

PRESS RELEASE

METAPHORS FOR EXPRESSION: CONTEMPORARY GERMAN ART

GEORG BASELITZ, GÜNTHER FÖRG, MARTIN KIPPENBERGER, ALBERT OEHLLEN, SIGMAR POLKE

APRIL 10 – JUNE 8, 2013

Opening hours: Tuesday – Saturday 10am-6pm, Monday by appointment



Skarstedt Gallery London is pleased to present an exhibition of singular works by leading contemporary German artists. Alternating between bold colour and sombre tones, humour and quiet reflection, the discourse of German artistic expression is contemplated in the works of Georg Baselitz, Günther Förg, Martin Kippenberger, Albert Oehlen and Sigmar Polke.

The art of the painter consists in drawing attention only to what is essential ...

- Eugène Delacroix

Georg Baselitz's *Orangenesser (Remix)*, 2005 attests to the prophecy of Eugène Delacroix's succinct statement. Revisiting his seminal theme of the orange-eater from the 1980s, the upside-down figure painted into a simple composition reflects Baselitz's concern with the formal qualities of picture-making. Through inversion, Baselitz distorts reality and renders the figure unfamiliar as the picture moves from figuration towards abstraction. In Baselitz's drawings *Untitled (Drinker)* and *(Drummer)* also included in the exhibition, this technique of disorientation through inversion is similarly at play. Baselitz further distances the works in the *Remix* series from their forerunners

as well as from his past, by painting from photographs of the earlier pieces. The pared down canvas and the rapid brush strokes of the *Remix* paintings demonstrate on a monumental scale the artist's continued development through this self-referential activity.

15 Preis, 1987 by Martin Kippenberger plays on the double-meaning of the German word 'preis', signifying both 'price' and 'prize'. Through inscription of the work's monetary or reward value directly onto the canvas, Kippenberger derides the commodification of painting, as well as the idea that merit can be awarded to an artwork by categorising it as first prize. His use of cheap fabric imagery is at odds with the price of the artwork, and also pokes fun at the history of twentieth-century abstraction and the high values attributed to the masters of this form. Referencing his German predecessor Sigmar Polke, who began painting over store purchased fabric in the 1960s, Kippenberger inscribes the *Preis* paintings into art historical discourse whilst simultaneously mocking this canon.

Albert Oehlen's *Bild und Auge (Picture and Eye)*, 1996-2000 illustrates the artist's preoccupation with the theme of painting. Created through computer-assisted design, the boldly coloured lines simulate traces of movement, which reveal against a white picture plane the structures of painting often masked by the surface layers of paint. The computer serves to heighten the artist's deliberate strategy of complication, where chance and chaos reign in equal measure, and to distance the artwork from established genres of painting. Eschewing categorisation, Oehlen's *Picture* confuses the *Eye* of the viewer and positions itself as antithetical to the over simplification of imagery and meaning in contemporary society.

Converse to the frenetic energy of Oehlen's painting, Günther Förg's *Untitled*, 1986 engages with the language of expression through a serene binary composition. Here Förg draws our attention away from the abstract qualities of the painting and onto its material presence. Through a light application of paint over lead, the painting echoes Förg's earlier wall paintings, whilst also rendering homage to Blinky Palermo's *Metalbilder* from 1972. Förg's rapid paint strokes contrast with the painting's dense lead support, to enhance the tactility and visibility of the artistic process. The physicality of the colour and surface combine to achieve an installation-like effect, enlarging the space occupied by the painting beyond its physical support.

The central theme of the recurrent dot in Sigmar Polke's oeuvre is exemplified in *Untitled*, 1993. Working characteristically with found material, the pictorial motif is identified through a contrast of colours on the otherwise flat picture plane. The dominant shape resembles a pre-historic icon, suggesting Polke's assimilation of ancient iconography following his global travels during the 1970s. Blurring the boundaries between high and low art through his marriage of generic fabric and ancient symbols, rendered visibly indistinct through the repetitive dots, Polke succeeds in questioning accepted opinions of art history. A cited influence on a younger generation of German artists, several of whom are represented in this exhibition, Polke's experimental style and nonconformity position him as the torchbearer for an individual mode of German expression.

For further information, please contact Sarah Horner on 0207 499 5200 / sarah@skarstedt.com

Image: Georg Baselitz, *Orangenesser (Remix)*, 2005, oil on canvas, 118 1/8 x 98 1/2 in. (300 x 250.2 cm)

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