
Philipp von Rosen Galerie

Martin Gerwers

Ascending Descending

Exhibition from August 31 to October 26, 2024

Opening on August 30, 2024, 6 – 9 pm

With *Ascending Descending*, we are showing Martin Gerwers' third solo exhibition in our gallery. In the very first room, he has installed a series of new works, *Steps*, arranged and loosely spread as if they were people engaged in conversation in groups. We are also showing four two-part paintings in oil and acrylic on wood as well as – and this is a first – seven works on and made of paper.

Describing the *Steps* as “sculptures”, i.e. as three-dimensional works that – according to the classic definitions – are created either by removing or shaping material, does not seem to be the right way to go, given the fact that these objects are located in space like lines and surfaces, depending on the angle of view. Rather, one could think of choosing the term “marking” in space. Basically, these works, which on the one hand have a very high aesthetic, that is a spatially perceptible or perceived presence, but on the other hand are not actual spatial bodies, can almost be compared to the mathematical concept of lines and surfaces: while the line is an (abstract) coherent, one-dimensional geometric structure without transverse extension, the surface is a two-dimensional subset of three-dimensional space. And this is also how Martin Gerwers' *Steps* can be seen and understood.

Such an extreme reduction of what we have described in previous exhibitions as “painting in space” is something we have never seen before from Gerwers. The pylons that he has shown in previous exhibitions in our gallery or in the Leopold Hoesch Museum in Düren or most recently – truly monumental and spectacular – in St. Peter's in Cologne, can also be experienced – again, depending on the angle of view – as colored surfaces in space. As soon as you move around them, however, it becomes clear that they are pyramidal bodies on a quadrangular or triangular ground plan. In contrast, when you walk around the *Steps*, the surface is reduced to a zigzag line that does not actually appear to have any spatial, physical extension.

It is fitting that Martin Gerwers was inspired to create the staircase theme by a text by Samuel Beckett, *The Lost Ones*. Beckett describes a group of people who are trapped without orientation and uselessly in a labyrinthine space structured by stairs, ascents and descents, who can neither escape nor do anything meaningful with their situation. Although the paths provided by the stairs do exist, they only have the character of a reference – and now we come back to Gerwers – and no actual function. On an art-historical level, Gerwers' vertical *Steps* and above all their perception in motion can be described as related to Sol LeWitt's *Cube Structures*, whose vertical sides also enter into intensive optical relationships with each other and make perspectives and overlaps tangible. And of course we can also think of Fred Sandback's sculptures, which use threads alone to create structures and bodies in space.

The above-mentioned pylons in the room were the starting point for the works on paper as well as for the two-part paintings on wood from our exhibition: Gerwers has painted on each part of the works a standing (with the tip pointing upwards – the lower part) and a hanging (with the tip pointing downwards – the upper part), very elongated triangle and has surrounded these triangles on the left and right by further shapes (they can be described as obliquely cut rectangles). In some cases the tips meet, in others they are set apart. The tips can always be read as vanishing points in an imaginary space and the horizontal edges of the picture, which abut each other, as horizons of an abstract landscape. But: the supposedly visible landscape is transferred into a different, more abstract state by the subtle and highly sensitive color compositions that Gerwers has created and applied to his geometric forms. In the same way, the geometries that define the picture surfaces disintegrate into worlds of color in which it is difficult to focus on the mathematically describable forms. Rather – and here we return to a formulation that we already used three years ago in a text – we can speak of “poetry” in Gerwers' work (even if this term seems somewhat worn out), because his works have an effect that eludes or transcends our language and our cognitive judgments. Gerwers creates life, a perceptible experience and thus a form of happiness.

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