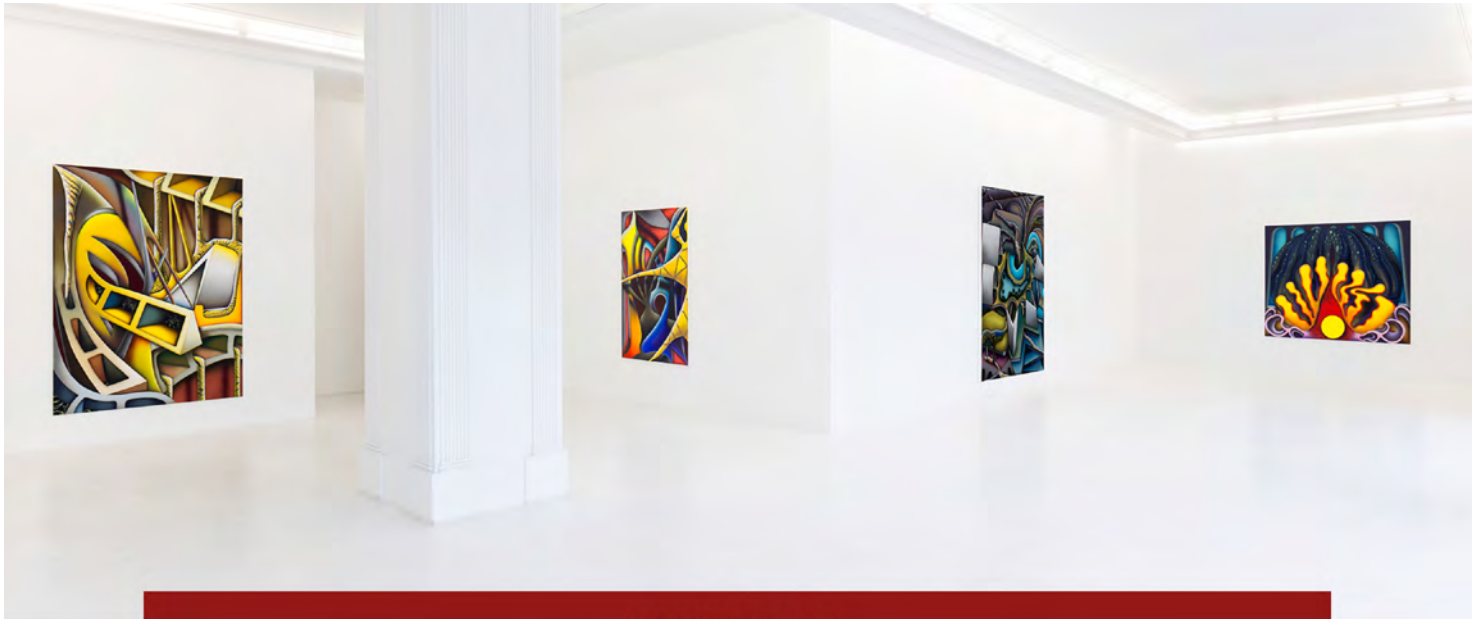


METAL



H A R M G E R D E S

F O L L O W I N G H I S I N T U I T I O N

“Personally, I struggle to describe my own style in a few sentences because that’s exactly what I’m working against,” resolutely replies the painter Harm Gerdes, who now encourages us to visit his new exhibition, *Synthetic Spirits*, at Peres Projects, Berlin, until July 8th. And it is that, as he says, his works have a second life if you see them in person. From how the light is reflected on the surface of his paintings to the nuances in the vibrant colors, the five new pieces that he now presents in his my first large solo show – he previously presented a debut exhibition at the gallery that could be considered a prelude to this one – speak for themselves. Are you ready to discover all his influences and details?

Before we start, could you introduce yourself to our readers?

My name is Harm Gerdes and I am a painter, currently living and working in a town called Darmstadt near Frankfurt. I studied Fine Arts at the art academy in Düsseldorf.

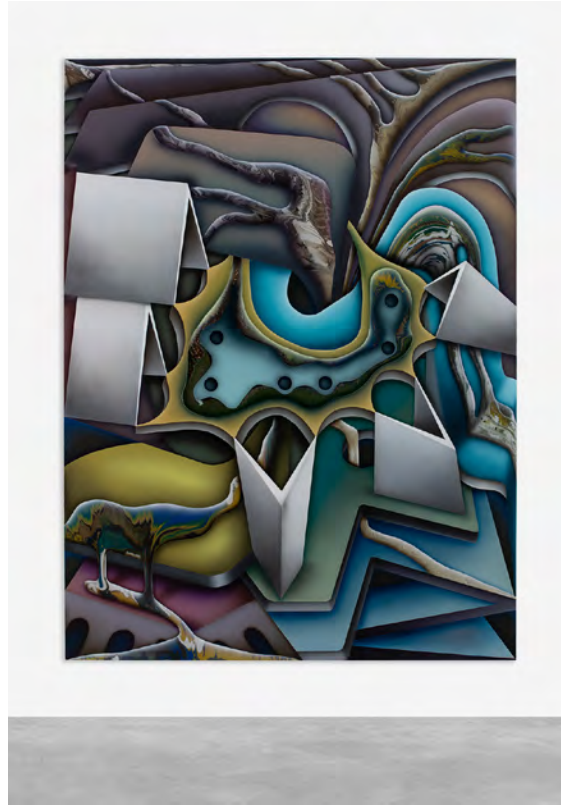
Now you’re presenting your second solo exhibition at Peres Projects in Berlin, *Synthetic Spirits*, until next July 8. But tell us first about the first exhibition you unveiled at the gallery. What balance do you make and why have you decided to choose this privileged location again?

Staying with the Trouble was my first exhibition at the gallery last September, which could be considered as a prelude to *Synthetic Spirits* which is my first large solo show. I am presenting five new paintings, most of them in large formats. The question of balance is omnipresent throughout my artistic journey. It is something that I deal with on the canvas, such as in *Terminals* (2022) or *Rollercoaster* (2022). Balancing out forms and colour with the viewer’s expectations and the gallery architecture, as well as on a personal level in my daily life – where do I rest and recharge before I start a new working phase? And so on...

How was your first approach to the world of art? Do you remember what was the first piece of work you did?

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I grew up in an artistic environment, in a household with my parents who love music and have always been interested in art. We had some art catalogues in our house and I remember one with pastels and drawings by Picasso, which completely absorbed me as a teenager. The first 'artwork' I created was a couple of years later. It is a 40 x 20 cm oil on paper painting with a figure that's made out of blocks, like an Antony Gormley sculpture standing in front of a very simple black and white background. Of course, at the time I had no idea who Antony Gormley was.



Your creative method is marked by experimentation, isn't it? And I am very interested in knowing more about the processes and phases you follow in the artistic process. Can you tell us more about this?

Of course. Actually, many factors led me to paint the way that I do now and it developed very naturally. I started painting in oil but had to give it up, as I became sensitive to the smells and solvents. Actually, my interest was never only in painting. During my time at the art academy, I learned how to work with wood, plastic, metal and plaster, and experimented with many other formats. I found it very interesting to try out these techniques because each of them really determines the output. If you work with wood for example and you want to build a structure or a sculpture, you definitely need to do some planning before; otherwise you're at risk of it collapsing. Since I first sketch out my paintings so I can focus on other aspects of the work while painting, such as colour and appearance, I definitely relate to this more intense form of planning you'd need to build a sculpture.

What is intuition for you and how do you take advantage of it in your artistic work? Would you say that this is the basis on which you build your work?

Following my intuition has turned out to be the most important part of my practice. Even though the way I work is very planned and strategic, I intuitively decide at every phase of the process what to do. I don't have rules that I follow. I have an idea about the quality I want my works to have but at the same time renegotiate with every new work.

Drawing on influences such as Hilma af Klint and Giorgio De Chirico, your work leaves no one indifferent. The strength of colours, shapes... How would you define your personal style?

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against. I think you really need to look at my work and maybe that's enough already. But if we'd met on a train and you had asked me what I paint, I'd say abstract and intense works that deal a lot with space and colour. Then I would probably grab my phone and just show some of them to you... Nonetheless, I think a lot of artistic traces are visible and if you have a trained eye you can see a lot of influences.

And beyond other painters or artists, who inspires you? Do you have any specific references?

I find it really interesting to think about how our history is changing and how this is reflected in art.



Each painting has its own spirit and character, as you have mentioned on previous occasions. Tell us about the DNA of the different pieces that you now present. How are they all alike and how are they different?

One thing that unifies all the paintings is the process of how I made them and their materiality. I would say that both *Terminals* (2022) and *Rollercoaster* (2022) are about complexity, and about an agitation between the fore and background which creates a field of vision that the viewer can lose themselves within. In contrast to this, *Falling Stars* (2022) is more iconic. It's a symmetric composition and seems at first glance easier to decipher. In this work the mystery lies in its poetry - what's the sun about, for example? Or is it even a sun? Where are these arches coming from and what's the whole scenery about? This is why I called the show *Synthetic Spirits*. United in materiality and diverse in character and spirit.

How do you assess the current art market? Is it difficult to make a living from painting?

I think the number of opportunities is incredible and I can only encourage people to take the risk and try things out.

Why should people come to Peres Projects to see your exhibition first-hand?

My works have a second life if you see them in person. There are so many details you can only see if you are standing in front of them – how the light is reflected on the surface of the works for example, when you see how the colours shift as you change your position or the details you can see when you can get very close.

And if we think about the future, what are your next projects? Are you already working on other exhibitions?

The studio never sleeps and right now I am in the process of setting up another studio in a city in the South of Europe.

Words: David Alarcón