

Panorama

Sigmar Polke

11.01.2022
29.01.2022

Panorama, Lukrativer Handel mit der Luft by Sigmar Polke is the first work presented at MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique this year.

In the 1970's Sigmar Polke abandoned painting for photography, which he took up while travelling to Afghanistan, India and Morocco. During this time, he explored the alchemical qualities of photography, testing the impact of substances, causing optical accidents, trying out chemical staining, resulting in strange presences and emanations in his pictures, which were recently exhibited in Paris at Le Bal in 2019.

When Polke returned to painting in the 1980's he maintained his interest in these alchemical qualities, experimenting with pigments and substances that were quite toxic: using products that could flow and stain the canvas just as he had done with photography, he produced some of his images by exposing photographic paper to radioactive rocks, resulting in strangely glowing images of ethereal presence. He also began using transparent fabrics and building complex stretchers that remained visible, becoming part of the composition.

"You are not quite sure where or how to look. Often, instead of canvas, the surface is translucent, weaveless, high-tech polyester scrim. You can see right through it to the stretcher behind, and the wall behind that. As you move, the material catches the light and shimmers with refracted iridescence. A painting, classically, is a virtual window, with an illusory painted world beyond. In Polke's case, the window is real, and so is the beyond, even when there's nothing there.

Executed by Sigmar Polke in 1997, the large-scale artwork *Panorama - Lukrativer Handeel mit der Luft* cleverly deconstructs the means of painting as we know it. Art has always looked at nature and challenged its representation. Sigmar Polke ambiguously and ironically comments on the world and the art world by borrowing a newspaper headline and experimenting on the idea of a contemporary landscape.

That year, the Kyoto protocol was signed off by almost two hundred countries to reduce greenhouse gases' emissions. The subheading *Lukrativer Handeel mit der Luft* (lucrative trade with air) places the work within a contemporary debate and focuses on an historical event and its perception, but it also simply becomes a conceptual expedient to draw attention to its own nature as 'painting', and to the recent bias of the art world and market towards a profit-based attitude.

In the 1990s, Polke started to frequently use polyester fabric as medium for his paintings, which allows to show the structure behind them. The complex wooden frames create a minimalist pattern, becoming a geometric motif of the paintings and part of the composition. Also interest in the alchemical qualities of materials, Polke treated the polyester with synthetic resin lacquer and that chemical reaction allows the surface's tones and shades to change according to the light and to the angle from which the work is viewed, just like a real spectacular panorama, producing strangely glowing surfaces of ethereal presence."

- Excerpt from *Moving targets*, by Adrian Searle, published on Oct 1st 2003 by the Guardian

Press Contact:

Francesca Sabatini
 sabatini@massimodecarlo.com
 www.massimodecarlopieceunique.fr
 IG: massimodecarlopieceunique

Artwork

Panorama - Lukrativer Handel mit der Luft
 (*Lucrative Trade with Air*), 1997

Polyester resin on polyester canvas
 300 x 400 cm / 118 x 157 1/2 inches
 Unique

Sigmar Polke

Sigmar Polke (1941–2010) was a German artist whose inventive paintings and photographs employed non-traditional materials.

Born on February 13 in Oels, Poland in the midst of World War II, he and his family were expelled to communist East Germany after the war.

Growing up in the German Democratic Republic left a lasting impact on him, specifically the sensorial overload of consumer culture he felt after moving to West Germany in 1953.

While studying at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Polke, Gerhard Richter, and Konrad Lueg, created what is now known as the Capitalist Realism. Together, these artists responded to the nationalistic themes of Socialist Realism, while also critiquing West Germany's burgeoning consumer society. Eliciting commentary on the lifestyle and conventions of the German middle class, these early pieces already displayed Polke's hallmark wit and irony. The works incorporate everyday and mass-produced objects, which corresponded with the cheap surfaces on which he painted, such as wallpaper or fabric, as well as his use of offset printing techniques.

Polke's work went on to have a profound impact on a generation of young American artists, including Julian Schnabel and David Salle. Polke also used a print raster aesthetic, which he called a "grid" technique, in which he painted enlarged images of magazines and newspapers on canvas, mixing art historical motifs with commercial imagery.

In the 1970's, Polke travelled extensively and worked increasingly with photography, using photographs taken in Pakistan and Afghanistan as the source material for later paintings. From 1977, Polke was a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Hamburg, a position he held until 1991. In his

large gestural paintings from the 1980's, Polke worked with both traditional and unusual materials, using chemicals, varnishes and mixtures of pigments, solvents and toxins in his work.

He exhibited his work at the documenta 5, 6, and 7 exhibitions in Kassel, and had several international retrospectives. Polke's last work was the renewal of the glass windows of the Gromünster cathedral in Zurich between 2006 and 2009, before he died in 2010.

His work is included in the public collections – among others - of the Art Institute of Chicago, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, The Broad, Los Angeles, Carnegie Museum of Art, Centre Georges Pompidou - Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, Kunsthau Zürich, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles The Museum of Modern Art, New York Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel and Tate Modern, London.