

Press Release

Harmony Korine. AGGRESSIVE DRIFTER

15 September 2023 – 14 January 2024
Hauser & Wirth Downtown Los Angeles
South Gallery



Los Angeles...For his debut solo exhibition with Hauser & Wirth, 'AGGRESSIVE DRIFTER,' American artist and filmmaker Harmony Korine will present a new series of acid-hued paintings drawn from his forthcoming film 'Aggro Dr1ft.' This unprecedented fusion of Korine's painting and filmic practices expands the irreverent polymath's exploration of the aesthetics of gaming and their seepage into the wider culture. Korine's oeuvre is both deliberate and erratic, figurative and abstract, and, like his films, the artist's paintings blur boundaries between 'high' and 'low' in ways that simultaneously attract and repel viewers with their hypnotic, otherworldly atmosphere.

Marking Korine's first presentation in Los Angeles in over eight years, the exhibition opens 15 September at Hauser & Wirth Downtown Los Angeles. It will remain on view through 14 January 2024 in the complex's South Gallery.

Ahead of the exhibition, Korine sat down with German art historian, educator and publisher of the journal *Texte zur Kunst*, Isabelle Graw, to discuss the artist's new body of work. Below is an excerpt of their conversation.*



Isabelle Graw: I would like to start by discussing your use of an infrared camera for your new film 'Aggro Dr1ft' (2023) which your paintings are based on. I wondered to what degree you reworked the film stills for the paintings because their colors seem even more intense and bright. You seem to push the painterly potential of the film even further in the paintings.

Harmony Korine: The film does lead into the paintings. I had set out to not make a traditional film. I didn't even call it a movie, and when people would call it a movie on set, I would laugh at them. It somehow did turn into a film because it has a structure and a narrative. I had spent two years with technical people – my cameraman and AI people and effects guys and editors – to develop something that would expand my language of film. I wanted to see what's after films. Maybe it's because I make paintings and movies and do photography that this notion of a singularity between the forms became very interesting to me: a kind of post-cinema or post-picture.

Graw: So, opting for an infrared camera was a way of producing a singularity that results from a medium unspecific practice that expands the borders of each art form?

Korine: Yes. Visually, I was starting to feel bored with the 2D, normal photography-based film. Video games seemed more and more appealing to me because they create entire worlds. And so, we spent a year – and it got very nerdy and technical – trying to figure out what it could look like, where could we go?

The infrared was something that my cinematographer had started experimenting with. He used cameras that we got access to from NASA. They were very, very high-resolution infrared, and beautiful. We started to develop this look and it felt very immersive. Obviously, these cameras are heat based, so they're related to the heat and to warmth. And that was exciting – I liked that idea. We came up with this look that was close to the idea of being inside of a video game. It felt completely immersive and closer almost to a drug experience.

It is the first show I've ever done where the paintings are directly related to the film, or whatever we call it. So, with the paintings, I wanted to really replicate and push the idea of infrared, of energy. And so, we just spent a long time mixing paints and figuring out how to really push the strength and the luminosity of the paint. The paintings were very closely based on the imagery within the film and then pushed even further, like you said.

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Graw: That was precisely my impression. And it is quite accurate to compare the sensation of watching the film to a drug experience – at times it felt like a bad trip. For me the interesting thing about using an infrared camera is that it visualizes temperature – it captures how temperature is distributed unevenly on surfaces and objects. And as a consequence of this, color gets extremely emphasized, and in your paintings even more so. Their colors – orange, red and blue and also green, red and blue – are used in a way that reminded me of German Expressionism.

Once the emphasis is put on color, a bodily sense of substance is created, a sense of liveliness is produced. And this usually happens at the expense of lines, lines are what is downplayed in your paintings. The figures thus lack individual features, their features recede in favor of their body-substances which makes them look rather ghost-like. I thought of them as stand-ins for what humans could look like after the apocalypse. Some of the figures wear face masks – a device that you often use in your work – which further contributes to this weird effect of anonymous, slightly scary living dead figures that only consist of substance. Why did you opt for not creating individuals with individual features?



Korine: I've always been attracted to bringing an image to the point where it starts to break down. And then like you were saying: the figures start to have this other strange quality, sometimes ghost-like, or in the case of 'Aggro Dr1ft,' there's a lot of avatars that we use – masks and avatars. They too call identity into question, blur the line between what's real and what's not real. It's like a dystopian vision where color becomes like a character in the film. It's almost science fiction, where the world just consists of colors and energy.

Graw: In painting theory since Denis Diderot's reflections on color, color has been associated with the capacity to produce a sense of liveliness. But your figures also look like the living dead. There's a weird tension between their extremely colorful suggestion of liveliness and these nearly dead creatures that only consist of temperature-substances.

Korine: Also, subject wise, it's exciting to me because the colors are so full of life and they're extremely beautiful. At the same time the subject matter and the characters are so grim and dystopian so there's this interesting discourse between the two. Because the colors are really almost like celebratory colors, but then we exploded them. And the characters themselves are very violent and very base and kind of dark. So, it's an interesting mix that happens and I think the paintings reflect that.

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Graw: You've talk about expanding the singularity of film, what you call your 'unified aesthetics' – a term coined by Charles Eames. It is not medium specificity you are interested in, which is a modernist concept associated with art theorists like Clement Greenberg. In your work every medium gets expanded and de-specified: a film can turn into a painting, a painting can become a film, etc. But I would also argue that each of these artforms comes with specific histories, language games, visual rhetorics and discussions. And I wonder: are you interested in these specific histories and if so, which painters are you actually communicating with in this new work?

Korine: This is something new. I could mention artists I love, like Öyvind Fahlström, a huge influence on me. Or Martin Kippenberger's use of color and even William Eggleston and the color use in his photographs. I wanted to make paintings that feel like they're basically alive. I wondered if one can make works and imagery that look like nothing has preceded them? This project is almost closer to a futurist take on visuals, painting and film.

Graw: There's something else that struck me in your paintings which is their focus on hands and gestures. There is one painting, 'UOU' (2023), which shows a female hand with long nails resting on a leg. And there are also several paintings of interacting hands that hold weapons like 'RAVETEK14' (2023). Hands and gestures seem to be of special interest to you which made me think of the German art historian Aby Warburg who coined the term 'Pathosformel' [pathos formula]. Pathos formula according to him are pictorial conventions in the history of art that are used for suggesting and transporting affects that supposedly have universal validity. What is it that interests you about hands and gestures?

Korine: The details were important to me in this work. A big technical reason for that is the infrared camera: it is very different in closeup than in wide. In closeup, you really feel the details and the heat from the body: that's why the hands are always there. A lot of the imagery is composed in close to mid-range framing. This is because the closer you get, the more heat is pulled from the image and the more alive it looks. So, a lot of it is really technical. As you go further away, the image becomes more abstract – it really starts to look almost like an abstract painting, where it will consist of a solid color. And then because it reacts to light, you'll see the lamps or something in the background glowing, having some kind of golden haze.

The paintings really get interesting when you get closer to the body. The closer you are, the more heat and details appear. So that's why you're seeing hands, guns, torsos, faces. And again, you were talking about the line: there aren't really traditional lines in these paintings. The colors and the grain structure start to explode the whole idea of lines. They become more about depicting the vibration of the energy.

Graw: Your paintings aim at producing strong affects in the viewer, if only due to the way chroma is used in them. They make people react viscerally; their colors activate one's sensory system.

Korine: Yeah. I always wondered how to induce a trance through the films or through the work. Since the beginning, I searched for something that had a physical component to it, something that was beyond an articulation or even a point. I used to be criticized with the early films because people wondered: what is the point? But the point for me was the feeling, the point was the discomfort or the sense of being off kilter: how the realism got pushed into something hyper-real.

I was trying to make films and paintings that weren't about any one specific thing. It was more about chasing a feeling or an experience, creating something like aesthetic drugs.

*An expanded transcript of this conversation will be published in Ursula magazine in November 2023.

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About the artist

Over the last thirty years, Harmony Korine has cultivated a multidisciplinary art practice that resists categorization and is admired internationally for the improvisation, humor, repetition, nostalgia and poetry that unite the disparate aspects of his output. One of the most influential and innovative filmmakers of his generation, Korine first rose to prominence after writing the script for the film 'Kids' (1995), directed by Larry Clark. Everything he has made since has been guided by memory, emotion and physical sensation as opposed to strategy and rational thought. Of his art, he has said, 'I'm chasing something that is more of a feeling, something more inexplicable, a connection to colors and dirt and character, something looping and trancelike, more like a drug experience or a hallucination.'

Korine's work has been exhibited at institutions worldwide, including the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.), Ghent, Belgium (2000); Whitney Biennial, New York (2000); CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, France (2001); Contemporary Art Gallery, Art Tower, Mito, Japan (2002); 50th Biennale di Venezia (2003); Kunsthalle Dusseldorf, Germany (2009); Swiss Institute, New York (2010); Casino Luxembourg–Forum d'art contemporain, Luxembourg (2013); Vanderbilt University Fine Arts Gallery, Nashville (2009); the Frist Center for Visual Arts, Nashville (2016); and Centre Pompidou, Paris (2017).

'Aggro Dr1ft,' Korine's new film from which the paintings in Hauser & Wirth's exhibition are drawn, premiered at the 80th Venice International Film Festival on 1 September 2023. For more information, please visit:

<https://www.labiennale.org/en/cinema/2023/out-competition/aggro-dr1ft>

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MANT1X FAZE
2023
Oil on canvas
179.7 x 122.6 x 4.1 cm / 70 3/4 x 48 1/4 x 1 5/8 in
182.2 x 124.5 x 6.7 cm / 71 3/4 x 49 x 2 5/8 in (framed)
Photo: Julian Cousins

INFABLINX
2023
Oil on canvas
154.3 x 186.7 x 4.1 cm / 60 3/4 x 73 1/2 x 1 5/8 in
155.3 x 188.9 x 6.7 cm / 61 1/8 x 74 3/8 x 2 5/8 in (framed)
Photo: Julian Cousins

UOU
2023
Oil on canvas
123.8 x 183.5 x 4.1 cm / 48 3/4 x 72 1/4 x 1 5/8 in
125.7 x 185.7 x 6.7 cm / 49 1/2 x 73 1/8 x 2 5/8 in (framed)
Photo: Keith Lubow