

Surface Works

**Ida Ekblad, Günther Förg, Joan Mitchell,
Albert Oehlen, Rebecca Warren**

First Floor, 41 Dover Street, London W1S 4NS
25 April – 27 May 2023
Opening: Tuesday, 25 April, 6 – 8 pm

‘Abstract is not a style. I simply want to make a surface work.’ With these words the Abstract Expressionist Joan Mitchell explained her relationship to painting and abstraction. On its own, abstraction was for Mitchell an empty shell. As a label it had come to characterise too much and too little all at once. Non-descript, beyond its non-objective implications, abstraction was quite simply not cut out for the job. Surface work was less hyperbolic, but far more fit for purpose. In one stroke it evoked the act of painting, and the painted surface. Gesture, as well as colour and texture were part and parcel of this definition which stressed the importance of the material surface over the more ambiguous idea of abstraction.

In her all-over compositions Mitchell demonstrates what surface work is and how it can express feeling. Take *Untitled*, 1956, and *Tilleul*, 1978 – in both instances Mitchell deploys bold, swift bundles of lines, which lend structure to the images, while also referencing landscapes and nature. Through surface work, Mitchell builds an aesthetic construction which extends beyond her own work to encompass that of others who have invested form, space, texture and gesture with meaning. The work of Albert Oehlen, of which *FM 18*, 2008, is an example, is also premised on the movements, rhythms and systems of a surface work. By bringing together an array of gestural elements, Oehlen engages with the long history of abstraction which he challenges and renews through the worked surfaces. Like him, Günther Förg endeavours to comment on, but also break free from the art historical bind that frequently sets contemporary art in dialogue with the past.

Presented here are a series of works, all made in 2009, showing Förg's attempt to make sense of colour and form on his own terms. The repetitive nature of the coloured marks in the oil on paper monotypes, all titled *an die leine*, 2009, recall a type of mindless scribbling that is at once explosive and contained. By a similar account, the two *mostly landscapes*, 2009, paintings use vivid colour and bold brushstrokes to express the intersection between form and the memory of nature which lingers on the surface work. In all of Förg's works there is a close link between the architecture of the composition and its materialisation on the ground surface. On the whole, Förg's are surface works that yield a preoccupation with processes of fragmentation and memory.



Joan Mitchell, *Tilleul*, 1978
oil on canvas, 74 x 60 cm.; 29 1/8 x 23 5/8 in.
© Estate of Joan Mitchell

Ida Ekblad's paintings contain a riotous energy. Inspiration is taken from a multitude of sources – archives of different kinds, film and music all come together to furnish Ekblad's eclecticism. To unite such an animated mix of images, Ekblad calls on a variety of techniques and materials. In the case of the triptych *FJORD IN HER FUTURE*, 2023, and in the three works on paper, all 2023, she focuses her attention on oil painting and through this centuries-old technique marks the surface of the canvases with vigorous strokes. In the latter works the surface is laden with bursts of colour, while in the triptych the pictorial rhythm is dictated by the diverging patterns, each jostling for attention. Ekblad exploits the cacophony of the surface work to convey a kaleidoscopic range of feelings.

The surfaces of Rebecca Warren's bronze sculptures are often given another work-over with paint so that it roils with the ground, articulating, dissolving and dredging information from what lies beneath. *Kutoff* (2020), has a gap derived from the sculpture-with-hole period of art history (also the heyday of UFO paranoia) and a toothy set of paint drips that make a strange kind of digital moiré pattern. *Jumper* (2020) is inscribed with an obscure glyph on one side and a lattice of colour on the other. It is the mix of all these elements that gives her sculptures their peculiar, alien natures, which Warren has said comes from an 'obscure zone of the mind or extra-human source.' She has also said of these works that she 'wanted them to be somehow denser than previous bronzes in order to integrate them completely with their painted surfaces, making them more concentrated, more intense.'

– Flavia Frigeri,
April 2023

Ida Ekblad (*1980, Oslo) lives and works in Oslo. In recent years, Ekblad's work has been the subject of institutional exhibitions at the Kunstnerens Hus, Oslo (2021); Kunsthalle Zürich; Museo Tamayo, Mexico City; Jardin des Tuileries, Paris (all 2019); Kunstverein Braunschweig (2018); Kunsthaus Hamburg (2017); The National Museum of Norway, Oslo; and Kunstmuseum Luzern (both 2013). The artist participated in the Venice Biennale in 2017 and 2011. Her work is in the collections of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Kistefos Museum, Jevnaker; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; and The National Museum of Norway, Oslo, among others.

Günther Förg was born in 1952 in Füssen and died in 2013 in Freiburg. The artist's work has been exhibited in numerous solo shows at international institutions including the Palazzo Contarini Polignac, Venice (2019); Kunstverein Reutlingen; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Dallas Museum of Art (all 2018); MEWO Kunsthalle Memmingen (2016); Deichtorhallen, Hamburg (2015); Museum Brandhorst, Munich (2014); and Museo Carlo Bilotti, Rome (2013). Förg's work is in the collections of the Art Institute Chicago; Fondation Beyeler, Basel; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Saint Louis Art Museum; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Tate, London; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, among others.

Joan Mitchell (1925–1992) lived and worked between the United States and France. Mitchell's work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions in international institutions including Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris (2022); Baltimore Museum of Art (2022); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2021); Museum Folkwang, Essen (2015); New Orleans Museum of Art (2010); The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2002, 1992, 1974); Walker Arts Center, Minneapolis (1999); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1988); and Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris (1982), among others. Works by the artist were included in the Venice Biennale in 1958, and Documenta II, in 1959. Mitchell's work is in the collections of The Art Institute of Chicago; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Tate, London; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and The Whitney Museum of American Art; New York, among others.

Albert Oehlen (*1954, Krefeld), lives and works in Switzerland. Solo exhibitions of his work have been held in international institutions, most recently including the Sprengel Museum Hannover (duo show with Carroll Dunham, 2020); Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; Serpentine Gallery, London; Kunstmuseum St.Gallen; and Museum Brandhorst, Munich (all 2019); Aishti Foundation, Beirut (2018); Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana (2017); The Cleveland Museum of Art; Guggenheim, Bilbao (both 2016); New Museum, New York; Kunsthalle Zürich (both 2015); mumok, Vienna (2013); Kunstmuseum Bonn (2012); and Carré d'Art de Nîmes (2011). Oehlen's work is in the collections of The Broad, Los Angeles; Centre Pompidou, Paris; The Cleveland Museum of Art; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris; Institut Valencià d'Art Modern; MOCA, Los Angeles; MUDAM, Luxembourg; Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris; Museum Brandhorst, Munich; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Staatliche Kunstsammlung Dresden; and Tate, London, among others.

Rebecca Warren (*1965) lives and works in London. Warren's work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions in international institutions including Belvedere 21, Vienna (2022); Le Consortium, Dijon; Musée National Eugène Delacroix, Paris (both 2018); Tate St. Ives; Fondation Vincent van Gogh, Arles (both 2017); Dallas Museum of Art (2016); Kunstverein München (2013); Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Ghent (2012); Serpentine Gallery, London (2009); and Kunsthalle Zürich (2004). The artist was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2006 and the Vincent Award in 2008 and participated in the 54th Venice Biennale (2011). Warren's work is in the collections of Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Arts Council Collection London; Dallas Museum of Art; Kunsthaus Zürich; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Royal Academy of Arts, London; and Tate, London, among others. Warren was elected as a Royal Academician at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 2013. In 2020, she was awarded the honour of Officer of the Order of the British Empire for services to art. The exhibition *ASensitiv GIACOMETTI / WARREN* is on view at the Fondation Giacometti, Paris until 2 July 2023.

Further exhibitions and events

Berlin:

27 April – 10 June 2023

**Merlin Carpenter, Jutta Koether, Valentina Liernur,
Kerry James Marshall, Albert Oehlen, Adam Pendleton,
Avery Singer, SoIL Thornton, Rosemarie Trockel,
Soundtrack: Jens-Uwe Beyer**

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in the Resort*

Curated by Isabelle Graw

Bleibtreustraße 45 and 15/16, 10623

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Bridget Riley

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Potsdamer Straße 77–87, 10785

Paris:

22 April – 3 June 2023

Walton Ford

A Very Rare Sight

46 & 47 rue du Temple, 75004

Marfa:

4 May – 10 December 2023

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