

Galería Ehrhardt Flórez

HELMUT DORNER

One of my ghosts

From January 24th to February 24th, 2026

More than a century ago, Paul Cézanne embarked on the colossal task of creating a new form of time and space in painting. Changing the course that Impressionism had set just a few years earlier, Cézanne sought to render the pictorial experience shareable and fixed once again.

Distant from this position, Helmut Dorner's painting nevertheless appears subject to a fleeting experience, one which is not encapsulated in the work itself, whether in terms of its time or in its space, and which, avoiding some of the certainties that Cézanne entertained, seems to revel in the ephemerality of the visual experience. *One of my ghosts*, the new exhibition presented at the Ehrhardt Flórez Gallery, Dorner's seventh solo show in Madrid, draws on some of the issues that were decisive for the development of painting in the late 19th century. The exhibition combines works from different periods that offer different approaches to the act of painting. Some of the more recent paintings offer more expressive gestures, while others from a few years ago maintain a more uniform logic; yet all of them have undergone and experienced multiple changes that survive in the paintings in the form of echoes, memories or traces. Understanding Dorner's pictorial practice as a flow or current, these pieces give new meaning to everything that has remained in the painting. The viewer's gaze and the painter's experience take place within a new and thrilling experience. Dorner himself, as a painter, not only observes but also submits himself to being looked at by what is happening in the painting.

His painting manifests through the appearance of a multiplicity of internal contradictions. Its somewhat paradoxical compositional architecture generates tensions between the flatness of clean, slippery surfaces and the accidental or erratic nature of impasto. In a 2000 text on Dorner's work, Jean Charles Vergne compared some of his paintings from that period (many of which, it should be noted, contained elements similar to those in his current production) to the contractions, collapses, or arrhythmias of living cellular organisms. Developing a critical theory about spectral painting and the poetics of pictorial language as two fundamental axes of Dorner's practice, he approached his work in relation to force fields, alluding to musicians such as Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern, and linking his painting to an ontological investigation into the notion of pictorial writing in order to rethink the question of language.

In this new exhibition there are paintings constructed with subtle, firm, decisive, and rapid strokes, while others are developed on the basis of smudges, marks, stains, and obsessive, repetitive exercises. There are new versions of previous paintings, supports such as wood or methacrylate, worked on both sides, characteristic of his works from the 1980s and 1990s, and paintings on canvas or hollow wood. While some paintings feature autonomous, monochromatic fields of colour, others offer pared-down signs that draw our gaze back to minimalist pictorial precepts typical of the early 1980s.

If one of the basic themes of painting is the perpetuation of a moment, Dorner breaks with that pattern. We find ourselves before a painting that shuns the preservation of the aesthetic experience and, far from fixing a pictorial act in the memory, reduces it to fleeting moments. Light and colour are visually and conceptually placed above form and narrative. The effects of light on painting, which are particularly important in Dorner's perception of his own work, lead to its continuous alteration and articulate a constantly changing and dissolving gaze. As Eric de Chassey argued in a text about painting as an open space or a space of openness, all of the artist's resources are, in some way, devoted to creating qualities of light that are always different, even when they all share the same absence of limits.

In a condition similar to that suffered by Van Gogh, Dorner could be considered a hyperaesthetic painter, who perceives light and colour with exceptional intensity and is therefore able to discover the imperceptible secrets of lines and shapes. The artist himself said in 1990, on the occasion of his exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bern and the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Nîmes, that in reality 'what we experience are not colours themselves, but coloured tendencies that generate an immensity of perceptions in a way that colours never do.'

Casting his painting into perpetual doubt, as Zola argued about Manet, these new (and not so new) paintings by Dorner contain, in the pure charm of their appearance, an immense clarity and truth.