

Günther Förg

Häuser und Fenster

Bleibtreustraße 45, 10623 Berlin

19 January – 24 February 2024

Opening: Friday, 19 January, 6 – 8 pm

Galerie Max Hetzler is pleased to present *Häuser und Fenster*, a solo exhibition of work by **Günther Förg** at Bleibtreustraße 45, in Berlin.

Günther Förg's comprehensive and multidisciplinary oeuvre, which spans five decades, includes painting, drawing and murals as well as sculpture and photography. The focus is on material, colour and space. The artist's experimental approach to abstraction and monochrome painting was directed against the trend towards figuration that prevailed in Germany in the 1980s. His works made continuous reference to 20th century modernism, whose utopia he critically questioned. In this context, he engaged with art movements as diverse as early modernism, referencing artists such as Edvard Munch, or the American abstract expressionists including Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman and Cy Twombly. Elements of conceptual art can also be found throughout Förg's work and additionally challenge traditional interpretations.

The current exhibition highlights Förg's varied methods of creation. In addition to works on canvas, wood and Canson paper, the artist's lead paintings are on display, in which he painted directly onto the metal. Förg also worked extensively with photography. Although some of his photographs appear monumental due to their large format, which was uncommon for the time, and their clearly composed details are reminiscent of painting, they nevertheless retain the immediacy of a snapshot. Thematically, Förg mostly focussed on the modern architecture of the 1920s and 1930s, as in the work *Häuser und Fenster* from 1987, which gives our exhibition its title, and can be seen as exemplary for a large part of his photographic oeuvre. The windows in the artist's works are structural elements which, instead of offering a view, redirect the gaze back onto both the exhibition space and their own physical presence. The characteristic grid pattern, which again represents a link to modern art, recurs in various forms.

In *Häuser und Fenster*, the view is obscured by the glaring daylight, whilst in *Untitled*, 2000, a tree appears directly in front of the window, blocking the view. This impression of non-transparency is reinforced by the heavy wooden frames and the reflective glass of the larger photographs, such as the series 'Bauhaus', from 1991. On this pictorial technique, the artist would explain: 'The architecture of the exhibition space is mirrored in the glass surface, so that when you look at the photos, you see yourself and a game begins. The exhibition space is no longer neutral.'¹



Günther Förg, *Eva*, 1998
Photo: Bernhard Strauss

¹ Günther Förg, quoted in *A Fragile Beauty*, Stedelijk, 2018, p. 88

At the same time, Förg also created large-format portraits of his female friends from his immediate surroundings, such as the photograph *Eva*, from 1998. Förg himself liked to combine architectural photographs in small and large formats with his photographic portraits from the 1980s onwards. Despite the different media, all works are thematically closely linked. *Farbfeld* and *Untitled*, both from 1986, are similarly geometrically reduced in their form, evoking the work of the Colour Field painters of the 1950s. By using lead as a painting surface, which continues to transform through oxidation, Förg's practice questions the methods of traditional painting and the purity sought in modern art. Although he refers to abstract expressionism, his works embody a particular lightness and detachment, unbound by the moral convictions of the movement. Transcending the boundaries between different art movements, Förg's oeuvre and his critical approach to the principles of modern art has remained an inspiration for generations of contemporary artists.

Günther Förg (1952–2013) was born in Füssen and died in Freiburg, having lived and worked in Areuse, Switzerland. The artist was a professor at the University of Arts and Design, Karlsruhe, and later at the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich. His work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions at international institutions, including the Long Museum, Shanghai (2023); Palazzo Contarini Polignac, Venice (2019); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Dallas Museum of Art (both 2018); MEWO Kunsthalle Memmingen (2016); Deichtorhallen, Hamburg (2015); Fundación Luis Seoane, A Coruña; Museum Brandhorst, Munich (both 2014); Museo Carlo Bilotti, Rome (2013); Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg (2008); Tokyo Museum of Contemporary Art; Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris (both 1991); and Secession, Vienna (1990).

Förg's works are held in major public collections including the Art Institute of Chicago; Fondation Beyeler, Basel; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Saint Louis Art Museum; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Tate, London; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

Further exhibitions and events

Berlin:

3 November 2023 – 10 February 2024

Richard Prince

Body

Potsdamer Straße 77–87, 10785

19 January – 2 March 2024

Jake Longstreth

American Heat

Goethestraße 2-3, 10623

19 January – 2 March 2024

Jake Longstreth

Springtime at the Scottsdale, Arizona Walmart

Bleibtreustraße 15/16, 10623

Paris:

13 January – 17 February 2024

Grace Weaver

Hotel Paintings

46 & 57 rue du Temple, 75004

London:

11 January – 17 February 2024

Karel Appel

CoBrA | Non-CoBrA

curated by Franz W. Kaiser

41 Dover Street, W1S 4NS

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