

Harm Gerdes
The Autotuned Mind
April 24 – May 31, 2024
Opening reception Wednesday, April 24, 6–9 PM

Peres Projects is pleased to present *The Autotuned Mind*, Harm Gerdes' (b. 1994 in Darmstadt, DE) fourth solo exhibition with the gallery and his first in Milan.

What would our thoughts look like if we could tune them to a perceived technical perfection?

How would we grasp the beauty that lies in walking that fine line between rational thought and metaphysical imagination so intrinsic to being human?

Would we still be able to enjoy the unique and extraordinary feeling of weirdness we sometimes experience when confronted with shapes and forms we don't fully recognise, but still awaken a sense of familiarity within us?

While thinking back to the conversations I shared with Harm Gerdes surrounding the body of work featured in *The Autotuned Mind*, these are just some of the questions that kept echoing in my mind. In the paintings, which slowly took shape over the course of the winter in his studio in Kallithea, I could see a rich visual representation of thoughts emerge, grappling with an overwhelming idea of freedom. Landscapes, whose fluidity is enhanced by Gerdes' signature pouring technique, conjure up references that our mind can grasp but not fully explain, producing in the observer a sense of weirdness that constitutes what I would define as an ontological category. Gerdes skilfully induces moments of semantic disorientation in the observer's mind as he presents us with figurative references that have all but lost their meaning, only to become recontextualised as mere centers of gravity within the abstract compositions. This awakes in us a sense of enquiry, of curiosity, as we mimic the tension in the paintings with our own internal semiotic tension between the forms we are seeing and their signifiers. We don't, nor can we, ignore the references populating the paintings, and yet we are drawn towards a wider, less paradigmatic understanding of them.

Gerdes' main achievement in this body of work is to investigate ways of giving shape to what is most intimate to us: the ways in which we form our thoughts. In doing so, the space he creates is one in which magical thoughts merge with rational and scientific ones, in which our emotional struggles meet our acquired knowledge, in which myths are deciphered and re-interpreted. The peculiarity of Gerdes' approach is to intertwine references borrowed from multiple historical—and arguably mythical—ages with an aesthetic very much influenced by a slickness we automatically associate with a future, with something always in becoming. In this last element, I believe, lies the exceptional nature of the works brought together in this exhibition: their capacity to imagine a space in which our mind is guided, fooled, and yet therefore expanded. The surfaces created by Gerdes have, at times, a machinic aftertaste, as is the case in *Sinus Untitled* (2024) composed by assembling architectural elements to create a fictitious center that gives us an initial sense of stability and safety. Upon closer examination, however, this is negated and shattered by the subtle overlapping and merging of planes around the imagined center, rationally negating the validity of that very axis of sight we found comfort in at first. In other instances, such as *Narcissus* (2024), we are left wondering how our minds create reflection in the first place. Certainly, what we are faced with is not a traditional reading of the ancient myth of Narcissus, but, if we were, what would we make of the two forms mirroring each other? Which is the "true" one and, as they differ to such an extent, are we to believe in the rigidity of the upper or the liquidity of the lower? A "weird" sense of intimacy is formed between the two, which overcomes questions of hierarchy and predominance. Paintings such as *Echo, Iridescent* (2024), which is probably the one that most resonates with Gerdes' previous works, reveal compositions and narratives consistent with those of the other works in the exhibition, thus signaling that many of these thoughts were already present in his practice, albeit not as fully developed as they are in this series.

Agape Halfway (2024) epitomizes Gerdes' visual research. Through a subtle interplay of references, a balanced use of various techniques, and an extremely compelling composition, the work immerses the viewer in a world uncannily familiar yet imbued with weirdness, that of a "universal love" manifesting "halfway".

Words by Christian Oxenius

This is Harm Gerdes' fourth solo exhibition with Peres Projects and his first at the Milan gallery. His solo exhibitions include *Panorama*, Peres Projects, Seoul (2023); *Synthetic Spirits*, Peres Projects, Berlin (2022); and *Staying with the Trouble*, Peres Projects, Berlin (2021). Gerdes has participated in several group exhibitions including *There is no sea but the sea*, Meyer Riegger, Karlsruhe (2022); *werden/becoming: From Michelangelo to*, Tiroler Landesmuseen, Innsbruck (2021); *Coming to Voice*, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf (2021); *Utopia*, Peres Projects, Berlin (2021); *Darmstadt Triennale: Kunstpunkte*, Mathildenhöhe Darmstadt, Germany (2015); and *Mit Kunst für die Kunst*, Kunsthalle Darmstadt, Germany (2015). His work has also been featured in group presentations at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Dusseldorf (2020), Städtische Galerie Eichenmüllerhaus, Lemgo (2017), and Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Dusseldorf (2017).

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