
Philipp von Rosen Galerie

Martin Gerwers

New Works

Opening September 3, 2021, 11am – 10pm

Exhibition from September 4 through November 6, 2021

Martin Gerwers' works, we show three new three-dimensional works as well as paintings, are situated in a field of tension between painting and sculpture. With them he investigates the relationship between color and space. For the viewer, the expansive paintings and sculptures, which are characterized by their multi-visuality, can only be fully experienced when he / she actively walks around the multi-colored objects. This results in a multitude of visual impressions - depending on the viewpoint.

And, of course, the perception of the original is of utmost importance in other respects as well. This is particularly evident in the sculpture *Untitled (July)*. It appears as if the opaque, black surfaces we initially see were velvety, closed surfaces. In fact, however, they are black holes that only appear impervious. This side of the object is simply an open side of a volume based on a triangular ground plan and pointed at the back. And it seems to be black in its interior. Black? No, not quite, we are talking about surfaces that, on closer inspection, turn out to be extremely dark red or brown, or dark blue.

We know this phenomenon, that you have to look very long to see colors at all, from the work of Ad Reinhardt. Only after prolonged observation do our eyes begin to assign the nine individual squares of his paintings to differentiated colors. A glimpse at the reproduction does not give us the experience of color. In the same way, Martin Gerwers' work depends on the concentrated perception by the natural eye, stretched out in time.

All three sculptures in the exhibition are highly sensitive in terms of their stability. And here lies a remarkable difference to many three-dimensional works of art from the USA of the 1960s and 1970s. For even if sculptures by Richard Serra seem highly unstable, they are in fact rather stable – and thus quite different from the works of Martin Gerwers, whose individual elements balance on top of each other in an unstable position and give us the impression that they might fall at any moment.

But it is not only works by Serra that we can think of when we see Gerwers' objects, but also – for example – some works by Donald Judd, which do not collapse because each element serves the static: the wire ropes create tension between the side parts and those in front. This results in a balanced whole that nonetheless appears light and unstable. However, while Judd's object is transparent not only with regard to some elements of the material used, but basically also overall with regard to the possibility of understanding the statics, Gerwers obscures this understanding. It is precisely not readily apparent that his objects actually remain standing as they are.

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Other American sculptures from the 1960s and 1970s that are described with the attribute „minimal“ and that can be related to Gerwers for this reason alone are, for example, those by Robert Morris. But here, too, Morris's structures are transparent and readable from the beginning, while Gerwer's works remain opaque and mysterious.

The comparisons between Gerwers and the earlier examples of three-dimensional art are meaningful because they can be used to understand particular qualities in Gerwers' work. Unlike his U.S. colleagues, he is not concerned with avoiding everything that has been branded „European“ in the United States: narration, mysticism, relationality, to name just a few keywords. Rather, he is concerned with creating just that: an experience full of mysticism, and surprise.

This also applies to his handling of color: in Gerwers' work, it is not inherent in the materials, but applied. And this process takes place with brushstrokes that are sometimes still visible, or at any rate with a still perceptible trace of „being made“ (as opposed to „being produced“). And perhaps the most important difference to the Americans is that for Gerwers the composition, the – in the close, Latin sense of the word – putting together of the colors, is of the highest importance – subjective and strongly dependent on his own sense of color. At the same time, he plays with the possibilities of materials and their aesthetic effect, because he creates some of the surfaces mirror-smooth and perfect (or has had them made in a paint shop for cars). This means that for Gerwers there is not an either / or, but a this and that and thus we see both: clear, minimalist forms in space, which – at first glance – are transparent and into which we can partly look and grasp the internal structure. And at the same time, we do not readily understand the unstably assembled forms. Rather, it is even so that it is hardly possible to memorize / remember in the circumvention of the sculptures what was there before and how it was put together and what it looked like.

Let me say a word about the sharp edges of the objects and how the colors on them are perceived: for each element on a triangular ground plan we can always see only two colors. This is a process that can almost be described as digital: we see something blue and black or blue and gray or gray and black. But we do not see the respective reverse side of the volume that has just been brought into focus. Transparency à la Judd or Frank Stella („what you see is what you get“) is not given. This process is „digital“ because, with regard to the color combinations, there is only a one way or the other, no mixed colors, and also not the perception of three colors on one sculptural element at the same time.

That Martin Gerwers originally comes from painting and has made a name for himself with painting (he was, for example, the winner of the prestigious Ars Viva art prize of the Federation of German Industries [BDI] in 1996) becomes clear when one considers the paintings from the exhibition. These paintings, which are painted on wood and emerge into the room, can be read as

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two-dimensional unwindings of one sculpture each. All three horizontally juxtaposed surfaces can be understood as respective sides of an object on a triangular ground plan, so that one can imagine turning the flat panels into objects again and then placing three elements on top of each other.

Finally, two aspects should be emphasized here: on the one hand, it is the being-made by the artist of these works, which are quasi-perfect, but do not exhibit a 100% perfection reserved for industrial processes. Thus they create for us as recipients the possibility of establishing a relationship on a human level. On the other hand, the concept of poetry should be brought into play. Martin Gerwers' works have an effect that eludes or transcends our language and cognitive judgments. This is something that Minimal Artists have tried to avoid at all costs. But here, with Gerwers, life, perceptible experience, and thus a form of happiness emerges.

Philipp von Rosen, September 2021

For further information and / or images, please contact the gallery.