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Jutta Koether

Songs of New York

8 September -
31 October 2026

Jutta Koether's move from Cologne to New York at the beginning of the 1990s marked a decisive transformation in her practice. Looking back, she described the relocation as a process of "self-displacement" - a conscious distancing from the encumbering Cologne art scene that allowed her to reposition herself. More than a rupture, however, this displacement became the starting point for a transatlantic practice intertwining earlier influences with new contexts.

While the previous exhibition with Jutta Koether at Galerie Buchholz New York focused on her paintings and her experimental writing for Cologne's music magazine SPEX in the early 1980s, our new exhibition begins with works from 1995. These include a large-format copy of a painting Koether acquired with Tom Verlaine at the Chelsea Flea Market, depicting massive colorful spotlights illuminating an otherwise dark Madison Square Garden, and a smaller work made for the exhibition *Warmer Stern* at Galerie Buchholz Cologne in the following year, featuring a central field of abstract gestural marks, a floating record, face, and amplifier that burst out of a grid-like structure.

This dialogue between possibility and constraint continued into the 2000s through exhibitions such as *Songs of New York &c* (1997) at Pat Hearn Gallery and *Extremes Europa* (2002) at Galerie Buchholz. During these years, Koether's painting expanded dramatically, embracing extremes of scale, surface, and gesture: large-format canvases alongside intimate works; pitch-black canvases marked by delicate lines in metallic pens alongside all-over compositions in vivid colors; formless gestural masses alongside grids of controlled painterly marks, smiley-faced heads, and exploding suns. Rather than resolving these oppositions, her paintings use them as simultaneous productive states.

For Koether, one important recurrent reference point was William Blake's early Romantic illuminated book *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, in which poetry and painting converge to confront the conflicting but inseparable states that constitute human existence. Koether's engagement with Blake was not limited to her paintings: in 1996, she named her new SPEX column *Songs of New York*, in which she traced her transatlantic position in writing. The page and the canvas, again, became parallel spaces of production: the rectangular geometry of the journalist's office overlapped with that of the painter's studio, forming a multidimensional site of production.

While Koether's writing within these texts remained experimental in its perspectives and language, it gradually moved toward a more journalistic form, particularly in contrast to her earlier 1980s column written under the pseudonym Mrs. Benway. This transformation unfolded alongside the painterly expansion of the same period. Increasingly, writing migrated more freely into the paintings themselves, recalling Blake's illuminated landscapes: a complex construction in which image and text cannot be separated, and in which the dialectic of enclosure and openness brings forward a new way of working.

Songs of New York is the second exhibition of Jutta Koether curated by Tonio Kröner and Christopher Müller, following “1982, 1983, 1984” at Galerie Buchholz New York in 2024. This is our eleventh solo exhibition with the artist since our first show with her in Cologne in 1996. Jutta Koether (1958, Cologne) lives and works between New York, Berlin, and Cologne. The Kunst Museum Winterthur will open a new solo exhibition of Jutta Koether on September 12 at Villa Flora.

Koether's work was the subject of a comprehensive survey exhibition at Museum Brandhorst in Munich and at Mudam in Luxembourg in 2018 and 2019. Exhibitions of her work have been held at Artium Museoa in Vitoria-Gasteiz (2022), Museum Abteiberg in Mönchengladbach (2019), Dundee Contemporary Arts (2013), Moderna Museet in Stockholm (2011), Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (2009), Kunsthalle Bern (2007), and Kölnischer Kunstverein (2006). Koether programmatically connects her painting to performance, music, and textual production; present and past collaborators include Tom Verlaine (1940-2023), Reena Spaulings, Steven Parrino, John Miller, Tony Conrad, Kim Gordon, and others. From 2010-2024, Koether was Professor of Painting and Drawing at the Hamburg University of Fine Arts, and previously taught at Columbia University, Cooper Union School of Art and School of Visual Art in New York City, Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, Yale University in New Haven, and Universität der Künste in Berlin, among others.

Her works are included in the collections of international museums including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles; Berlin National Gallery; Museum Brandhorst in Munich; Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Vienna, Museum Ludwig Cologne, and Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.