODERN

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FLOWERS 1964

ANDY WARHOL

synthetic polymer and
silkscreen inks on canvas

1964

61 x 61 cm

24 x 24 in.

signed twice and dated
on the canvas overlap

Provenance

Estate of the Artist

Paul Warhola Family Collection, Pittsburgh

Private collection, Europe

Private collection, Paris

Private collection (acquired from the above)

Private collection, USA

Literature

Frei Georg; Printz, Neil (Eds.). Warhol, Paintings and Sculptures 1964 - 1969,

The Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné. Vol. 02A, New York 2004, p. 302, text on the 24-inch Flowers.



FLOWERS 1964

ANDY WARHOL

From a dark green-black grass background, four gaudily-coloured orange-yellow, red and pink flower blossoms seem to jump from the canvas and confront the viewer with a subject that, superficially regarded, is simple to understand – a classic flower still life – which, however, on closer inspection turns out to be far more complex than it may seem at first.

Representations of flowers run like a common theme through the centuries of art history: until the Renaissance, flowers mainly had the right to exist in art as carriers of religious symbols or allegories, but beginning with the 15th century, this changed slowly, and the flower was acknowledged as an independent pictorial subject, as the embodiment of the life cycle. The Dutch flower still lifes of Baroque art undoubtedly represent a pinnacle in the treatment of the theme, in which the lavishly arranged bouquets of flowers only at first glance pay homage to the beauty of creation. Rather, they point to transitoriness, to death and to the finiteness of being: vanitas. The Romantic period gave the flower a new presence in painting and poetry, culminating in the representation of the 'Blue Flower': as a symbol of the desire for love, the metaphysical striving for infinity and pilgrimage. For the Impressionists from Manet and Monet to van Gogh, the flower became the ideal projection surface for expressing the artist's immediate perception.¹ This line can be continued without interruption: Lovis Corinth, Emil Nolde, Chaim Soutine and Paul Klee, Pablo Picasso, Max Ernst, Henri Matisse and Fernand Léger. As different as the artistic approaches of the artists mentioned

may be, the flower is never merely a flower, but always points beyond itself and generates a wealth of meanings, which inseparably accompany genuine artistic innovation and revolution – often more, and more clearly, than in other thematic areas. Since Warhol initiated a comeback of the subject with his Flower paintings, the flower has become an indispensable motif in the work of many great artists of the 20th and 21st centuries and has conquered the spatial dimension in the form of sculptures, installations and videos, as in the work of Pipilotti Rist, Jeff Koons and Marc Quinn.²

Warhol began the Flowers series in 1964 on the occasion of his first exhibition with Leo Castelli.

The basis for this series was an amateur photograph of hibiscus blossoms, which appeared in the June issue of the magazine *Modern Photography*. It was Henry Geldzahler, then the curator for modern art at the New York Metropolitan Museum, who more or less arbitrarily selected the original flower painting for Warhol.³ Warhol trimmed the photograph and the original six blossoms became the famous group of four, which fit perfectly into a square, and which the artist continued to develop in a major series lasting into the 1980s.

In the course of Warhol's structuring and manipulation of the theme, he introduced the screen printing technique in order to produce varied images of the same flower in different sizes, colours and combinations. The emphasis on process and repetition are

¹ Cf.: Kopp, Robert. Blumensehnsucht. In: Blumenmythos – Von Vincent van Gogh bis Jeff Koons. Exhibition Catalogue of the Fondation Beyeler 2005, Wolfratshausen 2005, pp. 23.

² Cf.: Büttner, Philippe. Obsession Blume. In: Blumenmythos – Von Vincent van Gogh bis Jeff Koons. Exhibition Catalogue of the Fondation Beyeler 2005, Wolfratshausen 2005, p. 33.

³ The Staff of the Andy Warhol Museum. Andy Warhol 365 Takes. New York 2004, p. 11.



typical features of Warhol's artistic strategy. The idea of completely separating artistic design from the necessity of the gestural or manual process, and replacing craftsmanship with technical means challenged the conventional notions of the authenticity of a work of art and the role of its author.

The romantic idea of the artist as a genius is completely negated by Warhol through the process of de-individualization. For the production of these panel paintings, he used only those elements which are absolutely necessary to justify the use of the term panel painting: the image, the colour and the carrier. The original photograph loses its detail and sharpness through the reproduction by means of screen printing; its shapes are simplified and the contrasts intensified. These effects, together with Warhol's choice of colours – often striking – create the effect of alienation that gives Warhol's art meaning. Chance, which is also a result of the silk-screen printing technique, which ultimately remains a craft, in the end leads to a particular kind of individuality. This individuality is, however,

no longer subject to the will of the artist, but to the laws of applied technology itself.

On closer inspection, the colourful and beautiful appearance of the flowers disintegrates against the dark background, which seems to open up like a sinister dark tunnel – a portal to the underworld. Warhol took up the Baroque theme of floral depictions and linked beauty and decay, life and death – opposites that are inseparably linked to each other. The Flower paintings had been preceded by the Death and Disaster works, and Warhol had already begun work of the first Electric Chair paintings, which were followed later by the Skulls. Death, horror and tragedy were always present in Warhol's work, alongside the (apparently) cheerful, glamorous and banal – the oscillation between the worlds, between the high and low is distinctive of Warhol's work.

"A lot of Andy's work revolves around that subject. The Marilyn paintings are about life and death, the Flowers are with their black, menacing

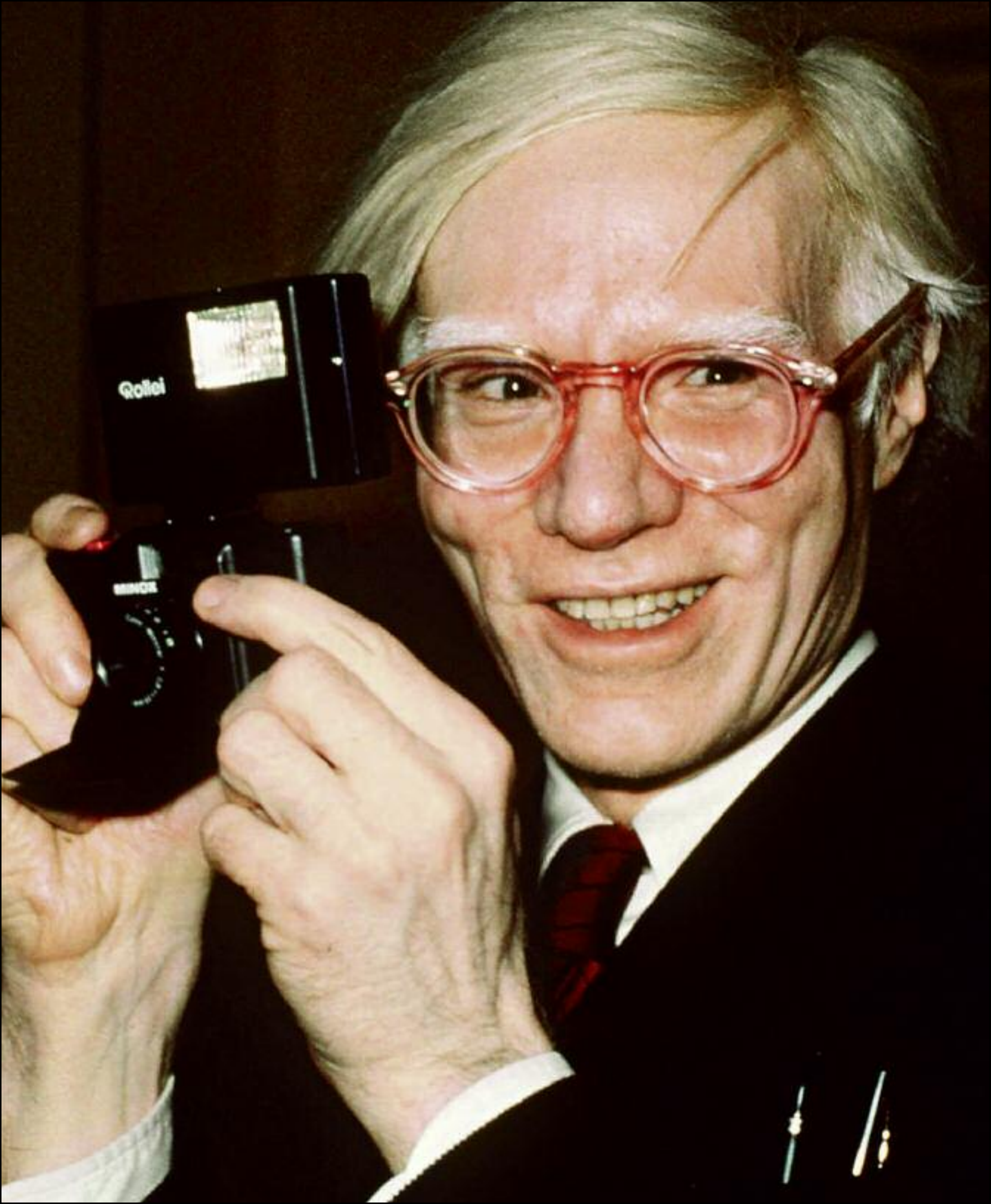


background ... We all knew the dark side of those Flowers. Don't forget, at that time, there was flower power and flower children. We were the roots, the dark roots of that whole movement. None of us were hippies or flower children. ... So when Warhol and that whole scene made Flowers, it reflected the urban, dark, death side of that whole movement."⁴

With his Flowers series, Warhol created one of his most iconic works and with these important works, heralded a renaissance of the depiction of flowers in 20th-century art by developing an essential concept of modernism based on the flower motif: using screen printing, he transferred one of nature's most serial motifs to his art. With this technique he takes up the seriality of the image in the age of television, and at this early point critically interprets the repetitive mechanisms and strategies of the growing mass media.

Photography from Modern Photography Magazine, with notes and a design by Warhol, 1964

⁴ O'Connor, John and Liu, Benjamin. Unseen Warhol. New York 1966, p. 61.



ANDY WARHOL

PITTSBURGH 1928 – 1987 NEW YORK

THE YEAR 1964

Warhol had already purchased a 16 mm camera in 1963 and had started shooting his first films with it, creating works such as *Sleep* and *Kiss*. A new studio at 231 East 47 Street became a 'factory', a place of work and encounter. Warhol's close circle included the poet Gerard Malanga and actors such as Jane Holzer, Brigid Polk, Taylor Mead and Robert Olivio.

After the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Warhol began his series of Jackie portraits. For the first time he also used photos from photo booths and a Polaroid camera.

On January 13, 1964, the Galerie Ileana Sonnabend in Paris opened an exhibition of Disaster Paintings, and on April 21 an exhibition was opened at the New York Stable Gallery, in which exclusively models of product packaging – screen-printed wooden crates – from Brillo, Campbell's and Heinz were shown. The exhibition and the opening party in the Factory became a scandalous success.

The public commission for a work for the facade of the pavilion designed by Philip Johnson at the New York World's Fair failed: Warhol's painting *13 Most Wanted Men* was rejected by the organizers after it had been shown for a few days in the New York State Pavilion. For political reasons, the exhibition of this mural was prohibited and, in the end, it was sprayed over with silver paint.

Warhol made numerous other films. The Vietnam War began in August 1964.

Warhol moved to Castelli Gallery – his inaugural show there consisted of the first series of the silk screen prints *Flowers*. The template that Warhol used for the images was a photograph by the amateur photographer Patricia Caulfield, taken from the June issue of *Modern Photography* magazine. Caulfield sued Warhol the same year. She rejected the compensation in the form of two *Flowers* portfolios, and an out-of-court agreement for a sum of money was reached. The exhibition at Castelli ran from November 21 to December 17 and all the works in the exhibition were sold.

The Factory was increasingly becoming a meeting place for young artists, dancers, dropouts and Warhol admirers. Warhol intensified his activity as a filmmaker and met Paul Morrissey, who shot all films with Warhol in the following years. The members of the rock band Velvet Underground became part of the Inner Circle of the Factory and played in Warhol's films. In May 1965, the second series of the *Flower* pictures was shown at Sonnabend Gallery in Paris, and while Warhol was being celebrated in Europe as the most important pop artist, he declared in Paris that he would give up painting in order to devote himself entirely to making films.

Andy Warhol
1976 in New York



TOTAL MODNESS (THE BIG FLOPPY COLLAR BY GERALD MCCANN)
1965

JIM DINE

Charcoal and objects
on canvas
1965
152.4 x 121.9 cm
60 x 48 in.

Provenance
Studio of the Artist

Exhibited
Robert Fraser Gallery, London 1965. Jim Dine: Recent Paintings. No. 2.



TOTAL MODNESS (THE BIG FLOPPY COLLAR BY GERALD MCCANN) 1965

JIM DINE

Jim Dine's first artworks were happenings, in which he collaborated with later exponents of performance art and Pop Art such as Allan Kaprow and Claes Oldenburg in the 1950s in New York. These roots of Dine's art are fundamental to the understanding of his later objects, panel paintings, and environments, since they reflect the crucial purpose of happenings of bringing everyday life, the viewer, and the artist personally into art, updating it and making it socially relevant, in a shift away from representation and criticism and toward immediate action.

Based on these origins, it makes sense that Dine's paintings and object-based works were later seen as Pop Art, since they grew out of the same roots as happenings. In a 1964 lecture, Roy Lichtenstein pointed out this direct link and cited Dine as a Pop artist.¹

However, Jim Dine himself always rejected the categorization of his work under the label of Pop Art and clearly formulated the differences between his artistic approach and the ideas of Pop Art: "Pop is concerned with exteriors. I'm concerned with

interiors when I use objects. I see them as a vocabulary of feelings. I can spend a lot of time with objects, and they leave me as satisfied as a good meal. I don't think Pop artists feel that way."

Beginning around 1962, Dine turned away from performance and increasingly moved toward an object-based painting that could take on the scale of an environment. This is the case in the 1962 work *Five Feet of Colorful Tools*, for instance, now at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which already points to the further development of his painting and formally belongs to the immediate predecessors of *Total Modness*. Here, too, Dine arranges tools in a row along the upper edge of the canvas, which is otherwise largely untouched. Only the shadows – or, rather, negative images of the individual tools – are spray-painted in different colors on the canvas behind the objects. However, the title is still an exact description of what the artwork shows. This changed later on, since poetry, which became increasingly important to Dine, also colored his artworks in a language rich in metaphors and associations. This is precisely the

¹ Roy Lichtenstein, lecture at the College Art Association, Philadelphia, January 1964, printed in: Johnson, Ellen H. (ed.). *American Artists on Art from 1940 to 1980*. New York 1982, p. 102-104.

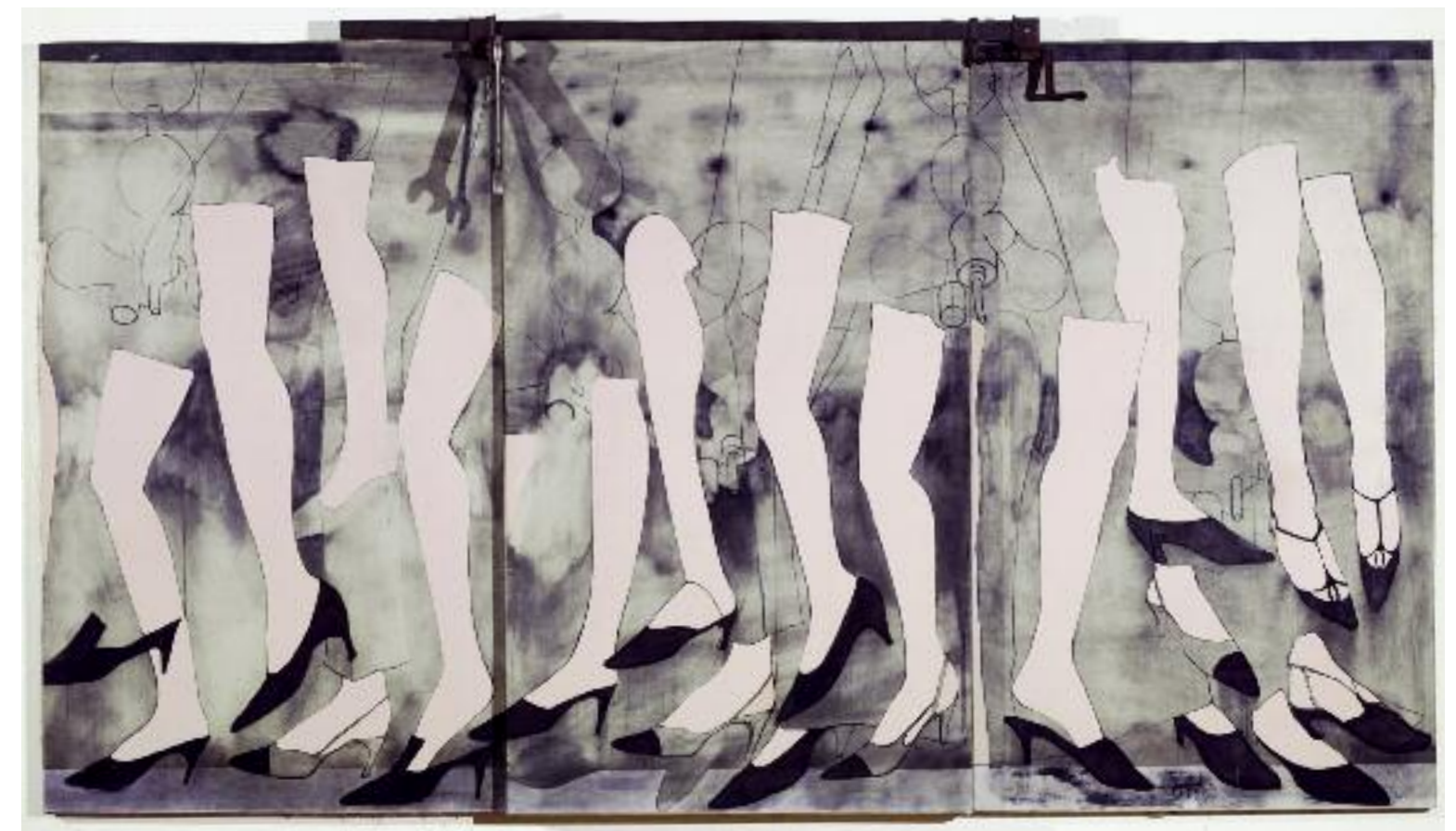


point at which his work turns away, or differs from, the position of Pop Art. While Dine's object paintings still show parallels to the material collages by other Pop artists, such as Robert Rauschenberg's Combine Paintings, they differ significantly in subject matter due to their symbolic and autobiographical level. Even more so than in the aforementioned painting at MoMA, this is apparent in *3 Panel Study for Child's Room*, now at the Menil Collection in Houston, which was created in the same year. As an evocation of a child's room, Dine reduces the environment to a material painting that includes not only individual items such as his own children's toys, but also the handprints of his sons Matthew and Jeremy. Thus, the ensemble becomes an autobiographical exploration of the present, which distinguishes it from externally comparable works of Pop Art.

All these formal and conceptual elements are also evident in *Total Modness*, but in an even more encoded and hermetic way. The canvas shows only a charcoal drawing of an undulating collar, the *big floppy collar* referenced in the title, in an allusion to

Gerald McCann. In the 1960s, McCann was a highly successful fashion designer and producer in the United Kingdom, and later particularly so in the United States, who, along with a few others, was regarded as the epitome of British fashion and created collections for the major fashion chains.

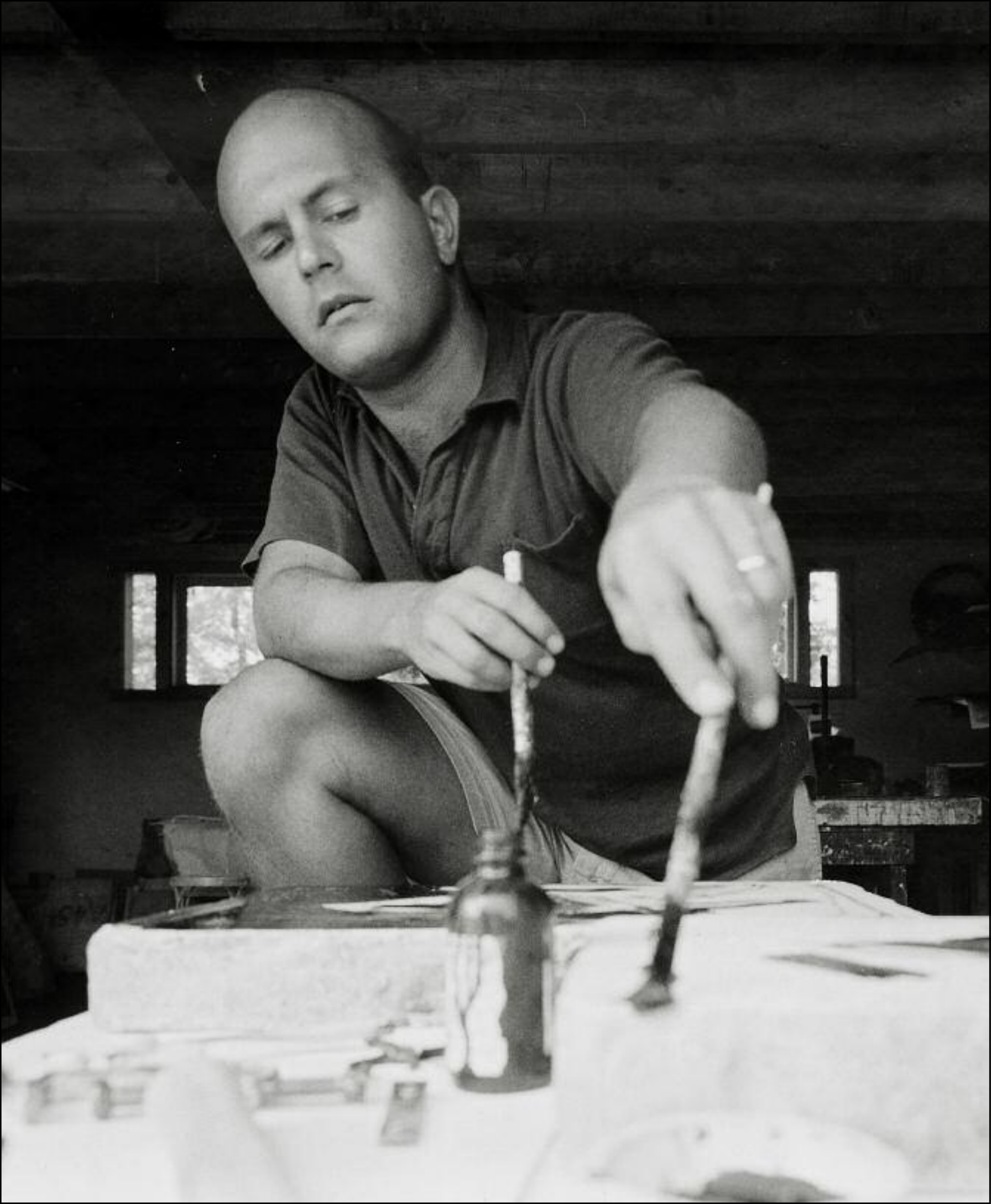
The topic of fashion seems typical of Pop Art, but Dine uses it here in a different way, as will be seen. The upper edge of the canvas is gripped by a large pipe clamp, with a crowbar hanging in the middle. In the same year, Dine used the clamp and the theme of fashion in a very similar manner in the triptych *Walking Dream with Four Foot Clamp*, now at the Tate in London. In *Total Modness*, however, Dine further complicates this composition by also drawing the shadow of the crowbar extending out of the collar like a head, as in a trompe-l'oeil painting. This multilayered approach between realistic painting, real objects, and their inclusion in the 'picture' through illusionistic painting creates a puzzle of reality and imitation of reality which amusingly and intelligently addresses the modern discussion about the tasks of art and painting.



The two tools, like all the tools in Dine's works, have an autobiographical reference through the childhood memories of the artist, who after his mother's death grew up with his grandparents, who ran a hardware store. But Dine combines them here in an even more telling way. After all, there are two conflicting actions that the two objects suggest. While the clamp apparently holds the 'picture' together by force, the crowbar, which has also assumed the role of the 'head' looking out of the collar, has the task of breaking something apart by force. Here, too, the action inherited from performance art still seems to be present in the tools. It is hardly surprising that Dine apparently hides yet another allusion in the crowbar, since an American name for this tool is 'jimmy', a familiar form of the artist's first name.

With the play on words 'modness' in the title, an allusion to the 'mod' youth movement (in 1965, The Who, the cult band of mods, released their epochal single 'My Generation'), it becomes apparent that Jim Dine's work is a self-portrait of the artist's current state of mind and his questions about art and pictures.

Jim Dine
Walking Dream with Four Foot Clamp
1965
Tate Gallery, London



JIM DINE

CINCINNATI 1935 – LIVES IN PARIS AND WALLA WALLA

THE YEAR 1965

In the early 1960s, Jim Dine began focusing less on performance art and more on painting and sculpture, creating material collages and entire environments. Prints, which later made up a large part of his oeuvre, became increasingly important to Dine, whom Jasper Johns introduced to the art-oriented print workshop ULAE in 1962.

In 1964, Jim Dine participated in the Venice Biennale at the American pavilion. He subsequently had his first solo exhibition in 1965 at the Allen Memorial Art Museum. At the same time, he was a visiting lecturer at Yale and a guest artist at Oberlin College in Ohio. Meanwhile, his past experience with happenings fed into his work as stage and costume designer for the theater.

From this secure position as a respected artist, in 1966 Dine took on a teaching post at Cornell University in New York. In the same year, he began writing poems, strongly motivated by his contact with the poet Robert Creeley. Another solo exhibition of his works was shown at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. In the preceding years, Dine had several acclaimed exhibitions in European galleries, mainly in London and Paris. This mutual interest in Europe eventually led Dine to move to London with his family in 1967, where he remained until 1971.

Jim Dine in the 1960s at Universal Limited Art Editions



WHEN WHITE 1963-1964

SAM FRANCIS

Provenance

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York

André Emmerich Gallery, New York

Private collection, USA

Martha Jackson, New York (March 1970)

Monique and Foster Goldstrom, San Francisco (acquired in May 1980 by Martha Jackson's son)

Monique and Foster Goldstrom sale, Christie's New York, Nov. 9, 1999, No. 550

Private collection (acquired 1999 at the above sale)

Judith and Abraham Amar Foundation (2003)

Private collection

oil on canvas

1963-1964

249 x 193.4 cm

98 x 76 1/8 in.

verso signed, dated and

inscribed 'L.A.'

SFF.392

Exhibited

Kornfeld & Klipstein, Bern 1966. Sam Francis, Werke 1962-1966. No. 17, p. 23 col. ill.

Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York 1967. Sam Francis Oil Paintings 1962-1966. No. 12 col. ill.

Montclair Art Museum, Montclair 1970. Abstract Expressionism: The Recent Years.

Martha Jackson Gallery, New York 1970. Sam Francis Paintings, Watercolours and Gouaches 1952-1970.

Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Dallas; Oakland Museum, Oakland, 1972/73.

Sam Francis: Paintings 1947-1972. No. 56, col. ill. p. 86.

Art Gallery, University of Maryland, College Park; The Finch College Museum of Art, New York; Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo 1974. The Private Collection of Martha Jackson. No. 25.

Martha Jackson Gallery, New York 1979. Large Paintings and Small Sculptures.

Foster Goldstrom, Inc., Dallas 1983. Icons of Contemporary Art. Ill. p. 10.

Museum of Art, Davenport; Art Museum, Wichita; Center for the Arts, Vero Beach; Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock; Center for the Arts, Scottsdale; Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte; Sunrise Museums, Charleston; Roberson Center for the Arts & Sciences, Binghamton; Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga; Lakeview Museum of Arts & Sciences, Peoria; Oklahoma Art Center, Oklahoma City; Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson; Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis; Museum of Art, Birmingham 1988-1992. Contemporary Icons and Explorations, The Goldstrom Family Collection. No. 21, p. 9, 43.

BAWAG Foundation, Vienna 1994. Amerikanische Kunst aus der Sammlung Goldstrom New York.

No. 21, ill. p. 14 and poster.

Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Menil Collection, Houston; Konsthall, Malmö; 1999/2000.

Sam Francis: Paintings 1947-1990. Col. ill. pl. 53, p. 106.

Literature

Ashton, Dore. Modern American Painting. New York 1970. Ill. pl. 21.

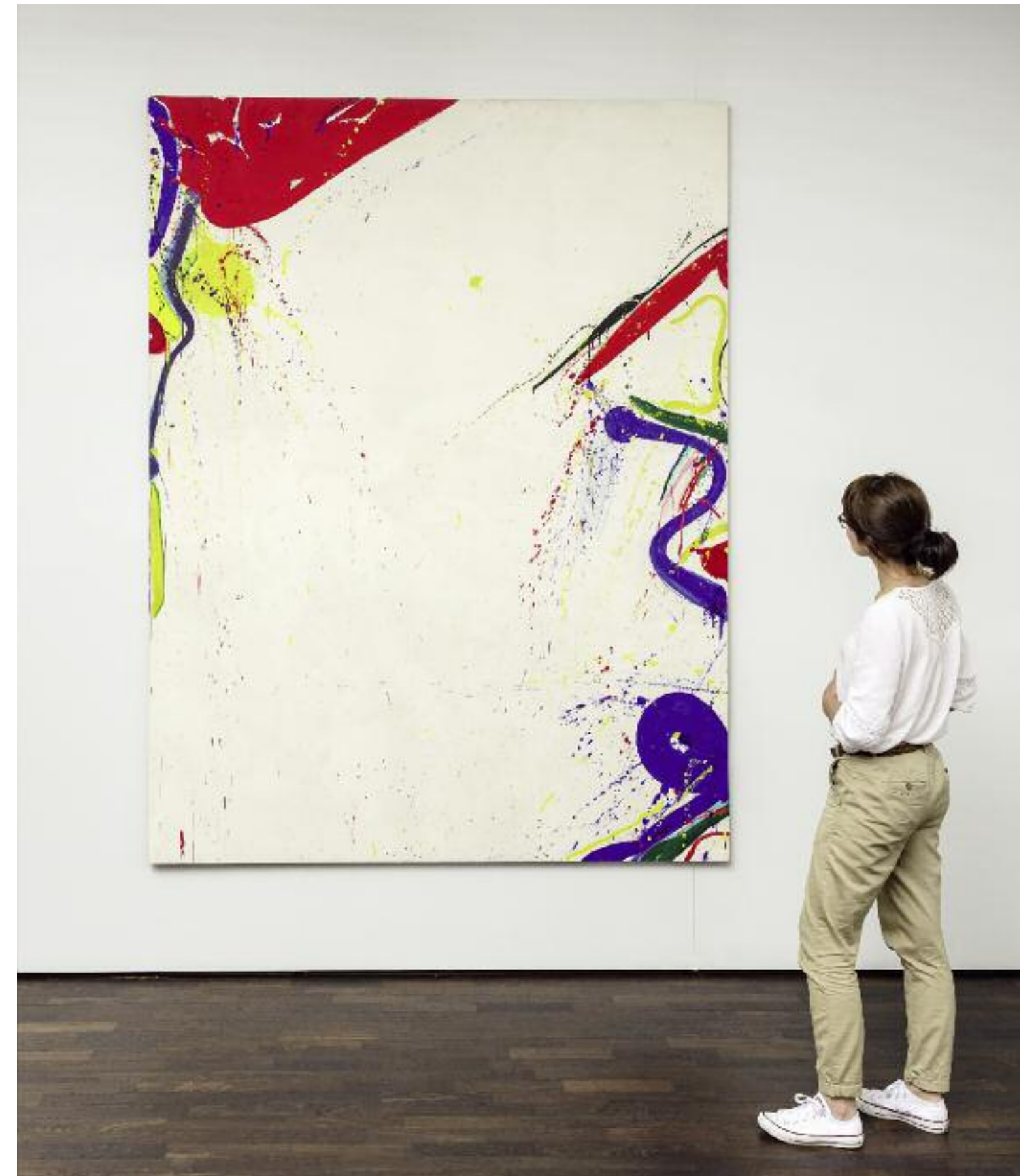
Selz, Peter. Sam Francis. New York 1975 (revised edition 1982). P. 90-91, ill. pl. 42.

Lyotard, Jean Francois. Lessons of Darkness ... Like the Paintings of a Blind Man. Venice, 1993. Ill.

Galerie National du Jeu du Paume. Sam Francis: Les années parisiennes 1950-1961. Paris, 1995. Ill. p. 199.

Burchett-Lere, Debra. Sam Francis, Catalogue Raisonné of Canvas and Panel Paintings, 1946-1994.

Berkeley 2011. No. SFF.392, CD with col. ill.



WHEN WHITE 1963-1964

SAM FRANCIS

"*When White* is one of Francis' most beautiful paintings, this blinding light, quivering with tension and potentiality, expansive veil beating against the wind, pushing the biomorphic forms back to the perimeter, this red triangle to the left, beating naked heart, and this blue snake, aggressive, libidinal." Herman Parret¹

Sam Francis accomplished this large painting in 1964, the same year that the renowned American art critic Clement Greenberg coined the term 'post-painterly abstraction' for an exhibition he curated at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.² He sought to find an expression for his observation that recent tendencies in Abstract Expressionism indicated a shift toward a freer use of color, larger unpainted areas, and a more one-dimensional approach to surfaces, which he called 'flatness'. Along with Sam Francis, the exhibition included artists such as Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis, and Kenneth Noland.

Ultimately, this freer mode of painting, characterized by non-hierarchical composition, gestural painting, and spontaneity, is an echo of earlier informal styles of painting, especially in Europe, and so it is not surprising that in 1970 the term 'lyrical abstraction', based on the French 'abstraction lyrique', was coined and came into use.³

While in Sam Francis's paintings from the 1950s the canvases were often nearly completely covered with almost hazy fields of color – which gave them the

name 'cloud paintings'⁴ – the sky played an increasingly important role in the second half of the decade. The white areas grew larger and came to occupy ever more space in his paintings, and at first the viewer is confronted with a puzzle in which it is unclear whether the white areas overpower the colors or the colored areas are about to penetrate into the white.

When White, which was painted shortly before the mid-1960s, shows the extensive development that this approach from the late 1950s underwent and which culminated in the Edge Paintings beginning around 1965, with a radical climax starting in 1967: the canvas is left almost completely white, and only on the outermost edges do narrow bands of color remain. With the growth of the central white area and the spread of the paint beyond the edge of the canvas, the paintings also increased in size. Even though *When White* is not a small painting, in these years Francis enlarged his pictorial spaces to monumental proportions.

The color fields condensed again beginning in the early 1970s to form grid structures, which in some works have an almost geometrically organized appearance. Sam Francis's paintings became solidified color fields, and only in the 1980s did he return to these colored areas and reveal the background – that is, the light and white areas.

Perhaps the formulation that Sam Francis found for *When White* and that dominates his works from this period can be understood as the most characteristic

¹ Quoted from Herman Parret (ed.), Jean-François Lyotard, Sam Francis, Lessons of Darkness, 'like the paintings of a blind man'. Leuven 2010, p. 25.

² Greenberg, Clement. Post-Painterly Abstraction. In: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Art Gallery of Toronto. Post-Painterly Abstraction. Los Angeles 1964, p. 5-8.

³ Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield; Whitney Museum of American Art. Lyrical Abstraction. New York 1970/71.

⁴ Cf. among others Pontus Hultén, in: Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Sam Francis. Bonn 1993, p. 29.





phase of the artist's work. After all, the large-scale paintings with colors dynamically surrounding a bright, white center, which burst with power and energy in gestural accentuation, mainly concentrating on primary colors, and with impulsive drippings – so much so that they could be interpreted as explicitly erotic⁵ – present an outstanding embodiment of the painter's central artistic ideas.

Two things are particularly influential in Sam Francis's art: not primarily color, as one would think, but light and – inspired by Eastern philosophy, which Francis had an affinity for also due to personal, biographical connections – the idea of the void, empty space. As the origin of all existence and as a center of power, emptiness is at the center of East Asian thought, and not only this theoretical figure exerted an influence on Francis's creative work. In his works, Francis, who lived and worked in Tokyo for many years and was twice married to a Japanese woman, also transforms very practical approaches to Japanese ink drawing, for instance, into gestural abstraction.

This interest in the concept of the empty center is typical of the time and began to fuel postmodern theory in these years. It was not without reason that Jean-François Lyotard, a pioneer of postmodernism, was attracted to Francis's works and published an entire volume of reflections on his oeuvre.⁶ The 'void center' occupied an important place in the reflections of this school of thought up until the 1980s, also including architecture, where it was even literally implemented.

For Sam Francis, however, the metaphysical level of this idea played an important role, and so his paintings from this period are not just a physical 'depiction' or an expressive reaction to it. Rather, they are a lyrical, poetic analogue to the otherwise incomprehensible.⁷

In interaction with the colors, the seemingly empty center is an embodiment of light, the second essential component of the artist's painting. For him, colors are an expression of the relationship between brightness and darkness, and in their interaction the artwork points to a mental meaning, the self becoming conscious between these poles. Unlike many representatives of Abstract Expressionism, who sought to dissolve all meaning behind the picture, Sam Francis belongs to the important faction that wanted painting to express a mental or even spiritual power.

In addition to the empty center as a relatively new symbolic element in Western reception, light is not only an ancient metaphor, but also a core problem of painting. In his own estimation, Sam Francis was equal in every way to the Impressionist Claude Monet, whom he studied intensively since his time in Paris, when he characterized light from this perspective, thus pointing back to the very direct practice of painting: "Los Angeles is the best for me for light in my work. New York light is hard. Paris light is a beautiful cerulean gray. But Los Angeles light is clear and bright even in haze."⁸

Sam Francis with Kusuo Shimizu in his Tokyo studio, mid/end of the 1960s.

⁵ Agee, William C. Sam Francis: Color, Structure, and the Modern Tradition. In: idem (ed.). Sam Francis: Paintings 1947-1990. Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles 1999, p. 9-49, here p. 41.

⁶ Lyotard, Jean-François. Sam Francis, Lessons of Darkness. Venice 1993.

⁷ Waldborg, Michel. Sam Francis, Métaphysique du vide. Paris 1987.

⁸ Quoted in William C. Agee (ed.). Sam Francis: Paintings 1947-1990. Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles 1999, p. 147.



SAM FRANCIS

SAN MATEO 1923 – 1994 SANTA MONICA

THE YEARS 1963 – 64

From the early 1960s, Sam Francis turned his attention back to Los Angeles, after having been active virtually worldwide in the preceding years, with studios in Venice/Los Angeles, New York, Paris, Tokyo and Berne. In 1964, he purchased the house in Santa Monica, which he had been living in since 1962 and had formerly belonged to Charlie Chaplin. In 1965, he began erecting his large studio. Nevertheless, along with other journeys, Francis spent a large part of the year in Japan. Here, he occupied himself with printed graphics, which increasingly interested him, and worked on ceramics and sculptures. In the same year, besides many other exhibitions, Francis took part in documenta III in Kassel, Germany.

Alongside an increased emphasis on printed graphics, 1963 and 1964 also represented an important turning point in the development of Sam Francis's painting. He had already been working more and more on very large, indeed monumental canvases in the preceding years. In these years, he began increasingly organizing the composition of his paintings around a central space, which was to characterize his style until the seventies.

It was also an eventful time in his private life, since he had been handling the separation and divorce from his wife Teruko Yokoi since 1963. In 1964, Francis had met the filmmaker and video artist Mako Idemitsu, whom he eventually married in 1966. Their son, Osamu William, was born in the same year.

Sam Francis in Paris
in the 1950s



ORANGE PERSONAGE C. 1947

ROBERT MOTHERWELL

oil and sand on canvas
c. 1947
139.1 x 94 cm
54 3/4 x 37 in.

Flam/Rogers/Clifford P57

Provenance

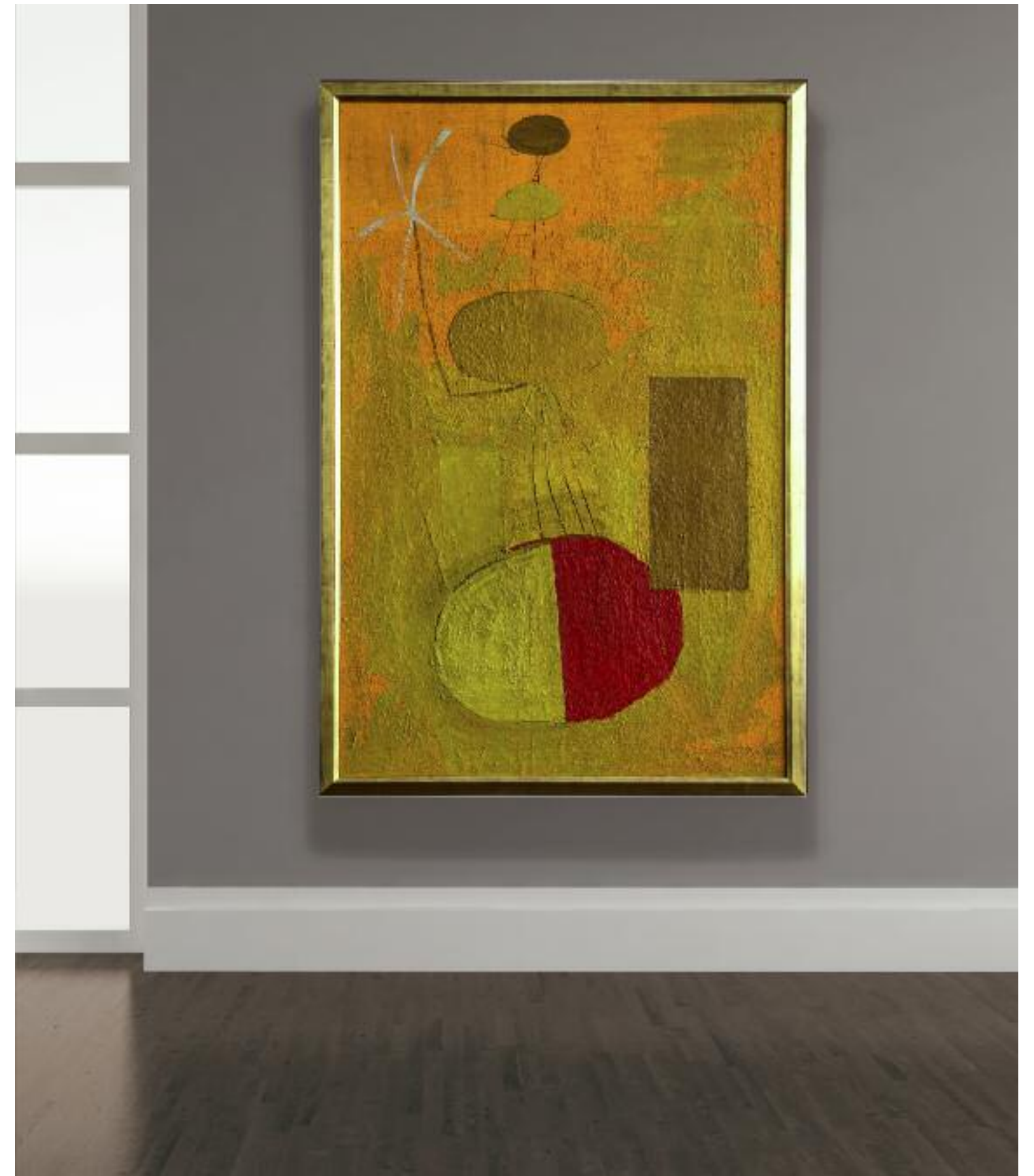
Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, New York (1947)
Vera G. and Albert A. List (c. 1952)
Private collection, Connecticut (2008)
Private collection, New York

Exhibited

Galerie Maeght, Paris, 1947. Introduction à la peinture moderne Americaine.
Kootz Gallery, New York 1951. Male and Female: The Figure in Abstract Art.
University Art Center Gallery, Bloomington, Indiana 1951. Contemporary Painting and Sculpture. No. 17.
University of Minnesota, University Gallery, Minneapolis, Minnesota 1952.
Forty American Painters 1940-1950. No. 50.
Oberlin College, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Ohio, 1952. Paintings by Robert Motherwell. No. 4.
Kootz Gallery, New York 1952. Invitation to South America.

Literature

Preston, Stuart. Art Shows Thrive in Galleries. New York Times, March 9, 1951, p. 23.
Paul, April J. Introduction à la peinture Moderne Americaine: Six Young American Painters of the Samuel Kootz Gallery. Arts Magazine, February, 1986, p. 65-71.
Jack Flam, Katy Rogers, Tim Clifford. Robert Motherwell Paintings and Collages: A Catalogue Raisonné, 1941-1991, Vol. II. New Haven 2012. No. P57 with colour ill. p. 35.



ORANGE PERSONAGE C. 1947

ROBERT MOTHERWELL

"I can't stand cool paintings."
Robert Motherwell¹

In timing and subject matter, the 1947 work *Orange Personage* belongs to a very important period of Robert Motherwell's artistic career. It took shape during his time in the East Hamptons, where Motherwell himself said that he created some of his most important works.² *Orange Personage* belongs to a group of formally closely related works that began with a smaller 1946 oil painting and a 1947 collage, both titled *The Poet*.

In 1943, in response to Peggy Guggenheim's invitation to him and other later proponents of Abstract Expressionism such as Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko to create collages for her Art of This Century gallery in New York, Motherwell began using a technique that would go on to become important in his work. Surely no less significant was the strong presence of Surrealism in the milieu of Peggy Guggenheim, whose activities played a crucial role in the emergence of American Abstract Expressionism influenced by Surrealism.

The collage *The Poet*, with its dominant orange tones and the symbolic figure that echoes the dark-toned *Poet* from 1946 and recalls figurations by Joan Miró, last belonged to Mark Rothko, with whom Motherwell exchanged his collage for a painting, and to this day the work remains in his family's collection.

Motherwell describes the creation of *The Poet* on Long Island in 1947, during a winter week of ice and snow, in the following words: "The orange background, felt all over, asked for an image. As though ice suddenly said, yes I like my material but I want a shape. The figuration arose spontaneously, surprising me, though I had used the shape previously."³

Orange Personage, which was created shortly thereafter, is the most monumental and extensive, most clearly defined work from the group of paintings that deal with the compositional theme found in *The Poet*.

Motherwell varies this new formulation – in a somewhat less determined fashion – in *Poet with Orange* and *Yellow Figure* from the same year. While the line drawing, which reads as a figure, and the dominating orange background remain, Motherwell translates the collage elements of *The Poet* into painting in the subsequent works. Elliptical and rectangular shapes remain, but only in *Orange Personage* does the composition gain a decided firmness that foreshadows his later, completely abstract and less colorful works. The influence of Miró as well as Picasso's abstract stick figures from the 1940s is unmistakable. The surface of the painting in its relief-like quality and roughness, which is not solely due to the impasto painting style, but attempts to achieve a crystalline materiality by mixing the paint with sand – in the tradition of Cubist and Surrealist material experiments – is very close to Miró's notions of 'peinture'.



¹ Quoted from Mary Ann Caws, Robert Motherwell: With Pen and Brush, London 2003, p. 63.

² Quoted from Phyllis Tuchman, Robert Motherwell: The East Hampton Years, 1944-1952, Milan 2014, p. 14.

³ Quoted from Phyllis Tuchman, see note 2, p. 27.



left:
Robert Motherwell
Poet with Orange
1947
Seattle Art Museum



middle:
Robert Motherwell
The Poet
1946
Private collection

right:
Robert Motherwell
The Poet
1947
Collections of Kate and
Christopher Rothko

In the works around the time of *Orange Personage*, Motherwell – who became friends with Fernand Léger and Piet Mondrian during his time in Paris in the 1930s, and who later, through the exiled European artists, engaged in intensive exchanges with Surrealist painters such as Max Ernst, Wolfgang Paalen, and Roberto Matta – was in the process of translating Surrealism and Constructivism into the lyrical language of a new, abstract painting that he sought to achieve. With *Orange Personage*, the viewer is presented with the beginning of American Abstract Expressionism.

The *Orange Personage* is also an evocation of the poet, although it cannot be said with certainty which poet Motherwell was referring to. Already in 1944, with *Mallarmé's Swan*, now at the Cleveland Museum of Art, Motherwell paid tribute to one of his poetic lodestars, Stéphane Mallarmé. But he might also have had in mind Charles Baudelaire, whose portrait photo hung on the wall of Motherwell's studio for a time.⁴ These literary references can be found in many ways in Motherwell's work, including in a 1948 painting with the typical figurative structures of those years, whose title *The Homely Protestant* Motherwell found by placing his finger on a random spot in James Joyce's 'Finnegan's Wake'.⁵ In the same year of 1948, Motherwell began working on his *Elegies to the Spanish Republic*, spanning over 170 works and four decades, which was based on a poem by Federico Garcia Lorca

and went on to become iconic in his oeuvre. The foundation for this work was laid by paintings from 1947 such as *Orange Personage*. Ultimately, however, from the beginning Motherwell was mainly interested in the position of the poet, the lyrical perception of the world, whose quintessence he paraphrased in his texts, and which he sought to express in his painting. Motherwell himself formulated this impressively in his 1951 article 'What Abstract Art Means to Me': "Nothing as drastic an innovation as abstract art could have come to existence, save as consequence of a most profound, relentless, unquenchable need. The need is for felt experience – intense, immediate, direct, subtle, unified, warm, vivid, rhythmic."⁶

⁴ On Motherwell's literary references, cf. among others Mary Ann Caws, see note 1, especially p. 94-102.

⁵ O'Hara, Frank. Robert Motherwell. Exh. cat. Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1965 p. 77.

⁶ Quoted from Frank O'Hara, see note 5, p. 45.





ROBERT MOTHERWELL

ABERDEEN (USA) 1915 – 1991 CAPE COD

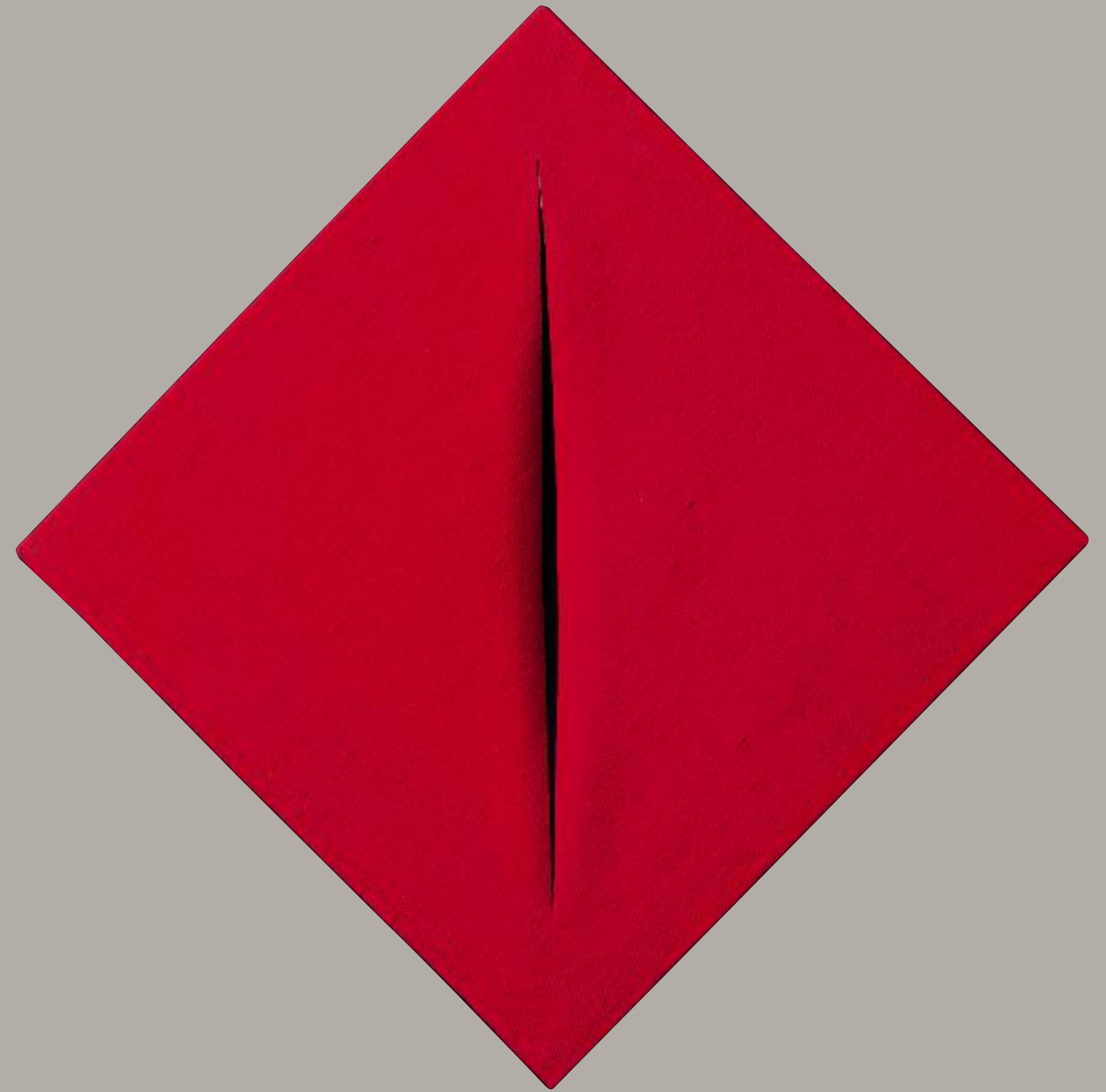
THE YEAR 1947

In 1945 Robert Motherwell began teaching at Black Mountain College, where his students included Cy Twombly, Kenneth Noland and Robert Rauschenberg. At the time, he was already very active not only as an artist, but also as an author and editor, in particular of 'Documents of Modern Art', where texts by Mondrian and Moholy-Nagy, among others, were published. As an artist as well, in 1947 Motherwell had already had exhibitions in museums and galleries, and one of his works had been purchased by the Museum of Modern Art. His network of young American and exiled European artists such as Max Ernst and Lyonel Feininger was far-reaching. He lived in a New York apartment with his first wife Maria, but also rented a house in East Hampton in 1944. He would stay there until 1948. In 1946 he bought a plot of land there and had a house built by the architect Pierre Chareau, whom he had met a few years earlier through none other than the writer Anaïs Nin. The modern architecture of the house attracted a great deal of attention and was featured in an article in 'Harper's Bazaar', but resulted in major financial problems for Motherwell due cost overruns. Although Motherwell was forced to rent out the house and later sell it and move back to New York, the time in East Hampton – where Leo Castelli was his neighbor, among others – was a highly productive period with major developments.

It was an eventful time for Motherwell in every regard: in 1948 he began teaching at 'The Subjects of the Artist' school, which was founded by Motherwell, along with Rothko, Bazziotes and Hare. That same year he created the first versions of his famous series of *Elegies to the Spanish Republic*, and the following year he divorced Maria and met his second wife Betty. This bubbling time of upheaval culminated in the 1951 exhibition 'Seventeen Modern American Painters' at Frank Perls Gallery, for which Robert Motherwell wrote the introductory text 'The School of New York'.

At the latest with this event, American Abstract Expressionism was born and given a first name, not least due to Robert Motherwell's important theoretical and artistic contributions since the mid-1940s.

Robert Motherwell in his studio in East Hampton, 1946



CONCETTO SPAZIALE, ATTESA 1964

LUCIO FONTANA

waterpaint on canvas
1964
58 x 58 cm
22 ⁷/₈ x 22 ⁷/₈ in.
(side length each 16 ¹/₈ in.)
verso signed, titled
and inscribed
'è venuto a trovarmi Adriana'

Provenance
Galleria Schubert, Milan
Private collection, Milan
Collezione Pacchiarini, Florence
Private collection, London

Literature

Crispoliti, Enrico. Fontana. Catalogo generale. Milan 1986. Vol. II, p. 538, ill.
Crispoliti, Enrico. Lucio Fontana. Catalogo ragionato di sculture, dipinti, ambientazioni. Milan 2006.
Vol. II, no. 64, T. 117, p. 724, ill.

With a photo certificate
of the Archivio Lucio Fontana,
issued in Milan on
February 20, 1974.
The work is registered at the
Fondazione Lucio Fontana
under the number 1571/1.



CONCETTO SPAZIALE, ATTESA 1964

LUCIO FONTANA

"You can say whatever you like about the holes, but a new direction in art will emerge, purified, from them – that's what Giotto told me in Padua, and Donatello confirmed it to me."

Lucio Fontana¹

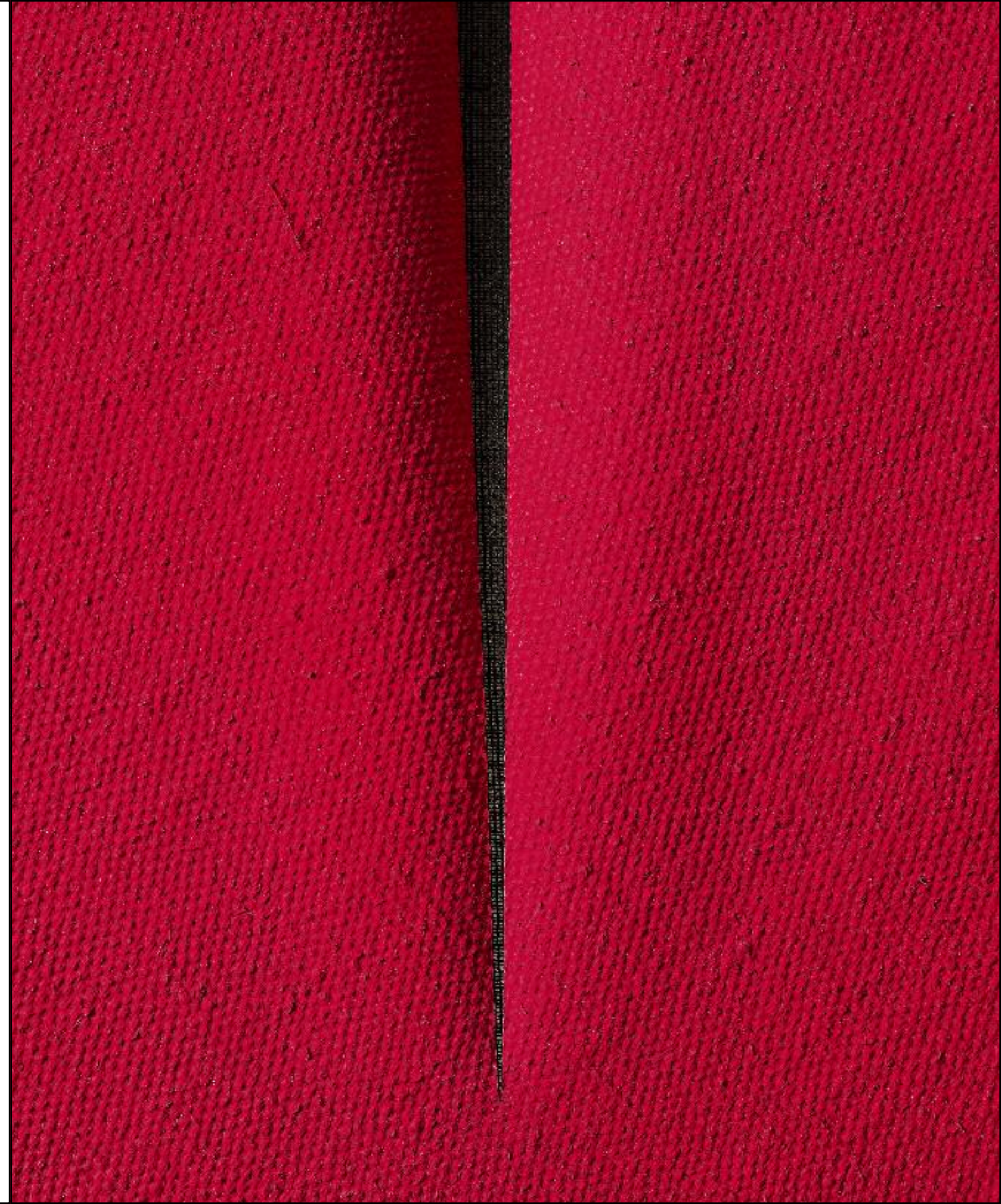
Between 1958 and 1968 Fontana created the group of works in his studio in Milan that were known as *Concetti Spaziali*, *Attese*, which he himself described as *tagli* (slashes) and which were the logical consequence of the perforations and holes (*buchi*) in previous sculptures, ceramics and on canvas. The catalogue of works lists 143 such *tagli*, mostly in portrait and landscape formats and also as irregular multi-page pictorial fields, but only a very few canvases that are positioned on one corner. Through their precision, aesthetic presence and uniqueness, they became the characteristic creations that shaped the image of Fontana's work. And while Fontana created a significant number in many variations, these slashed canvases are the apotheosis and the logical climax, and yet only one part, of his artistic work.

Originally a sculptor who had worked figurally for a long time, Fontana had begun to develop his increasingly abstract compositions under the influence of the group 'Abstraction – Création' in the 1930s. Also through the influence of Futurism, Fontana further developed his artistic questions regarding space and dynamics from sculpture, which he incorporated into the 'White Manifesto' that he initiated in 1946.

Initially, he created works on paper, but then also on canvases, which he perforated, thus opening up a three-dimensional space. Starting from this time, he entitled all his works *Concetti Spaziali* – spatial concepts. The physical penetration of what originally was two-dimensional, and the illusionary picture surface in the figural representation destroyed irrevocably not only this representational space limited by the edges of the picture field, but also the pictorial function of the representation, imitation or illusion. The space in the picture thus became real; the pictorial space itself beyond the picture surface became unlimited. Fontana transferred this concept to sculpture and three-dimensional objects, to which he added hollows and holes (*buchi*) – in this way Fontana also conflated the classical genre boundaries between the artistic techniques.

Under the impact of Yves Klein's and Piero Manzoni's pictures, Fontana achieved the radical simplification and monochrome severity of his *tagli*. He thus achieved the greatest possible strictness of the concept of space without images, which he varied and dynamized in different ways only through the consistently monochrome colouring of the canvas, which was at first only primed, the orientation of the canvas and the slashes and their direction. Thus, Fontana's work draws a direct line from Futurism and Constructivism to Concrete Art, and to ZERO, even to Arte Povera. Fontana formulated his artistic intention, the basic conceptual idea, as follows:

"From the beginning, in 1946, I did not call my work painting, but 'spatial concept'. For I believe



¹ Quoted from Barbara Hess, Fontana, 1899-1968, Ein neues Faktum in der Skulptur, Cologne 2006, p. 8.

Lucio Fontana
in his studio in Milan
1964

painting has to do with ideas and concepts. The canvas served, and still serves today, to capture an idea. The things I am doing right now are only variations of my two basic concepts: holes and incisions. At a time when people were talking about planes – the surface plane, the depth plane, etc. – it was a radical gesture to make a hole that broke through the pictorial surface of the canvas, as if to say, from now on we are free to do whatever we want. The surface cannot be limited by the edges of the canvas, it expands into the surrounding space.”²

For the tagli, Fontana added the term attesa (if there is one slash in the canvas) or attese (if there are two or more slashes in the canvas) to the work titles of the Concetti spaziali. The meaning of the word attesa is ambivalent: actually ‘waiting’, but also ‘expectation’ in all possible variations of the meaning; ‘hope’ and ‘anticipation’ also belong to the semantic field of the word. Fontana uses it to sum up the temporal and spatial aspect of his work as well as the reference to the infinitely expanding picture field. Of course, it also reinforces associations such as that of a curtain opening, or the inkling of what lies behind the slashed canvas. But Fontana also blurs the clarity as to whether the viewer is currently regarding the front or the back of the picture – actually, as Fontana understands it, the former is himself fully ‘in the picture’.

Regarding the actual title Concetto spaziale – Attesa, Fontana often added laconic, sometimes ironic or witty inscriptions on the back of the canvas. Mostly they are journal-style, biographical remarks (“Yesterday I returned from Venice. I saw the film by Antonioni!!!”) or short aphorisms (“Those who sleep don’t catch any fish”). In his 1964 painting, Fontana records, as he frequently did, a visit: “è venuto a trovarmi Adriana” – (“Adriana came to see me”).³ It cannot be said with certainty who this refers to – possibly it was Adriana Cavaliere, the wife of the sculptor Alik Cavaliere, with whom Fontana had some contact in Milan.

For Fontana, these short statements, which replaced his previous random numbering, were not only a means of individualizing each work, but also a kind of protection against forgery and copying.

The fact that Fontana positions the square canvas on one corner, together with the signal red basic colour, considerably increases the dynamics of the spatial slash and reinforces the space-time axis, which Fontana always thematizes in his Concetti spaziali. The square placed on a corner (a diamond, not an elongated rhombus) has been a typical and widely used architectural ornament or formal element in Italian architecture since the Middle Ages and evokes a history of form that goes back to influences of Arab culture in southern Italy.

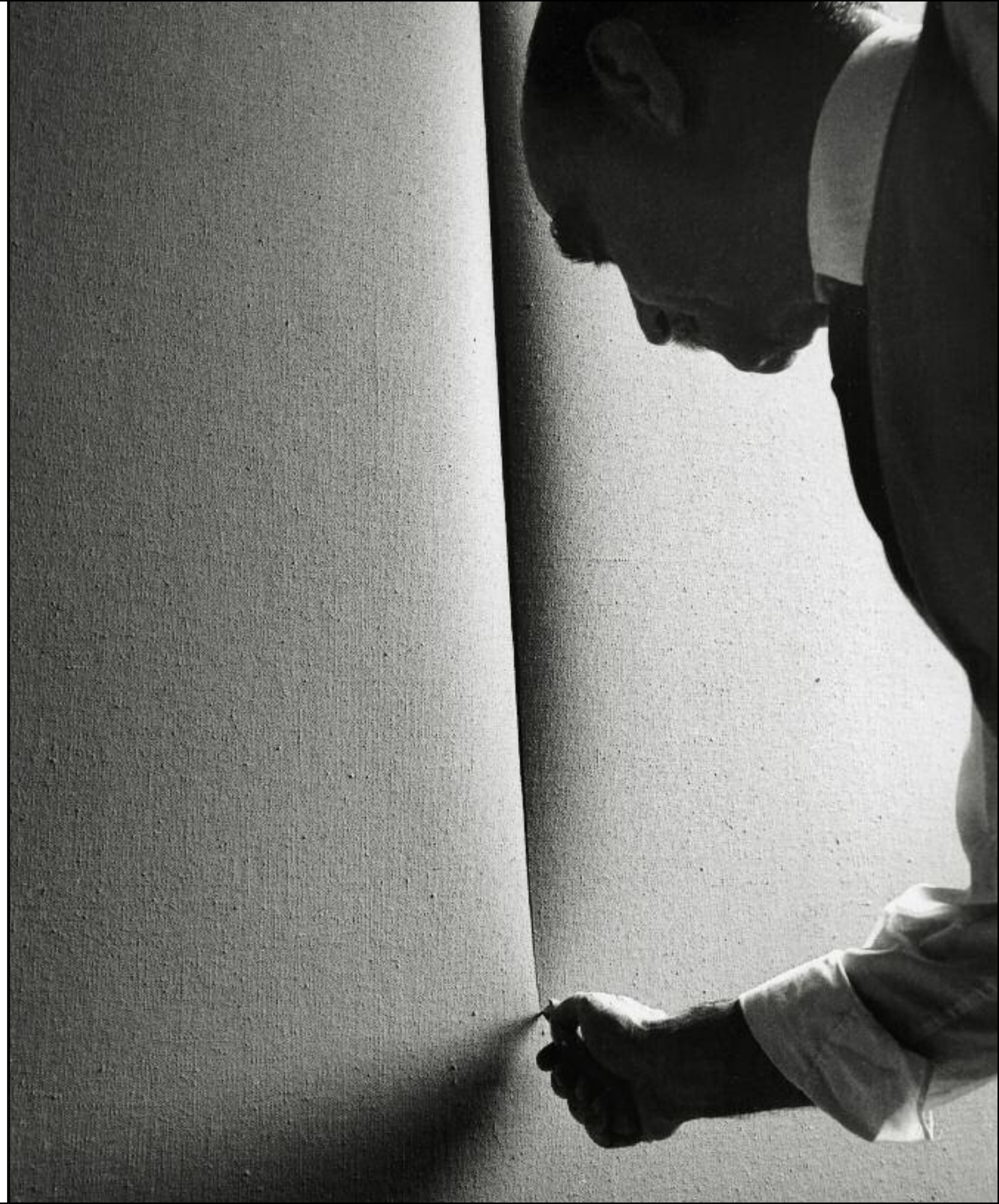
The various interpretations of the tagli, – of Fontana’s incisions in the canvas – range from a physical-sensory interpretation as wounding, the association with the female sex or a metaphor for space travel, which fascinated Fontana, who saw himself as a spatial artist, because of the sensually perceptible infinity of space. Reality is more banal, more concrete and more intelligent. In this context, it is amusing and ironic that of all people, Fontana’s gesture, which destroys the work of art’s imagery and links to a reference, as well as its pictorial and painterly quality, has in the end been given such an abundance of iconographic and symbolic interpretations. However, this does not reflect a deeper understanding of the works of art, but merely the conventional need of the interpreters for textual legibility. Lucio Fontana himself has made this very clear:

“When I work as a painter on one of my perforated pictures, I have no intention of making a painting: I want to open a space, create a new dimension of art and enter into a relationship with the cosmos that extends beyond the limited surface of the painting into infinity.”⁴

² In conversation with Daniela Palazzoli. In: Bit Nr. 5, Milan 1967.

³ Cf. regarding this and Fontana’s tagli in general: Lüthy, Michael. Fontanas Schnitte. In: Kapustka, Mateusz (Ed.). Bild-Riss, Textile Öffnungen im ästhetischen Diskurs. Berlin 2015, pp. 25-38.

⁴ Quoted from Barbara Hess, as in Footnote 1.





LUCIO FONTANA

ROSARIO DI SANTA FÉ, ARGENTINA 1899 – 1968 COMABBIO, VARESE

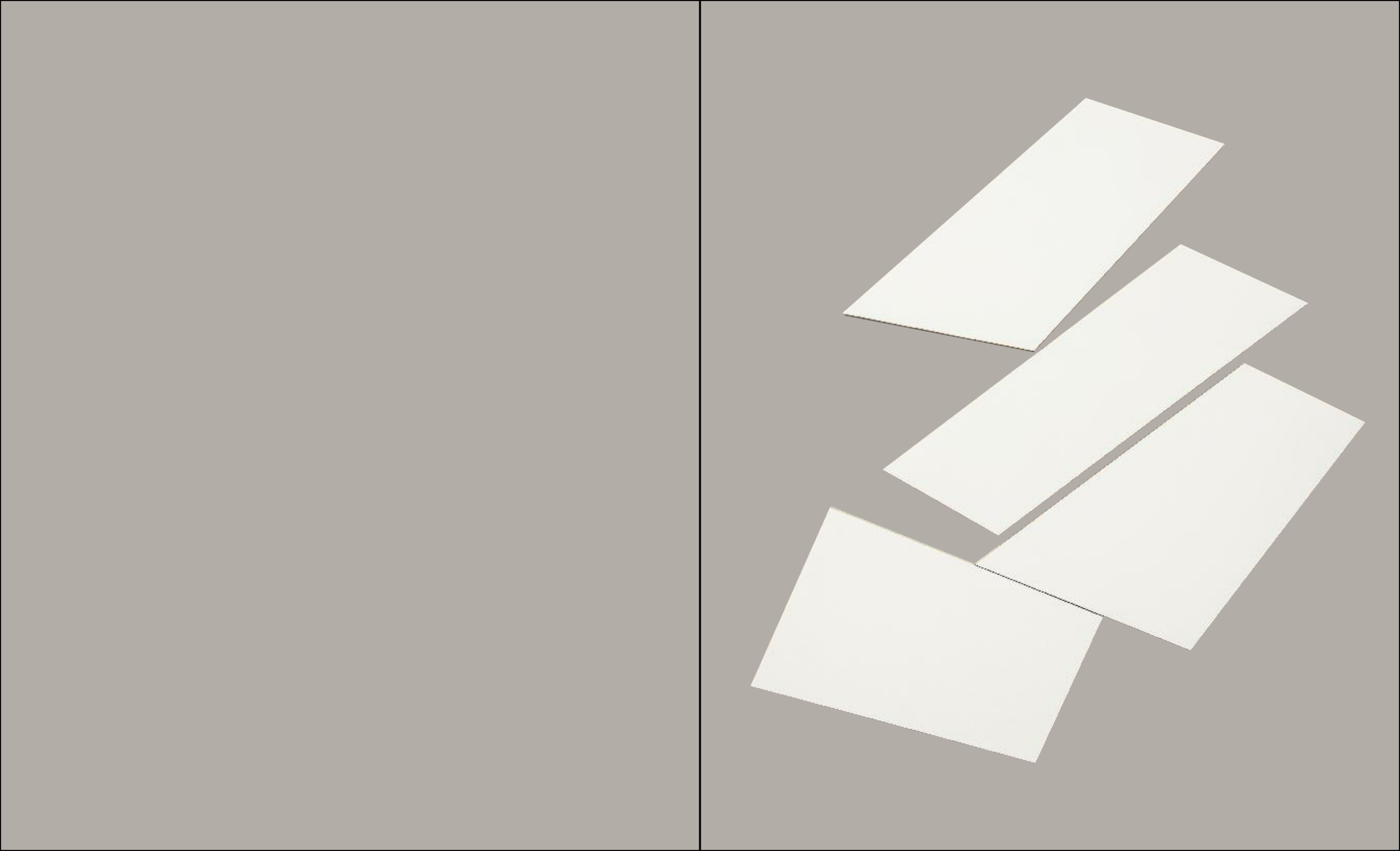
THE YEAR 1964

Since 1952, Lucio Fontana had been working in his studio on Corso Monforte in Milan, where he developed the formative artistic formulations of his *Concetti spaziali* complex of works leading to the 'tagli', the 'slashed canvases'.

In the early 1960s, Fontana continued to experiment with incisions, tears and perforations in various materials. While he further developed the 'Attese' through variations of canvas sizes and shapes, background colours and of the numbers of slashes, creating his own cosmos in the true meaning of the word, his spatial concepts led him to works in metal and, finally, between 1963 and 1964, to a series entitled *Fine di Dio*. In a quintessence of his own theoretical and aesthetic concepts, this group of works consists of oval, almost ovoid pictorial fields with various primary colours, into which Fontana introduces holes and irregular lacerations to the surface.

The apotheosis of his artistic work in the context of the 'Concetti spaziali' is undoubtedly the oval space created by Fontana in cooperation with the architect Carlo Scarpa in 1966 for the Venice Biennale. The completely white room was divided like a labyrinth by means of differently aligned, slightly U-shaped walls, in each of which an 'Attesa' could be seen. The combination of painting, architecture and installation won an award at the Biennale and aroused enormous interest.

Lucio Fontana
in Milan 1952



WEISSE KONSTELLATION G 1975/87

IMI KNOEBEL

acrylic on fibreboard,
on wood
1975/87
321 x 306 cm
126 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 120 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.
4 pieces
verso signed with monogram
and dated '75 87'

Provenance
Studio of the artist
Private collection, Munich

Exhibited
Haus der Kunst. Imi Knoebel. Retrospektive 1968-1996. Munich 1996.



WEISSE KONSTELLATION G 1975/87

IMI KNOEBEL

"In my work, I always return to the beginnings, still to this day, and join everything together."
Imi Knoebel¹

A master student in the class of Joseph Beuys and formally close to the currents of Minimalism and the ZERO movement, Imi Knoebel was strongly influenced in his artistic work especially by the Russian Constructivists with their star artist Kazimir Malevich. Knoebel himself has pointed out the impact – indeed sensation – that artists like Malevich and Fontana had on him and his fellow students at the Düsseldorf Art Academy. From the very beginning, Knoebel was concerned with the essence, the composition of images and less with statements of content that could be transported by images. The severity, indeed, formalism, with which Knoebel carried out his explorations and artistic questioning of the picture, initially only permitted him to use black, white and the colour of his materials – wood and chipboard. Knoebel did not begin using colour until the early 1970s, under the powerful influence of his artistic companion and friend Blinky Palermo.

After the white pictures of the late 1960s, Knoebel experimented between 1970 and 1972 with light projections which could place the white image field – as a rectangle or as a cross – immaterially into the space. The aim was to dematerialize the image as far as possible in order to discover its quintessence. Imi Knoebel put it like this:

"The white was already too much! That's why the light was added. The white was too much, the

material was too much, even the light was too much. Then I tried to paint the rectangle or the square on the white wall and, in the end, all I did was write up the dimensions."²

The distortion in perspective of the light projections transformed the right-angled quadrilaterals into shapes that Knoebel associated with 'kites' and from which the rectangular images with distorted perspective and, ultimately, the constellations of several shapes of this kind emerged in 1971.

In his first major solo exhibition at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf in 1975, Knoebel hung a rectangle obliquely for the first time.³ The duplicate dating of these works originated in this way: 1975 as the decisive year for the origin of their design, and as the second date, the year of the actual physical production of the work, in this case 1987. Knoebel also maintains this principle, for example, in the case of the so-called Mennigebilder (Red Lead Pictures), which virtually push the individual panels of the constellations over each other, thus creating a polygonal 'shaped canvas', which has the outline of several imaginary rectangles lying on top of one another, each of which no longer possesses an individual surface for itself.

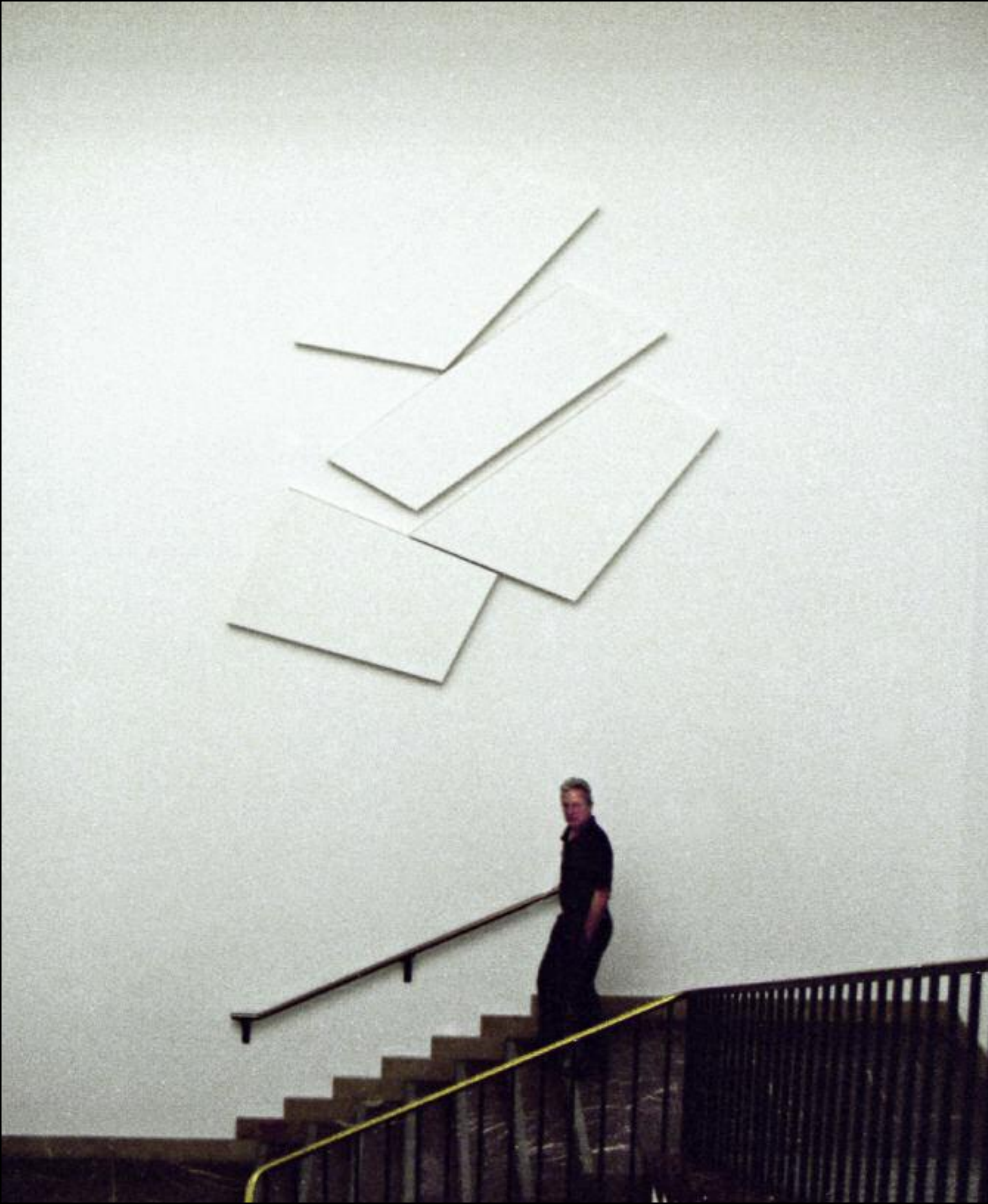
The box-like depth of the wooden frames that carry the white surface, of which the materiality becomes visible on the sides, lends the individual panels of the constellations a solidity that allows the entire work to no longer appear only pictorial, but

¹ Quoted from Hütte, Friedhelm (Ed.). Imi Knoebel: ICH NICHT, Neue Werke / ENDUROS, Sammlung Deutsche Bank, Ostfildern 2009, p. 139.

² Quoted from Exhib. Cat. Kat. Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg. Imi Knoebel, Werke 1966-2014. Bielefeld 2014, p. 50.

³ Cf. Pictorial essay by Carmen Knoebel with drawings by Johannes Stüttgen, in: Exhib. Cat. Haus der Kunst Munich. Imi Knoebel Retrospektive 1968-1996. Ostfildern 1996, p. 25.





object-like. Knoebel thus creates an even more complex network of real and virtual references to space, for in addition to this realistic object-like quality and the position of the individual elements in relation to one another, there are further spatial illusions that must be visualised. In fact, they are not even illusions, but real possibilities which are present in the perception of the viewer.

On the one hand, the constellation generates dynamics that fan out the image fields in space and suggest movement, velocity. On the other hand, the surfaces can be seen as distortions of perspective, so that they extend optically into the depth as right-angled quadrilaterals. Finally, this optical effect can be further heightened when a three-dimensional space is visualised on this surface area, that is if virtual walls are imagined rising vertical to the boundaries of the rectangular surface, thus creating a cuboid.

Knoebel thus explores intensively the spatial references and virtual spatial and dynamic possibilities of the image on the wall, which is no longer purely planar, that are attributed to it by the imagination and perceptions of the viewer. Ultimately, it is a completely different kind of naturalistic, representational painting that leads to the root of what a 'picture' really is.

Knoebel's close relationship to Malevich's painting, which is expressed in numerous references in form and title, extending to entire exhibitions that revolve around the Russian Constructivists, does not, however, adopt the latter's theoretical superstructure of Suprematism. Knoebel concentrates entirely on the question of pictorial composition and spatial reference, without ever entering a metaphysical level of pictorial meaning or pictorial reference. At first glance this may seem surprising, the more so in a student of Joseph Beuys, but on the other hand, it shows that Knoebel was moving in great artistic kinship with Concrete Art and Minimalism.

Imi Knoebel with
Weisse Konstellation G
at Haus der Kunst,
Munich 1996



IMI KNOEBEL

DESSAU 1940 – LIVES IN DÜSSELDORF

THE YEAR 1975

1975 was an extremely significant year for Imi Knoebel's artistic development, because for the first time he began to hang rectangles and constellations of rectangles at an oblique angle, thus expanding his spatial vocabulary as consistently as he did radically. In addition, under the not inconsiderable influence of Blinky Palermo, colour began to permeate his works, which enormously increased the radius of his pictorial explorations. This so important year had been preceded by a year of crucial experiences in his personal life; in 1974 Imi Knoebel married Carmen Drawe and became the father of a daughter.

Only a short time later, Knoebel's close companion and friend Imi Giese committed suicide, so that these three events alone brought profound changes to his life that preceded the artistic developments. 1975 was also the year of Imi Knoebel's first institutional solo exhibition at the Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf.

Imi Knoebel 1977



WHITE CELL WITH CONDUIT 1986

PETER HALLEY

Acrylic, flashe
and roll-a-tex on canvas,

3 pieces

1986

147 x 284 cm

58 x 112 in.

Jordan PHP 86-25

Provenance

Studio of the artist

Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris (1986)

The Saatchi Collection, London

Gagosian Gallery, New York

Private Collection, Switzerland

McClain Gallery, Houston

Private Collection, USA

Exhibited

The Broad Art Foundation. Los Angeles 1993.

Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art. Japan 1998.

Museum für Gegenwartskunst. Flashback. Eine Revision der Kunst der 80er Jahre. Basel 2005-2006.

Literature

Cameron, Dan. NY Art Now. The Saatchi Collection. London 1992, p. 107, ill.



WHITE CELL WITH CONDUIT 1986

PETER HALLEY

“Even though my work is geometric in appearance, its meaning is intended as antithetical to that of previous geometric art. Geometric art is usually allied with the various idealisms of Plato, Descartes, and Mies. My work, in fact, is a critique of such idealisms.”
Peter Halley, 1983¹

Peter Halley first came to fame in the mid-1980s with his diagrammatic depictions of geometric ‘cells’ and ‘prisons’ in bold colors and contrasts, as in *White Cell with Conduit*.

Distinctive in their formal appearance, Halley’s works were initially placed in a context of Constructivism, color field painting, and Neo-Geo. This categorization is both correct and incorrect, since Halley’s artistic approach, which he has also accompanied with theoretical writings, was from the outset a clear and intelligent critique of the tradition of geometric and Constructivist painting into which he was first placed.

In his work, Halley explores geometric patterns, colors, and surface structures, as well as their organization, and thus examines the structures of modern technological orders of communication systems, architectures, supply infrastructures, and digital circuit diagrams of computer-controlled processes and the like. The predominance of technical and later digital layouts in frames and layers is visible in all his works.

In his fundamental article ‘The Deployment of the Geometric’ from 1984 – not coincidentally the year and the title of George Orwell’s dystopian science fiction novel – Peter Halley described this condition of the modern world which is the focus of his work as an artist:
“The deployment of the geometric dominates the landscape. Space is divided into discrete, isolated cells, explicitly determined as to extent and function. Cells are reached through complex networks of corridors and roadways that must be traveled at prescribed speeds and at prescribed times. The constant increase in the complexity and scale of these geometries continuously transforms the landscape. Conduits supply various resources to the cells. Electricity, water, gas, communication lines, and, in some cases, even air, are piped in. The conduits are almost always buried underground, away from sight. The great networks of transportation give the illusion of tremendous movement and interaction. But the networks of conduits minimize the need to leave the cells.”²

The elements of Peter Halley’s iconography mentioned in this text, as well as his principles of color composition, were already carried out and formulated in hermetic strictness in *White Cell with Conduit*. The pictorial elements, at first glance nothing more than geometric shapes and color fields, are essentially the cell (rectangular, sharply defined areas), the conduit (narrow strips of color running at right angles that connect the other

¹ Halley, Peter. *Collected Essays*, 1981-87. Venice 1988, p. 25.
² Ibid., p. 128-130.





Peter Halley's studio in New York in the 1990s

elements or, as here, run under or next to them), and prisons (rectangular color fields subdivided with vertical stripes like bars). They are basic elements of a circuit diagram of modern life and its schematic relationships, in which the individuals are integrated – indeed, because they are ‘prisons’ and ‘cells’, trapped. Halley succinctly summarized this condition in the above-mentioned essay: “Along with the geometrization of the landscape, there occurs the geometrization of thought. Specific reality is displaced by the primacy of the model. And the model is in turn imposed on the landscape, further displacing reality in a process of ever more complete circularity.”³

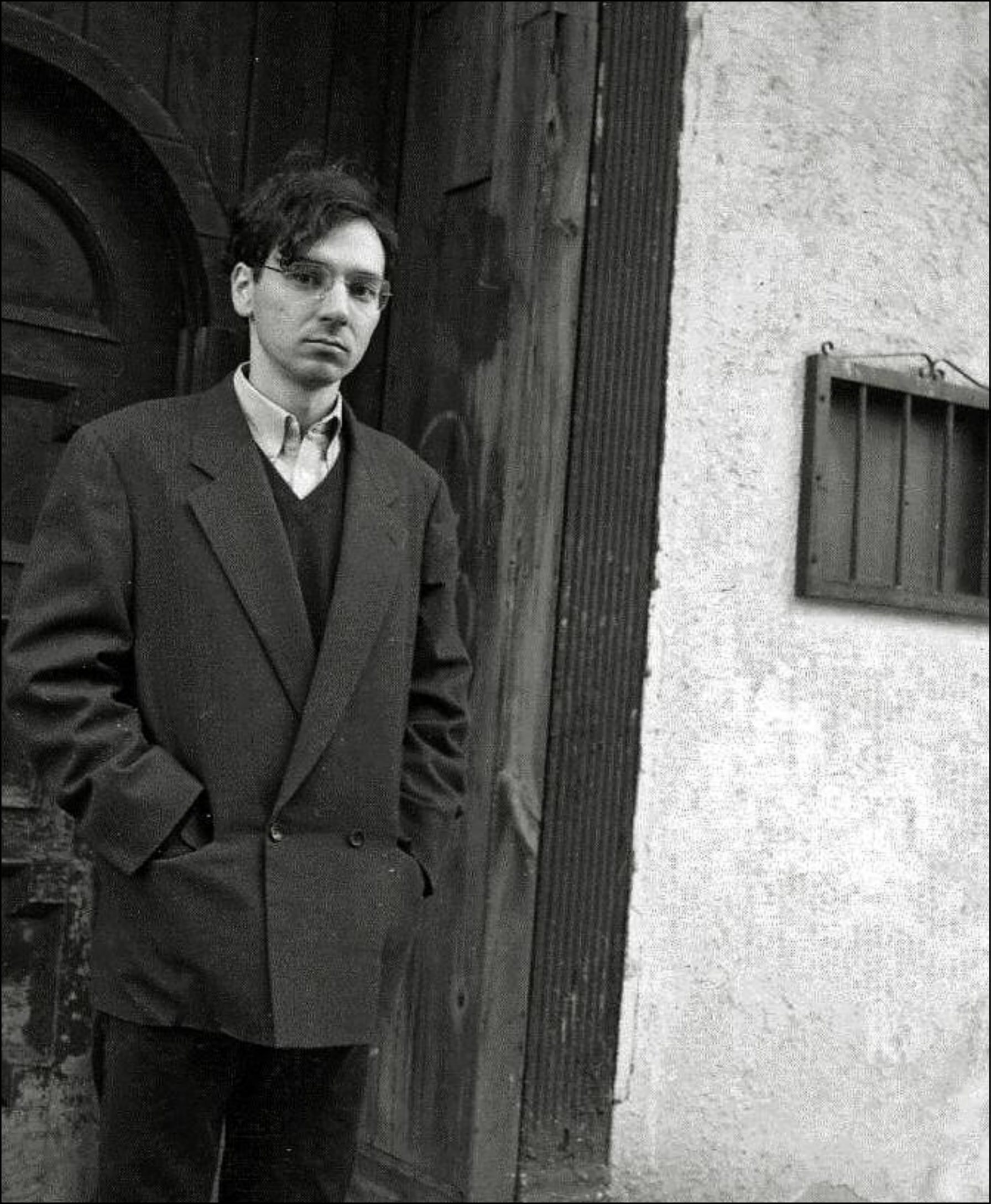
These iconographic elements are augmented with Halley's specific color combinations, including industrial fluorescent ‘Day Glo’ paints from the advertising industry and prefabricated relief-like ‘Roll-A-Tex’ paints that simulate the easy-to-maintain, rough wallpapers found in large apartment blocks. To Halley, both are typical surfaces of the standardized world.

This contrast between the coldness of mathematics and geometry and the warmth of color and sensory perception points to the core of Halley's artistic critique of the limitations imposed by the systematic measurement and subdivision of the world. At the same time, he negotiates one of the oldest aesthetic theories, according to which the sense of beauty is determined by proportions. This is accompanied by Halley's critique of abstract and Constructivist art,

which he exposes as a propaganda of the geometrization of the world due to its assertion of a higher, sublime mathematical order; instead, it is nothing more than the installation of an arbitrary power structure. Halley counters this with his brilliant geometric compositions, which he spectacularly differentiates from abstraction and directly connects with the reality of our environment.

Through the clarity of this simple yet powerful structure, the geometric grid that defines our life – from the supply and communication networks to the honeycomb-like organization of buildings and cities to technological micro-networks of all kinds – is broken up and used for a different, individual design.

³ See note 2.



PETER HALLEY

NEW YORK 1953 – LIVES IN NEW YORK

THE YEAR 1986

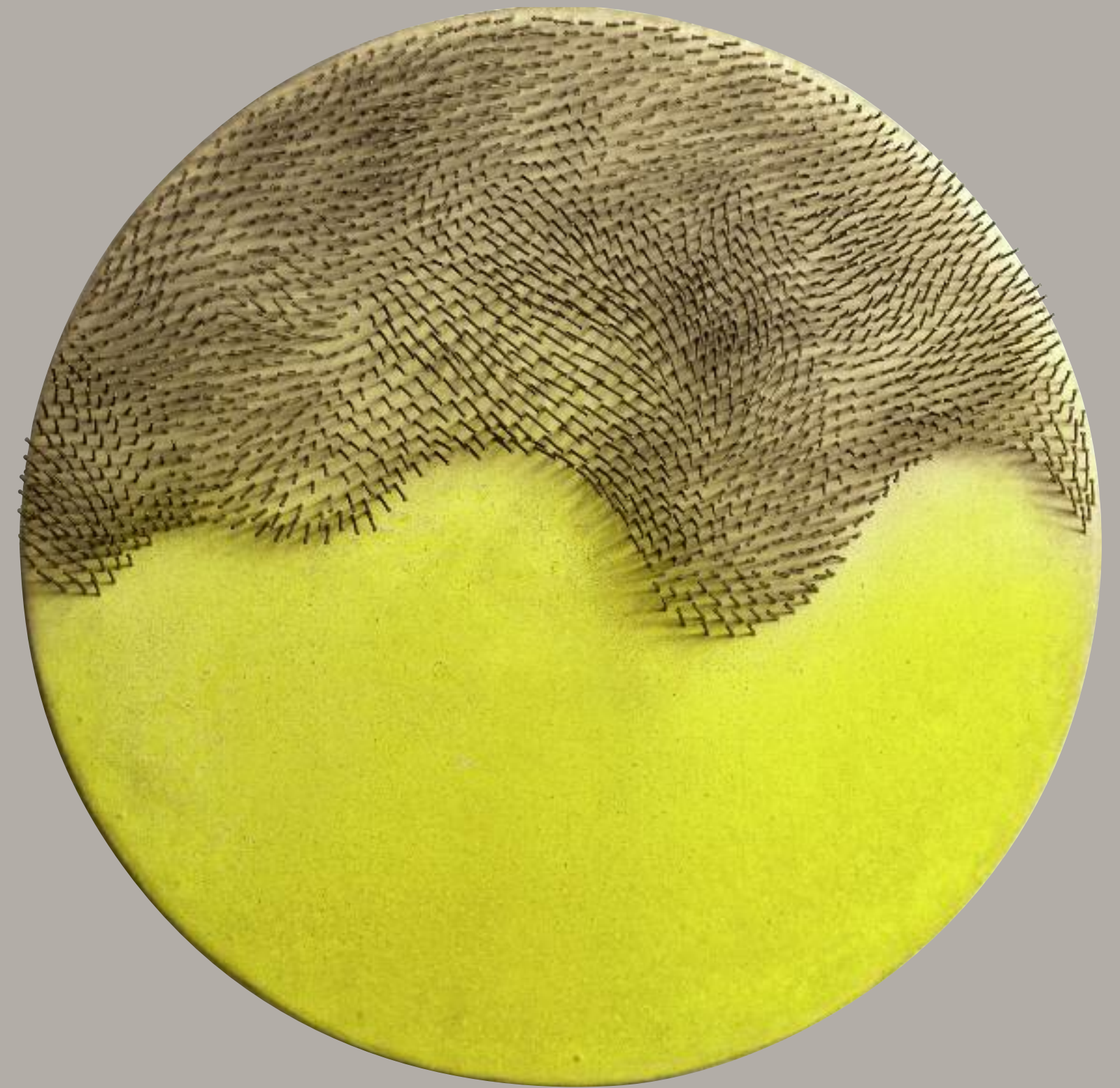
The year 1986 was in many ways a defining time in Peter Halley's artistic career, but it also brought with it personal changes with the move to a new studio in Tribeca and the birth of his daughter.

Through his acquaintance and subsequent friendships with numerous artists, curators, and writers, Halley was an important member of New York's avant-garde during the decade and gained an increasingly international reputation up to the mid-1980s through exhibitions in Europe. In addition, he was a highly regarded theorist and critic. Much of his aesthetic theory, which had a direct impact on the form and iconography of his artworks, took shape before 1986.

In that year, Halley repeatedly exhibited with Meyer Vaisman, Ashley Bickerton, and Jeff Koons and also had personal contact with Frank Stella, about whom he wrote an important essay, and Andy Warhol, among others.

He visited Warhol in 1986 in his studio, who made several portraits of Peter Halley.

Peter Halley in front of his studio at East Village, New York 1981



SONNENÜBERFLUTUNG (TRANSGRESSION) 1963

GÜNTHER UECKER

nails and acrylic
on canvas on wood
1963
diameter 100 cm
diameter 39 3/8 in.
verso signed, dated,
titled and inscribed

Provenance
Studio of the artist
Private collection
Private collection, Germany

Exhibited
4. Biennale Internazionale d'Arte, San Marino 1963. Cat. p. 159, ill.

Honisch 247

Literature
Helms, Dietrich. Günther Uecker. Berlin 1970. p. 44, ill.
Honisch, Dieter. Uecker. Stuttgart 1983. p. 186, no. 247, ill.
(titled 'Transgression', illustrated falsely).



SONNENÜBERFLUTUNG (TRANSGRESSION) 1963

GÜNTHER UECKER

Günther Uecker, born in Mecklenburg in 1930, initially studied in Wismar and Berlin and, finally, after fleeing to the West, at the Kunstakademie (Arts Academy) in Düsseldorf. During his time as a student, he had already come into close contact with the German and French Avant-garde and the artists of what would later be the ZERO movement. In 1957 he met Yves Klein in Düsseldorf; Klein later became Uecker's brother-in-law when he married the latter's sister Rotraut in 1962.

With Heinz Mack and Otto Piene, Uecker was a member of the ZERO group, which had been founded in 1958, from 1961 to 1965. The zenith of this European art movement was the major exhibition dedicated to it at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1962, at which Uecker's work was also prominently represented.

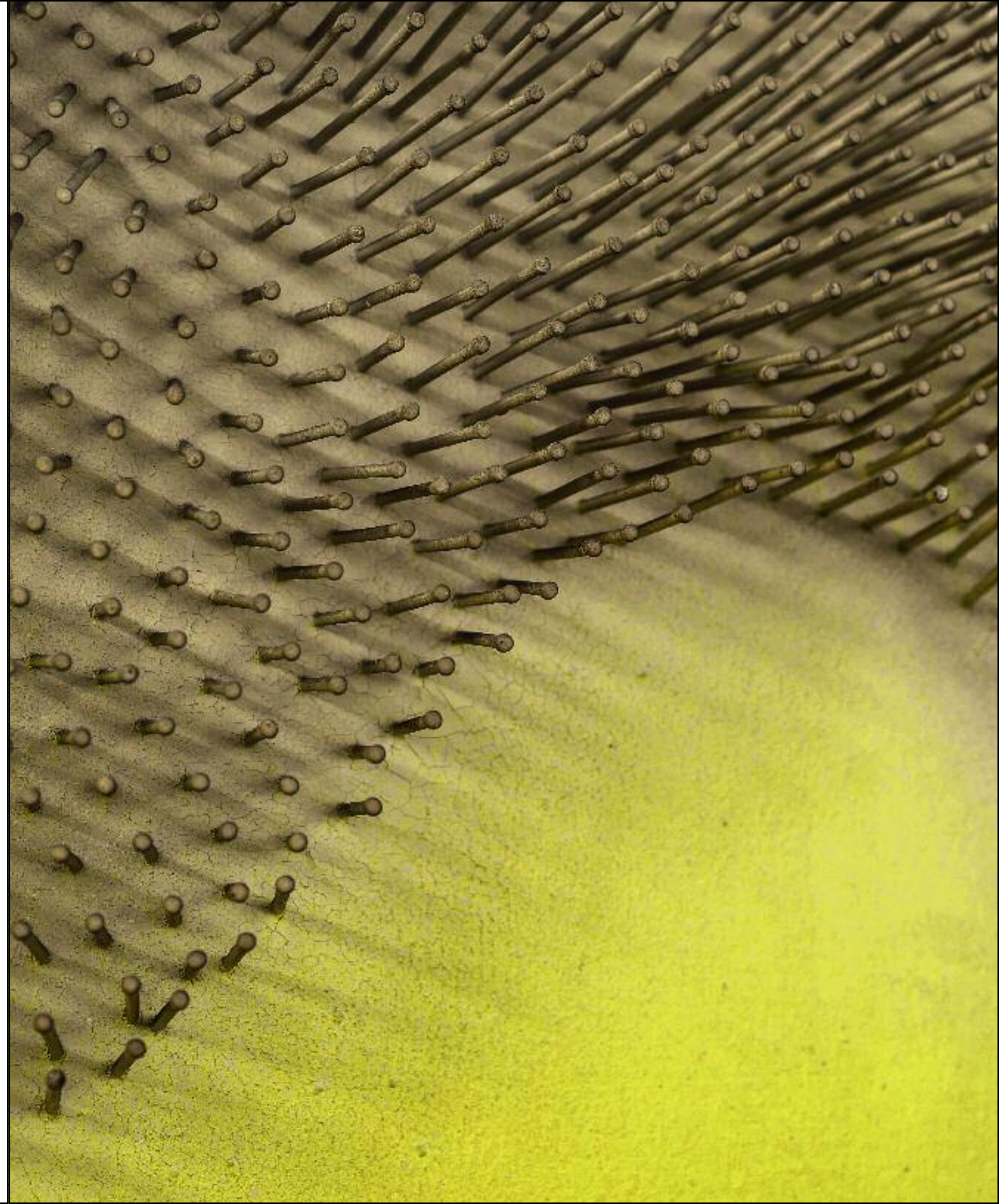
At this time, Uecker had already developed his nail pictures and nailed objects, for which he became famous, from the source in his earlier structured pictures. The possibility this offered for creating a three-dimensional material image that is capable of capturing movement and light even in a panel picture, was especially important to him.

Uecker continued the development of the nail pictures through spirals and organic forms to the 'nailing over' of other objects. Uecker thereby attained an extremely independent transformation of his structured pictures, which were still closely based on the Concrete art of the 1950s, into a unique pictorial language with a strong sensuous element.

The light and the constant changing of the work through the effect of light and the angle of observation are particularly important – in this way Uecker succeeded in integrating into his work movement and time sequence, that is, the kinetic effects that were of such significance to the artists of the ZERO group. Günther Uecker did not restrict himself to a simply purist aesthetic but went beyond that to incorporate a transcendent spiritual level. In a text written in 1961, Uecker formulated it as follows:

"I am thinking of a reality that is presently unfolding and that preserves its eternal value in its dynamics. ... The light will make us fly, and we will see the sky from above. Everything will permeate us, will pass through us just as it passes through Something and Nothing. ... The beauty of light will take on every form we desire and dream of."¹

¹ Quoted from Wieland Schmied. Günther Uecker. Exhib. Cat., Kestner-Gesellschaft Hannover 1972, p. 39.





Günther Uecker with
Das gelbe Bild
of 1957/58,
Düsseldorf 2005

All these elements and ideas are perfectly expressed in the picture *Sonnenüberflutung* from 1963. The structure of the nails, which at first glance appears organic and seems to sweep over the surface of the picture like a breath of wind, opens our view to a higher order that is not actually discernible with the normal senses. The contrast Uecker typically makes between design that requires 'brute force' – the visible disclosure of 'how the picture is made' and the light, poetic, even ephemeral effect is especially vivid in this nail picture. Uecker's ability to transform metal and strength into light and air is evident in this work to a particularly strong degree.

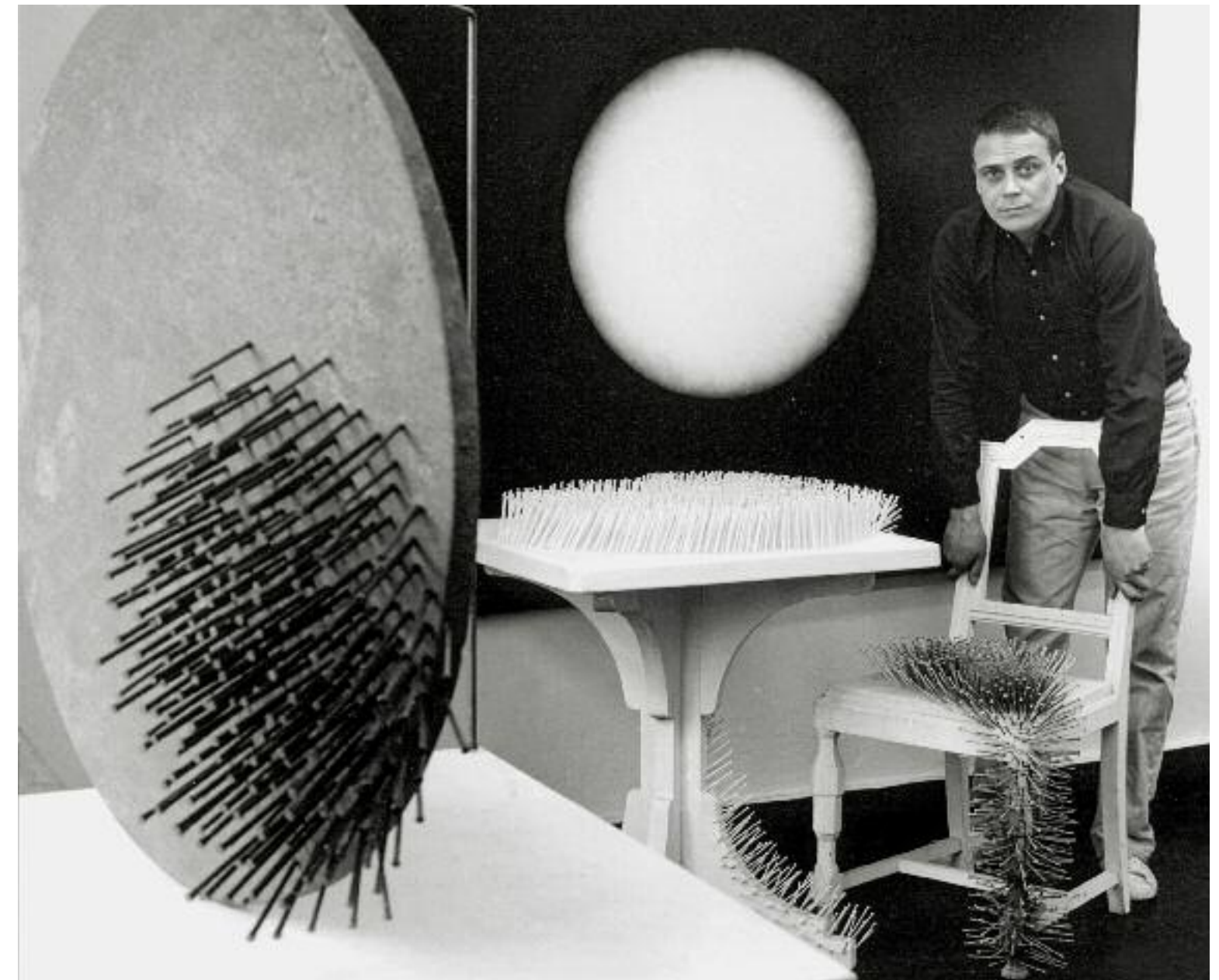
The encroachment of the picture's surface into the room and the perforation of the surface of the picture by the nails for the same purpose are a direct reaction to the work of Lucio Fontana, who is referenced by Uecker in several instances. This act of 'trespass' is addressed by the subtitle of the work – Transgression – and uses this technical term to describe the flooding, in this case by the sun. The theme of flooding is very apparent in Uecker's work in this period: he makes it a central theme in a

performance for a lecture by Bazon Brock at the Galerie d in Frankfurt in September 1963 and in his Flood Manifesto.² Subsequently, Uecker's waves of nails conquer not only the image fields and the circle of the sun in this work, but also three-dimensional objects, such as furniture and pianos. Uecker himself described his approach in a radio interview with Deutschlandfunk on March 11, 2005:

"I had these elaborated pictorial structural fields, which were something like meditative fields of observation, for myself as autotherapy in order to find composure; the thought that these elaborated structures should now suddenly cover furniture and the banal, secularized area of work and life of the population, was at that time an idea, a manifesto of transgression: to flood the world with art, and so I thought: no pictures on the wall, but up on the furniture, on this undying foreman, this atavism of a cultic deed – you don't know what you're doing, yet you still polish the furniture every day – here a nail must be hammered in to create resistance in order to clarify the contemplation of my work – that art can penetrate right into this banality of life."

² 'Sinnflutmanifest – Überflutung der Welt', 1963, cf. Dorothea and Martin van der Koelen (Eds.), Günther Uecker, Opus Liber, Verzeichnis der bibliophilen Bücher und Werke, 1960-2005. Mainz 2007, No. I 6303, pp. 30-31.

³ 'Zero – Der neue Idealismus' was a flyer that Uecker, Mack und Piene had printed for the opening of their exhibition in the Galerie Diogenes in Berlin in 1963. Quoted from: Heiner Stachelhaus. ZERO, Mack, Piene, Uecker. Düsseldorf 1993, p. 49.



Günther Uecker
in Hanover 1965

As metaphors for the sun, both tondi and the colour yellow crop up regularly in Uecker's work from the late 1950s onwards, but apart from *Sonnenüberflutung*, there is only one other round nail picture that also uses the colour yellow. All his other tondi are either white or are in the form of light discs equipped with a kinetic mechanism and illumination. This combination is one of the most direct implementations of the maxims of the ZERO Manifesto published in 1963. There the radically concrete approach of the group is formulated as, 'ZERO is round' and, 'The sun is ZERO'.³

The hermetic content of the ZERO Manifesto and the demand for the 'Flood of Nails' in Ueckers Flood Manifesto find their counterpart in the cosmic symbolism of *Sonnenüberflutung*, which invites the observer by means of the work of art to allow sensuous perception and free association to flow together with the goal of reaching the spiritual freedom that the ZERO artists hoped to attain.



GÜNTHER UECKER

WENDORF 1930 – LIVES IN DÜSSELDORF

THE YEAR 1963

As early as 1961 Günther Uecker had come into fairly close contact with the artists of the ZERO group, which had been formed in 1958, and he participated in the happenings associated with their exhibition in the Galerie Schmela, where Uecker's works were subsequently also shown. Uecker was officially accepted as a member of the group in 1962, while at the same time interest in his artistic work was growing steadily, and the first German museums purchased his works for their collections.

The year 1963 was an preliminary highpoint of the ZERO movement and also of Uecker's public presence: the ZERO Manifesto was published that year, and Uecker himself propagated his manifesto of the inundation of the world by art. Uecker was awarded prizes and the chance to participate in numerous shows and he expanded his sphere of influence as far as to the USA – to New York, where he achieved major sales of his work, for example, to Rockefeller.

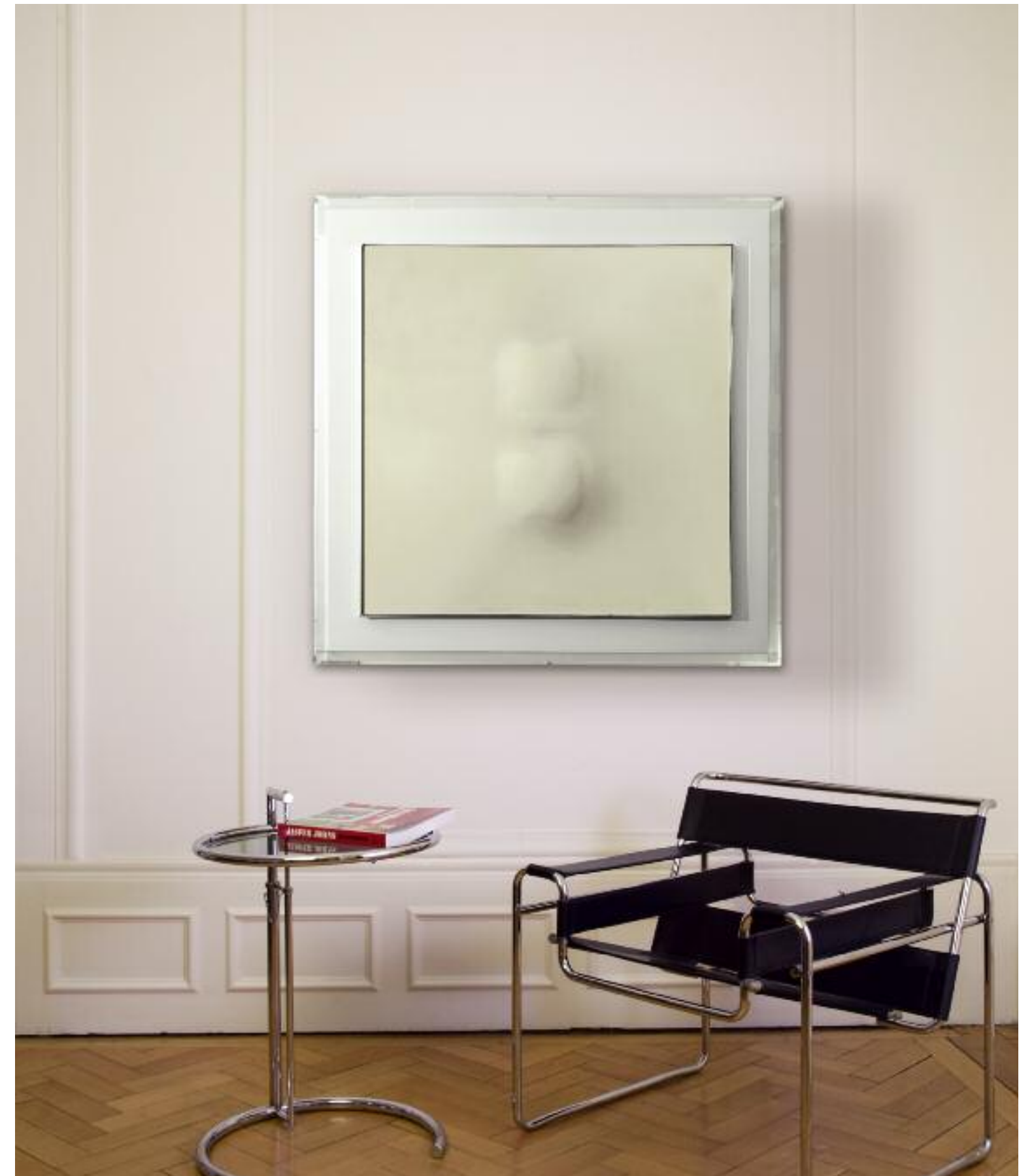
This intensive phase culminated in the participation of the ZERO artists at the Documenta in 1964, when they jointly designed a complete kinetic light room as a homage to Lucio Fontana.

Günther Uecker
in Düsseldorf 1971

KAURI IV 1968
GOTTHARD GRAUBNER

oil on nylon
over foam on canvas
1968
100 x 100 cm
39 3/8 x 39 3/8 in.
verso signed and dated, titled
and inscribed on the stretcher:
'Kissenbild' ('cushion picture')

Provenance
Studio of the artist
Private collection, Württemberg (early 1970s)
Private collection, Germany (from 2017)



KAURI IV 1968

GOTTHARD GRAUBNER

"Color is itself enough of a theme for me."
Gotthard Graubner¹

Gotthard Graubner experimented from the early 1960s with possible ways of expanding the pictorial space of conventional panel painting into the room, and so to create a light and color surface that does not even look as though painted on a panel, but radiates aimlessly – though vibrantly, pulsatingly – into the room. In this respect, his artistic approach has affinities with color field painting in the United States or the European Art Informel, and there was some overlap between his aims and those pursued by the artists of the ZERO movement. However, none of these epithets can fully cover Graubner's pictures.

Although Graubner had started out with expressionist and geometric abstract paintings, he increasingly abandoned this path starting around 1962 in search of other expressive possibilities.

The first 'cushion pictures' were created, for which the canvas was stretched over a layer of synthetic wool, thus resulting in a physical and ultimately spatial rendering of color. Although he kept within the same chromatic range, the actual application of paint could never be described as 'monochrome' in Graubner's work – shimmering, tonal surfaces are characteristic of his painting. However, there is no characteristic brush style or unique 'signature', and thick layers of paint are similarly absent. Free-floating pigments gleam, an effect that Graubner initially achieved by applying a technique first used

in Abstract Expressionist paintings in the United States by Helen Frankenthaler, and later by Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland. It involved using paint to soak the canvas in a contingent (and subsequently, in the work of Noland and Louis, controlled and targeted) manner just a few times with the aim of creating a cloudy, translucent color effect. Known in American post-painterly abstraction as 'staining', this technique was adopted by Graubner to color his picture surfaces, although he repeated the procedure multiple times and used large paintbrushes and scrubbing brushes to modify the effect. The result was a simultaneous delicacy and depth to the layer of paint, achieved not only by modulation and free flow, but also through the multiple layers and saturation of the soft three-dimensional surfaces.

As early as 1961, 'color space' started to appear in the titles of Graubner's paintings, a term to describe his works which he would later expand, in regard to his to 'cushion pictures', to 'color-space bodies'. He had previously explored the physical quality of cushions, starting from around 1964 in drawings and prints, and moving then to works featuring doubled round and oval shapes in pale, white, or light gray tones. The earliest of these double formations was entitled *Kauri*, probably in reference to this tropical sea-snake's form and pale-colored, porcelain-like, and seemingly translucent surface.²

Gotthard Graubner's *Kauri IV* thus refers back both thematically and formally to a series of drawings and prints that were created starting in 1964 and

¹ Quoted in: Petra Richter. Ed io anche son in Arcadia. In: Imorde, Joseph; Pieper, Jan (eds.). Die Grand Tour in Moderne und Nachmoderne. Tübingen 2008, p. 225-246, here p. 228.

² Schäfer, Dorit. Gotthard Graubner: Radierungen. Exh. cat. Kunsthalle Karlsruhe 2008, p. 18.

whose subject matter explored the theme of twins. These were followed in 1968 by four cushion pictures with the same title, as well as another entitled *Kauri Blau*, which, in contrast to the others, did not stick to a gray-white palette but – as the title suggests – includes blue pigments. Graubner exhibited *Kauri II* at the 1971 São Paulo Biennale, and another picture from the series is now part of the collection of the Museum Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf.

In *Kauri IV*, the two raised ovaloid forms, arranged one on top of the other like an '8', occupy the center of the square-shaped pictorial space. The forms' coloration and shadow effect make for a hieratic, almost ghostly impression, which, also through association – and not just by dint of the raised surface of the picture – evoke corporeality. There emerges a subtle, almost sacred game of perception that anticipates, as it were, a movement emanating from the form. The light plays a major role in creating this perception, although the character and restrained color effect of the picture (which is, in reality, colorless) vary according to perspective and the intensity of light irradiation.

Here it is worth raising the not insignificant point that the cowrie not only has a formal resonance with Graubner's cushion picture. The shells of these mollusks are highly charged with cultural significance, and possess (in Africa, for example) a variety of meanings and functions – and not only because they were used for centuries as a method of payment in the Indo-Pacific region. According to a Central

African belief, they facilitate contact with spirits,³ although it is impossible to prove with any certainty whether Graubner knowingly and deliberately made this cultural allusion. However, Graubner's cushion pictures and color spaces do indeed also possess a transcendent intent, which concords wonderfully with the symbolism conveyed by the title *Kauri*.

Writing in reference to Horst Schwebel, Markus Zink provides an incisive summary of the substance of this potentially 'sacred character' – or, at least, of the transcendent quality of Graubner's paintings:

"Whether figurative (Friedrich), Constructivist (Malevich), Abstract Expressionist (Newman, Rothko), monochrome (Graubner), or Art Informel (Tobey), Schwebel recognizes in all these examples a unifying element: the art leads its viewers via sensory perception to a limit of knowledge, experienced as the foundation of consciousness – that is to say, the nameless act of looking. The resultant experience of absent content is confronted with the pure refusal of form, the 'void of death'. The visualized phenomenon is, in Schwebel's words, 'a void loaded with dynamism and potentiality'."⁴

In particular, the 'nameless act of looking' is arguably at the core of Graubner's art in terms of what he hoped to achieve and make possible. *Kauri IV* occupies a central place in this art, which is not only translucent but also capable of engendering transcendent pictorial experiences.

³ Gabriel, Alexandra. *Zeitgenössische Malerei in Kenia*. Dissertation Freiburg 2001, p. 94.
⁴ Zink, Markus. *Theologische Bildhermeneutik: ein kritischer Entwurf zu Gegenwartskunst und Kirche*. Münster 2003, p. 392.





GOTTHARD GRAUBNER

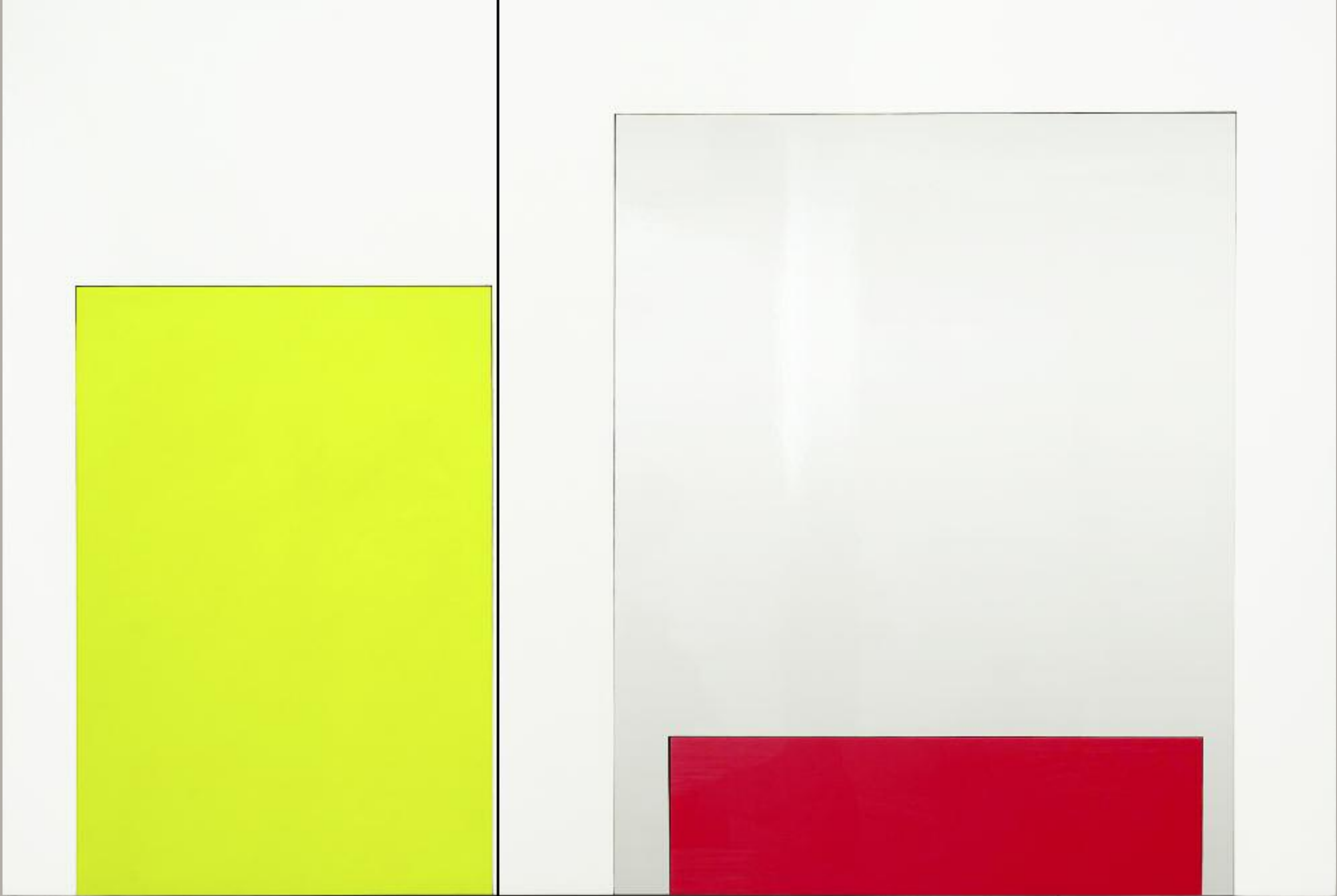
ERLBACH 1930 – 2013 DÜSSELDORF

THE YEAR 1968

1968 was in many respects the year of Gotthard Graubner's artistic breakthrough. Having previously only had his work shown at a small number of exhibitions – such as at Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf starting in 1962 – he attained major recognition while working as an art teacher due to his participation at the fourth edition of Documenta in Kassel in this watershed year of 1968. This was followed by his appointment as professor of painting at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg in 1969. His work became more consolidated, as did his artistic theorization, leading him in 1971 to coin the term 'color-space body' to describe his creations, replacing the rather mundane term 'cushion pictures' that he had used previously.

Graubner said in 1968 that he considered the 'Nebelräume' (Fog Spaces), which were first exhibited that same year – plastic tents shrouded in dry ice, giving the visitor a vague, shimmering sense of light and space – to be the 'most total expression' of his painting, and showed them, even as he returned to color in his painting, at his first major solo exhibition in Hanover and Düsseldorf in 1969. The exhibition even garnered an admiring comment from the magazine 'Der Spiegel', which, in an otherwise lighthearted article from 1969, stated that no other German artist handled color with more subtlety and nuance than Graubner.

Gotthard Graubner
in his studio in Düsseldorf 1971



FIGUR 15 1985

IMI KNOEBEL

acrylic on fibreboard, on wood	Provenance
1985	Studio of the artist
170 x 250 cm	Private collection, Munich (acquired directly from the artist)
66 ⁷ / ₈ x 98 ³ / ₈ in.	Exhibited
verso signed and dated	Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden 1986. Imi Knoebel.



FIGUR 15 1985

IMI KNOEBEL

The so-called 'figure paintings', which Imi Knoebel created from 1985 onwards, have their origin in the considerations of the 'balcony picture'. This is about the overall structure that became visible when looking at GDR apartment blocks as a consequence of the individual ornamentation, which sometimes differed slightly and sometimes starkly, of the serially arranged rows of balcony fronts that originally had been completely identical. Knoebel regarded this overall picture, which was created without precondition or plan by the free and uncoordinated design of each individual, as a metaphor for the "pure, never painted, hidden picture", the presence of which is manifested in the idea of an "energy figure".¹

'Figure' is to be understood here in an abstract sense, not as a person or anything similar. The decisive question in this context is what this figure in an image is, or where it is located. Knoebel approaches this problem formally by designing several surfaces that are inscribed on each other, however, not only through their different colouring, but also in a quite physical sense through the mechanical nesting of individual picture surfaces. In the case of *Figure 15* there are four panels: a tall quadrilateral yellow area, a white rectangle with a smaller red transverse rectangle at the lower edge and a surrounding white field, which encloses the other rectangles beginning from the lower edge by means of corresponding recesses. The result is an optical puzzle of spatial references and priorities: is the large white surface the background for the other three – something that is negated by the fact of

being inserted physically – or is the white figure the actual image with, the other three smaller rectangles superimposed on it? And are these to be understood spatially as being in the foreground or the background? Or, to suggest only a few possibilities for the constellation: do the smaller ones form a single picture with the larger surface – a 'composition' in the literal sense?

It is this ambivalence of priorities and perspectives that leads to the core of the question of the 'image as such' and in turn refers to Constructivism and Malevich. The central work of the Russian Constructivist, the black square on a white ground, was, in its monumentalisation and the radical break with every form of composition or representation in painting, the key experience for Knoebel – at the time a student of Beuys – as it was for many other painters of his generation. Irrespective of the manifold confrontations with the constructivist geometric painting of the Russian Avant-garde, from the Bauhaus to the American Abstract Expressionists and the Minimalists, Imi Knoebel once again turned his attention to the question of the organization of space and colour in the picture – to non-representational composition, virtually in the musical sense.

In more recent works, some of which Knoebel showed in an exhibition entitled 'Honoring Malevich' in 2015, the artist updates this reference to Malevich. *No. 112* combines two geometric elements to form a colour panel, in which a right-angled white quadrilateral supports a red trapezoid.

¹ Pictorial essay by Carmen Knoebel with drawings by Johannes Stüttgen, in: *Exhib. Cat. Haus der Kunst Munich. Imi Knoebel Retrospektive 1968-1996. Ostfildern 1996*, p. 96.

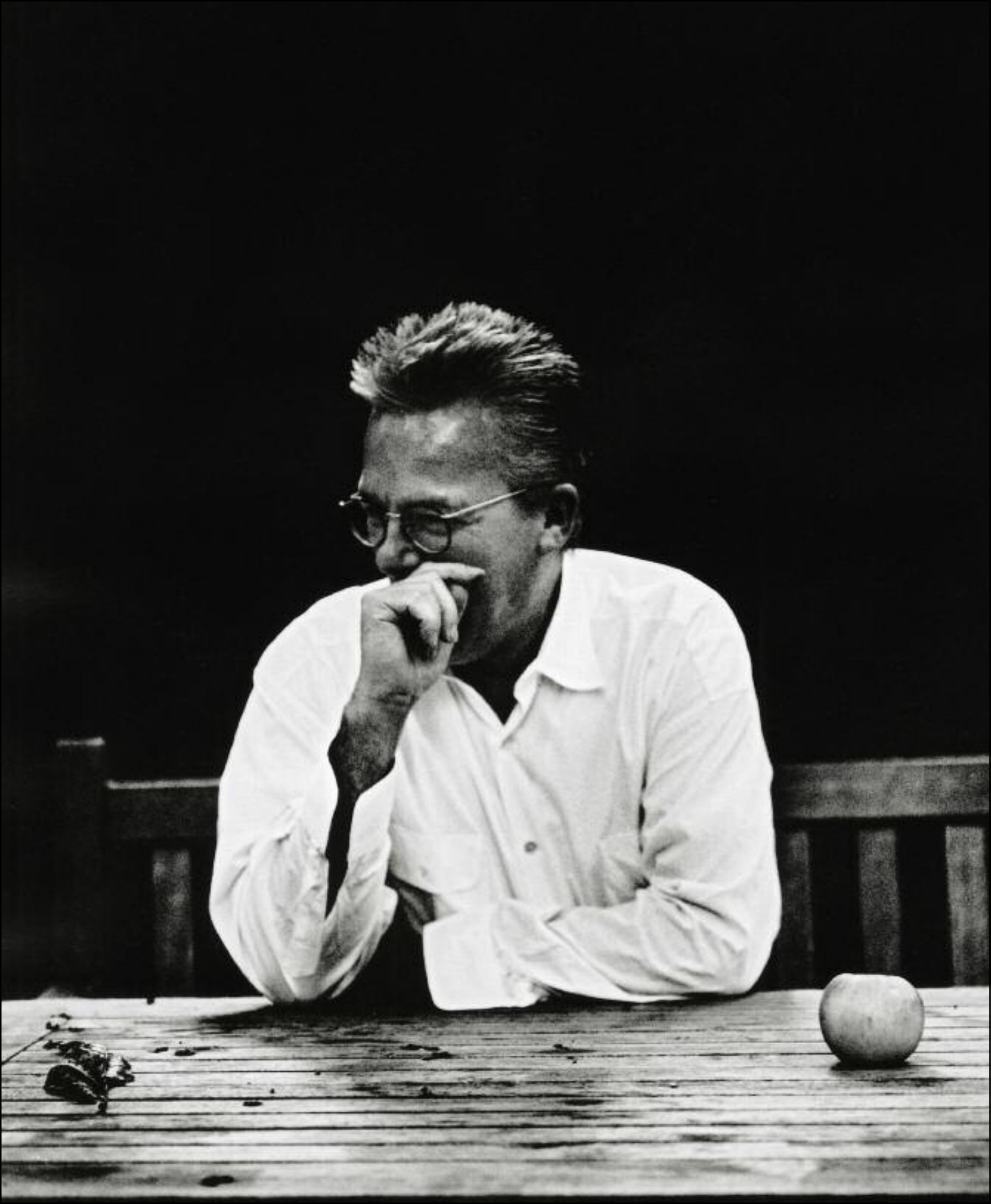


So this time, it is rather Malevich's red square that is the reference point. Just as in Malevich's work, where the not-quite-square rectangle brings movement into the composition through the positioning with a slight displacement of the axis on the white ground and makes the Suprematist space palpable to the viewer, Knoebel unsettles the rigour and balance in his picture through the slightly trapezoid form of the red colour field. It seems, therefore, that Knoebel's reference is not only to Malevich, but also to the American painters of the Hard-edge and Shaped Canvas groups.

This is certainly also true for the figure paintings and *Figure 15*, except that here the 'shaped canvasses' are interposed and instead of propagating the liberation of the picture, or of painting, from spatial boundaries, this effort in searching for the true essence of the picture and for its actual location, causes it to implode. Furthermore, Knoebel no longer understands the painting as a painted pictorial surface, but as an object that can in equal measure become a spatial object, extending into a virtual space that lies in the viewer's power of visualisation, just as the 'balcony picture' can be perceived in completely contrasting and differently accentuated ways depending on the perspective of the individual.

The principle as set out in the figure paintings of assembling individual pieces of different colours to form a whole, runs through the work of the 'Grace Kelly' Series from 1989. Although these works own a strong formal severity – size, arrangement and proportion of the individual picture quadrilaterals remain unchanged –, Knoebel has at the latest since the figure paintings, infinitely expanded and explored his previously restricted colour spectrum. Prior to this, the figure paintings of 1986 with the group 'nuovi gelati' gave rise to the stricter, more constructivist works, and finally to the gate paintings of 1988.

Imi Knoebel
Nummer 112
 2014
 Collection of the artist



IMI KNOEBEL

DESSAU 1940 – LIVES IN DÜSSELDORF

THE YEAR 1985

In 1985 Imi Knoebel's work was counted as having arrived in the world of contemporary art in Germany and was also exhibited abroad extensively and frequently. It was the climax of the painting of the 'Neue Wilden' (New Wild), and Minimal Art had already relinquished its rigour and uncompromising nature to a more colourful and playful pictorial language. Nevertheless, Knoebel's oeuvre lost none of its stringency and formal consistency. Thus, his works were not only shown in large solo museum exhibitions in Germany and Europe – not to mention the numerous gallery exhibitions – but were also integrated into the overview exhibition 'Kunst in der BRD – 1945-1985' (Art in the FRG – 1945-1985) at the National Gallery in Berlin.

In Knoebel's work however, the further formulation of his pictorial programme and the successive declension of colour involve sculptural works and unexpectedly heterogeneous, collaged object works. The diversification of his work is obvious in the mid-1980s but is also an expression of a sovereign expansion of the basis for his artistic principles that Knoebel had acquired in the previous decade.

Imi Knoebel 1984



UNTITLED 1990

SIGMAR POLKE

acrylic, dispersion, interference
colours on cardboard

1990

200 x 150 cm

78 ¾ x 59 in.

signed and dated lower right

verso signed and dated

Provenance

Studio of the artist

Private collection, Europe

Private collection, Germany

Exhibited

Kunsthalle Krems 2017. *Abstract Painting Now.*



UNTITLED 1990

SIGMAR POLKE

"We can't just assume that good pictures will one day get painted. We have to take matters into our own hands."

Sigmar Polke, 1966¹

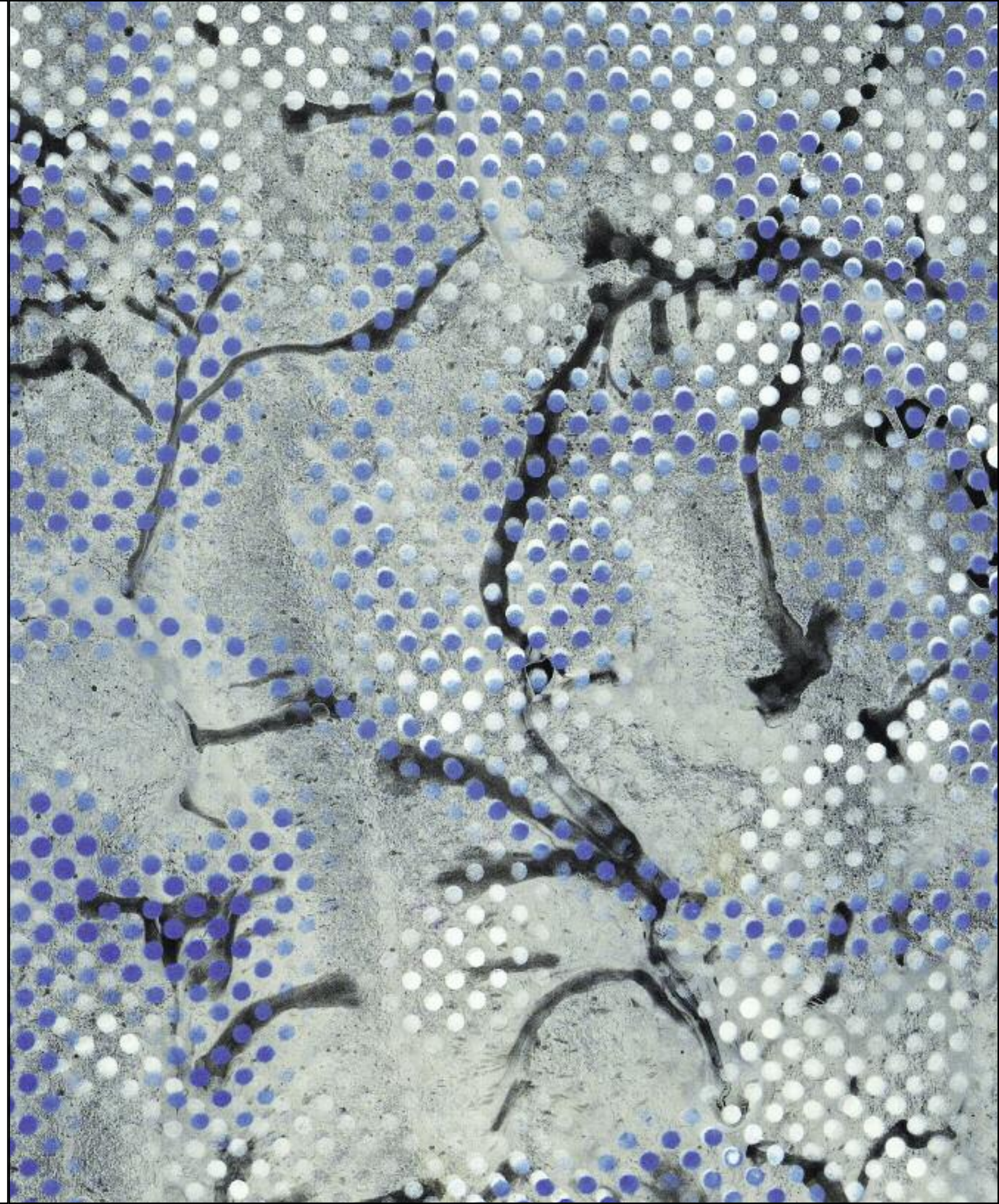
In his large-scale, untitled work from 1990, Sigmar Polke amalgamates a good portion of the elements from his previous works and produces a dense visual fabric of masterly applied artistic devices, acquired over decades of creative output, to create a singularly powerful expression of intuited meaning – the fundamental theme of his work. It features the outlines of almost uninterpretable figurative representation, the halftone pattern of the pictorial surface that recalls 1960s Pop Art and mass media aesthetics, and the use of little-known technological means, whose chemical reactivity alludes to the alchemical mishmash that had such significance for Polke.

Appearing on first sight almost like a cosmological representation, which gravitates from the bright center toward the darker edges of the picture, the untitled work is dominated by black and blue, the colors of the cosmos. The all-covering halftone structure gives the impression of a documentary image or an enlargement of a scientific illustration. Permeated by streaky areas that obscure perception, linear structures emerge that, in contrast to formally similar works by Polke from this period, resist immediate iconographic interpretation and captivate the viewer's eye, seemingly disclosing a sea horse, a dragon – or an elephant?

Polke not only used acrylic and emulsion paints for this work, as in many of his splatter paintings from this creative period, but also so-called interference paint, whose differing refractive properties allow it to create shimmering color effects that change according to the viewer's position and the fall of light, similar to those seen on the surface of a pool of oil. Complementing the principle of contingent pouring, which Polke used frequently in this period, the paint lends an additional level of perceptive possibilities and coincidental combinations of both color and form. And here is where the intuited meaning resides: a multitude of seemingly interpretable pieces of information that, depending on perspective, may still undergo qualitative changes – and are lent the impression of being a published, 'real' picture by the overlaid halftone dots – cannot at any point be definitively interpreted.

Beginning with the halftone pictures from the 1960s, Sigmar Polke experimented persistently and intensively with different chemical reactions of his paints, and with the effects caused by external (including atmospheric) influences on his pictures. An early highlight was his contribution to the German pavilion at the 1986 Venice Biennale, for which he was awarded the Golden Lion. The exhibited works used paints that were sensitive to either moisture or heat, undergoing gradual changes contingent on external climatic conditions and the presence of viewers, who in turn might consider what implication this had for themselves – and who at no point ever caught sight of a kind of

¹ Quoted from: Buchloh, Benjamin (ed.).
Sigmar Polke: Bilder, Tücher, Objekte.
Werkauswahl 1962-1971.
Tübingen 1976, p. 42.





definitive state. The equally ironic and profound quintessence of these and all the artist's other works has never really been fully understood – but this is in itself part of Polke's artistic intent.

Polke used these alchemistic elements and open ends in his paintings – including the present work – to redefine the purpose of art as the ultimate representation of the process of drawing attention to its own meaninglessness. The intuited meaning is a pure chimera; the alchemical search for the philosopher's stone will remain fruitless.

This is particularly evident in the halftone dots so beloved by Polke, which here constantly change character and emphasize their autonomy through their shimmering colors. After all, the joke underlying Polke's halftone pictures is primarily the fact that the dots form part of the picture, indeed comprise the picture itself, and are not there to provide structure for some hypothetical motif that might potentially emerge out of its arrangement – and which the culturally conditioned viewer expects to see when he or she catches sight of the dots.

The boundaries between advertising, kitsch, and art, which have become increasingly fluid since the early 1960s, constitute the wit and variety of Polke's work, and commenting on them might transform the lightness of a moment into a heaviness of permanence. The sudden remoteness in the meaning of words and images operates in such a way in Polke's work that the etymological proximity of the word

'alchemy' (which derives from a term meaning 'to pour') and the word 'kitsch' (probably from the German 'kitschen', meaning to sweep up sludge off the street – and, by extension, the 'kitsch-ing together' of saccharine academic pictures) is no longer surprising. Just how close sense and nonsense, seriousness and play are to one another is revealed by a term coined by none other than the grandmaster of alchemists, Paracelsus: the concept of 'mishmash'. As art's designated experimentalist, Sigmar Polke swept together symbols and signs in his work, mixing them up and continually recombining them in never-ending test sequences, separating them, and putting them back together. There emerges a mishmash of symbols and elements of images, a thicket of signs, whose labyrinthine arrangement has as many entrances as it does have exits instead of just one of each. However, the fabric derives meaning through the act of weaving itself, and less from the material in its complete state.

Polke jumping
Photograph of 1971



SIGMAR POLKE

OELS, SILESIA 1941 – 2010 COLOGNE

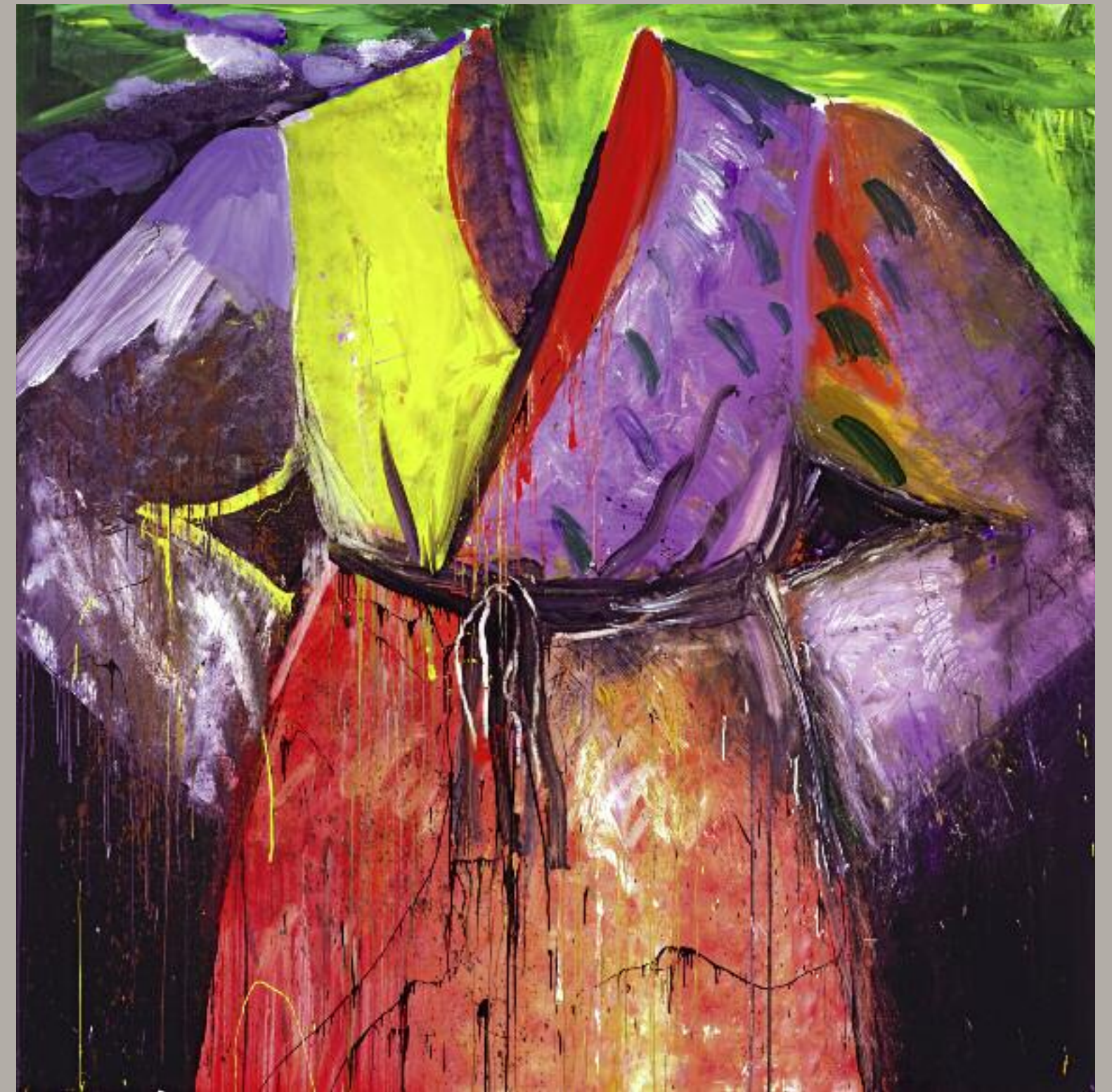
THE YEAR 1990

The 1990s, and particularly 1990, form a gaping hole in Sigmar Polke's official biography. In the period bookended by the high points marked, respectively, by his participation in the 1986 Biennale, which brought him definitive international fame, and his stained-glass windows for the Grossmünster in Zürich, which were garlanded with awards as soon as they were unveiled in 2009 – a year before the artist's death – Polke had participated in numerous exhibitions and remained as active as he was present in the art scene. Yet little, if anything, has been published about his personal life and his work in his Cologne studio from this period.

This is consistent with the self-image of the artist, who gave no interviews and shut himself off from those who eagerly approached him for explanations. In 1994, he painted a picture entitled *Die Drei Lügen der Malerei* (*The Three Lies of Painting*) and gave the same name to his major retrospective in 1997, which was accompanied by two substantial

publications. It might seem as though Polke had inscribed this slower rhythm into his work following his Biennale success. This is a Eurocentric view, however, whose partial blindness Polke would have liked. He in fact had a major touring exhibition in the United States in 1990, which made stops in San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and New York, after which he also became increasingly famous overseas, culminating in 1995 when he was awarded the Carnegie International Prize. Polke was now an international artist, and it befits the irony of his own works that in 1990, a year of tremendous upheaval in German and European society – bearing in mind this was an artist who had fled the East for the West, a theme he explored extensively – this barely played a role in the public perception of his own country.

Sigmar Polke
at Venice Biennial 1986



BLOOD'S ON THE RIVER NOW 2005

JIM DINE

oil and charcoal on linen
2005
274.3 x 274.3 cm
108 x 108 in.
verso signed, dated
and titled

Provenance
Studio of the Artist



BLOOD'S ON THE RIVER NOW 2005

JIM DINE

"I was looking for a way to do self-portraits without painting my face. I saw this bathrobe in an ad. It had no one in it, but it looked like my shape – so it became a sort of metaphor for me."

Jim Dine

In addition to happenings in the late 1950s and early 1960s and his object paintings and environments, Jim Dine also developed a richly colored, gestural style of painting with thickly applied paint which was strongly influenced by the painters of American Abstract Expressionism. In contrast to these painters, however, Dine's paintings eschewed abstraction and developed their expressive style with figurative subjects. The boundaries between the various groups of works also continue to overlap today due to the fact that Dine has often integrated items such as tools and everyday objects into his richly colored paintings.

From the beginning, the two most important and common subjects in Dine's pictures have been the heart and the bathrobe, which have become signature symbols of his painting. Dine has depicted these two subjects in endless variations and combinations, though always filling the entire canvas with a monumental, frontal view of the subject.

Both the heart and the bathrobe are symbols of the artist's self, so that these works can be read as hermetic, symbolic self-portraits of Dine. The painting process inscribed in them – often along with the enigmatic or poetic titles that Dine frequently takes from his own poems – forms the commentary, the more detailed description of this self at the time of painting. The result is a catalog of journal-like self-questioning and descriptions that has grown over the decades and explores the nature and possibilities of painting from the perspective and feelings of the painter.



As Dine himself recounts, he discovered the robe as a subject in 1963 in an advertisement in the 'New York Times Magazine' and adopted it as a metaphor for himself, as a symbol of his self-portraits.¹ The first bathrobe pictures were created in 1964, and they often point to their function as self-portraits. This is the case in the 1964 work *Red Robe with Hatchet (Self-Portrait)*, which is now at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Here the painting of the red bathrobe is augmented with a sculptural addition to form a large-scale installation: a wooden block with a hatchet stuck in it stands in front of the canvas – a crossing of Dine's subjects and an underscoring of the autobiographical theme through the tool. Another example of these early bathrobe variations is *Double Isometric Self-Portrait (Serape)* from the same year at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Here Dine fills the double bathrobe depicted with clear outlines with bold, almost comic-like colors and

augments the painting with metal hooks and rings attached directly to the canvas, each holding a wooden peg hung on a cable or wire around the middle of each bathrobe. Subsequently he created countless variations in painting, drawing, and prints, which form a repertoire of artistic and compositional expressive possibilities.

More than forty years after he first dealt with the theme, in *Blood's on the River Now* Jim Dine focuses entirely on the thickly applied, bold painting. As is so often the case, the individual sections of the bathrobe serve as color fields, juxtaposed compartments, filled in with different colors and contrasting with the colors of the background. Yellow, red, and purple dominate and are lent texture, movement, and physicality with blue, black, and white; at the same time, variation is created through complementary colors.

¹ Celant, Germano. Jim Dine: *Walking Memory 1959-1969*. Exh. cat. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York 1999, p. 192.



Jim Dine
Double Isometric Self-Portrait (Serape)
1964
Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York

The empty robe takes on a contradictory tension through this physicality, which can also serve as a projection surface. Even though Dine originally understood the garment as a metaphor for himself, it is also a universal symbol of the human being whose expressiveness viewers can relate to themselves. In combination with the title, an associative field develops through which Jim Dine not only portrays himself or translates his state of mind into a painterly vocabulary. Through his painterly exploration of the human condition, he offers viewers a possibility to reflect, an invitation to contemplate themselves.



JIM DINE

CINCINNATI 1935 – LIVES IN PARIS AND WALLA WALLA

THE YEAR 2005

In 2001, Jim Dine began spending part of the year in Paris, where he still owns a studio to this day. His close ties to France and his many exhibitions there were recognized in 2003 with the title of Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et Lettres. After a major retrospective of his drawings at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., in 2004 Dine shifted his focus back to the United States. This was all the more the case when he married photographer Diana Michener in 2005 and bought a farm in Walla Walla, Washington. There Dine set up a painting and printmaking studio and began working on large sculptures with a local foundry.

Another traveling exhibition of drawings by Jim Dine toured the United States in 2005. The first stop was the Allen Memorial Art Museum, where the artist's first solo exhibition took place forty years earlier.

Jim Dine
in his studio in Paris in 2018

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