

# GALLERI NICOLAI WALLNER

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**Poul Gernes**

*Paintings, Sculptures, Flags, etc.*

January 18 – March 16

Galleri Nicolai Wallner is pleased to present *Paintings, sculptures, flags, etc.* a solo exhibition of works by Poul Gernes.

Poul Gernes (1925 - 1996, Denmark) was a painter, sculptor and performance-artist. Active from the 1940s through the rest of his life, he sought to redefine ideas regarding public space and social practices. Known for his bold use of colour and geometric forms, this incredibly graphic style made use of every-day objects and materials. Celebrating a return to decorative arts, his works communicated a strong belief that art is for everyone. Playfully radical, this influence can be seen throughout a generation of artists in Scandinavia as well as internationally, with many younger artists building on his iconic style and his insistence on a social and participant-based idea of art.

Throughout his career Poul Gernes worked alongside his wife, Aase Seidler Gernes (1927 -2018, Denmark). An artist in her own right, Aase Gernes worked primarily with textiles until the mid-60s when she put her own artistic practice on hold. She became an active partner alongside Poul Gernes in the realisation of the Gernes project, and would do so until his death. In the coming year, Galleri Nicolai Wallner will explore the relationship between Aase Gernes' practice and her fundamental work on the Gernes project.

Gernes' paintings are built on a repetition of forms and colour. Often working in series, Gernes would use a leading principle, for instance a coloured dot on a monochrome background with varying colour combinations. This systematic way of painting was, for Gernes, a way of removing his importance as the creator of the works, as the artist. An experience or understanding of the work was thus directly seen as something between the viewer and the work, without needing the artist to function as a kind of middleman.

This directness can also be seen with Gernes' sculptures. With his work *Katamaranen* from 1967, Gernes built a boat, which was used for sailing while at the same time was conceived of as a work of art. Its form and function are familiar to us, as Gernes' stripes and drawings decorate both hulls and flowered textile fabrics used to cover the middle bars. His plaster sculptures continue his use of everyday objects, making casts of boxes used to hold bottles, as well as dessert-like towers made of fluffy meringue and whipped cream shapes that sit one on top of the other, oozing out at the sides. Spontaneous and playful, there is a physicality inherent in the works and the plaster material that conveys a more performative quality and a sense of excitement.

The idea of accessibility within Gernes' practice is underlined by his insistence on art having a strong social function. One of art's fundamental purposes was to better the life of those around it. As such, Gernes did not shy away from the cultural and political debates, but rather integrate them into his practice. Completed in 1972, *Untitled (Suggestions for a European Community Flag)* was made in direct response to Denmark's entrance into the European Community (now the EU). Contrasting the systematic nature of the paintings, each flag is unique and made with varying textiles of different patterns and colours—much like the ones used in *Katamaranen*. All different while at the same time working under a unified aesthetic, the flags reflect the diverse yet common nature of the European nation.

For Poul Gernes, there simply was—and is—no difference between art and life.

Poul Gernes (1925 - 1996, Denmark) has had work exhibited around the world. In 1988, he represented Denmark at the Venice Biennale, and since his passing he has received international acclaim, with solos at Deichtorhallen (Hamburg), and Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (Humlebaek) and at Documenta 12. His mark can also be seen throughout Denmark's landscape, notably with Copenhagen's brightly coloured Palads movie theatre, the exterior of which he created in 1989, alongside almost 150 other decorative projects in the country. His design of the interior of Herlev Hospital—completed in 1976—is still in use, and remains the largest artistic decoration to date in Denmark.