



SAMIZDAT ONLINE / REVIEW

## RON GORCHOV / GALERIE MAX HETZLER, BERLIN

APRIL 23, 2018



WILLIAM KHERBEK

In the run up to Berlin's Gallery Weekend, Galerie Max Hetzler seems to have taken a cue from the American hip hop artist, Waka Flocka Flame, whose hit song "Hard in da Paint" – originally a basketball metaphor – accurately sums up their current pair of exhibitions. Both of Hetzler's Berlin spaces are dedicated to shows of work by household names – or names that should be. In the Galerie's space off Goethestrasse, the works of Julian Schnabel and Albert Oehlen bring new meaning to the expression "big picture". One doesn't get much harder into the (literal) paint than these two. Almost everything that can usefully be said about these two worthies has already been said, and that exhibition, while likely a thriller for fans, is not particularly packed with surprises. If you know and/or love either or both painters, it's a must-see; if not, there's nothing on show that particularly redefines either artist's idiom. A quieter, perhaps even more engrossing show, however, can be found at the Hetzler's space on Bleibtreustrasse; it is a solo exhibition of recent paintings by the Chicago-born American painter Ron Gorchov. Gorchov has been exhibiting since 1960 when the then-thirty-year-old painter was shown as part of the Whitney Museum's Young America exhibition, and he enjoyed a solo show at the legendary Tibor de Nagy Gallery, from which the painters of the post-war New York School came to prominence. Gorchov's work is less representational than the notable names of that tradition, for example, Fairfield Porter, or Larry Rivers, but seeing his new works now, more than fifty years on from that first blaze of glory, I was struck both by how current they feel, and how little strain they seem to take in bending, sometimes literally, the viewer's expectations.





Gorchov is perhaps best known for his innovative approach to the painterly support. His works, abstract, sometimes dreamily rendered oils are executed on specially constructed canvases that resist tyrannies of the traditional rectilinear picture plane. In an age defined by digital aesthetics and sprawling installations, relational head-trips, and research-centric inversions of the artistic process, one would think there would be little radical to find in the work of a painter like Gorchov. What, really, is so mind-bending about softening the canvas' edge and creating a vaguely concave structure that, many critics have noted, often resembles a saddle? Without delving into the wild west mythos that the shape evokes for many – perhaps a logical aesthetic reference point for an artist of Gorchov's age – the works' modest otherness still expresses a singularity that repays dedicated attention. The evocative titles given to the works in the Hetzler show, often referencing mythology, as with "Prometheus" or "Jocasta", may strike some as backward looking, but like Cy Twombly at his best, for example in Twombly's late period masterworks from the "Lepanto" series, Gorchov's compositionally minimal works seem to probe the tensions between the ostensible timelessness and universality of the European mythology and the prerogatives of abstraction. The works have an iconicity but also a specificity, and, one should note, a distinctly harmonious comfort in each other's presence. The dialogues between works in the show are as important as any Gorchov seeks to establish with mythological traditions. Reference dynamics don't only point one direction, as in "Ascella" from 2017, a set of stacked panels assembled on the gallery's northern wall, for instance calls to mind the works of a contemporary artist like Marlie Mul. Gorchov's own approach is, of course more concerned with traditional painterly questions and while his works go more softly into the paint than Oehlen and Schnabel, his work runs equally deep despite, or perhaps because of, its less bombastic register.

RON GORCHOV  
GALERIE MAX HETZLER  
BLEIBTREUSTRASSE 45  
10623 BERLIN  
WWW.MAXHETZLER.COM

Images courtesy of Galerie Max Hetzler and the artist.