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Press Release

Günther Förg. Arbeiten auf Papier / Works on Paper / Oeuvres sur Papier: 1975 – 2009

Hauser & Wirth Zurich, Limmatstrasse
27 September until 20 December 2024



About the exhibition

The largest survey exhibition of Günther Förg's works on paper, spanning over 30 years, opens at Hauser & Wirth Zurich, Limmatstrasse, this September. Förg's works on paper were an integral part of his multi-disciplinary practice (which comprised drawing, painting, photography and sculpture) and ran parallel to his works on canvas. Executed in a variety of materials, from watercolor, acrylic and oil to charcoal, chalk and ink, these creations are considered works in their own right; instead of using them as preparatory sketches for paintings, the artist would often be inspired to paint and draw on paper after experimenting with his large-scale canvases. The exhibition includes well-known series, including his Grid, Color Field, Grey and Spot works, alongside lesser-known pieces, such as early works on paper from his studies in Munich, such as early works on paper from his studies in Munich or later series such as Mostly Landscapes.

With many shown together for the first time, the exhibition positions Förg as a daring conceptualist who both incorporated and critiqued tropes of modernism, while celebrating his distinctively sensuous approach to gestural abstraction. His works on paper offer an insight into the way in which Förg engaged with these concerns by ceaselessly transforming his use of color, form and composition to push the boundaries of his own image making. Sidestepping easy categorization, he candidly appropriated and re-imagined canonical art historical references, such as the work of Blinky Palermo, Paul Klee, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Cy Twombly, Edvard Munch and others.

Born in Füssen, Germany, Förg is considered one of the most significant German artists of the post-war generation. The earliest works on view are from 1975, during which time he was studying under Karl Fred Dahmen, one of the most influential figures of Art Informel, at The Academy of Fine Art Munich. Executed on lined note-book paper with isolated pink or green sections of gouache and overlined with a ball point pen,

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these works are early examples of Förg's engagement with artists such as Blinky Palermo or Cy Twombly, who he first came across during his studies. Experimenting with and expanding their visual language through color and form, the works, titled 'Landschaft (Landscape)' (1976) and 'Green Paul Veronese' (1975) — the latter referencing the pigment of green used by Renaissance painter Paul Veronese—are at once evocative of landscapes yet resolutely abstract.

After a short break from the medium, when Förg focussed mainly on his photographic work, he returned to painting in the mid-1980s with his Color Field paintings, geometrically partitioned fields of color. Painted with acrylic on Canson paper, the gestural immediacy of the works and thinly applied layers of color subvert the modernist notion of the sublime, despite their compositions being evocative of the densely colored experimentations of Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman.

In contrast, Förg's renowned Grid works from the mid-1990s, executed here in gouache on paper, demonstrate a visual shift away from his Color Field paintings. Identified as an emblem of modernism, the artist engages with the grid through expressive layers of color and paint, threatening to dissolve any distinctions between negative and positive space. He takes this notion a step further in his series of Grey paintings, begun in the 1970s with examples from the 1990s on view in Zurich. Förg immerses the picture plane with infinite tones of grey by covering cardboard with black gesso and layering geometric hatchings of washed-out streaks of chalk, introducing a tonal complexity within a deconstructed grid formation.

An example of Förg's Checkerboard works from 1993 in varying tones of grey is also on view and explores a different approach to the grid, here taking inspiration from the geometrical compositions of Paul Klee. The motif is further explored in a rarely seen work on paper titled 'Decke IV' (1998) from a series of paintings



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inspired by the French post-impressionist painter Pierre Bonnard. This work depicts the geometric pattern of an orange and red tablecloth owned by Bonnard that would frequently appear in his compositions, once again reflecting Förg's complex critical engagement with the aesthetics of modernism.

Works from the 2000s include expressive watercolors or gouaches which abstractly or explicitly depict landscapes, among them his Mostly Landscape paintings or his An die Leine series. These are shown alongside some of Förg's later drawings using charcoal and oil on paper, experimenting with the negative space of the paper through gestural mark-making. He developed these expressive, dynamic brushstrokes by introducing bright dabs of color for one of the last series he ever made, his celebrated Spot paintings (2005 – 2010). Within these works on paper, Förg transformed the previous lattice structures from his series of Grid paintings into rhythmic, gestural marks that appear to float across his paper, doing away with any previous sense of order. In these works, the brushstroke itself becomes the main protagonist, representing an ultimate return to expressive painting, indicating a completion of sorts—a full-circle arrival at painting as a synthesis of experimentation, rooted in art history.

The exhibition coincides with the artist's solo exhibition at Maison La Roche in Paris, on view from 15 October to 14 December 2024.

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Opening hours:

Tue – Fri, 11 am – 6pm
Sat, 11 am – 5 pm

Caption and courtesy information:

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Günther Förg
Green Paul Veronese
1975
Gouache and varnish on lined paper
21 x 29.3 cm / 8 1/4 x 11 1/2 in

Günther Förg
Decke IV
1998
Acrylic on Canson paper
150 x 100 cm / 59 x 39 3/8 in

Günther Förg
Untitled
1991
Acrylic on Canson paper
201 x 148.5 cm / 79 1/8 x 58 1/2 in

Günther Förg
Untitled
2005
Watercolour on paper
45.5 x 35.5 cm / 17 7/8 x 14 in

Günther Förg
Untitled
1993
Acrylic on Canson paper
148 x 119 cm / 58 1/4 x 46 7/8 in

Günther Förg
Untitled
2007
Mixed media on Laurier paper
80 x 137 cm / 31 1/2 x 53 7/8 in

Günther Förg
Untitled
2008
Charcoal and oil on paper
49.8 x 65 cm / 19 5/8 x 25 5/8 in