

KALTBLUT.



Johanna Urbancik·Art·December 12, 2021

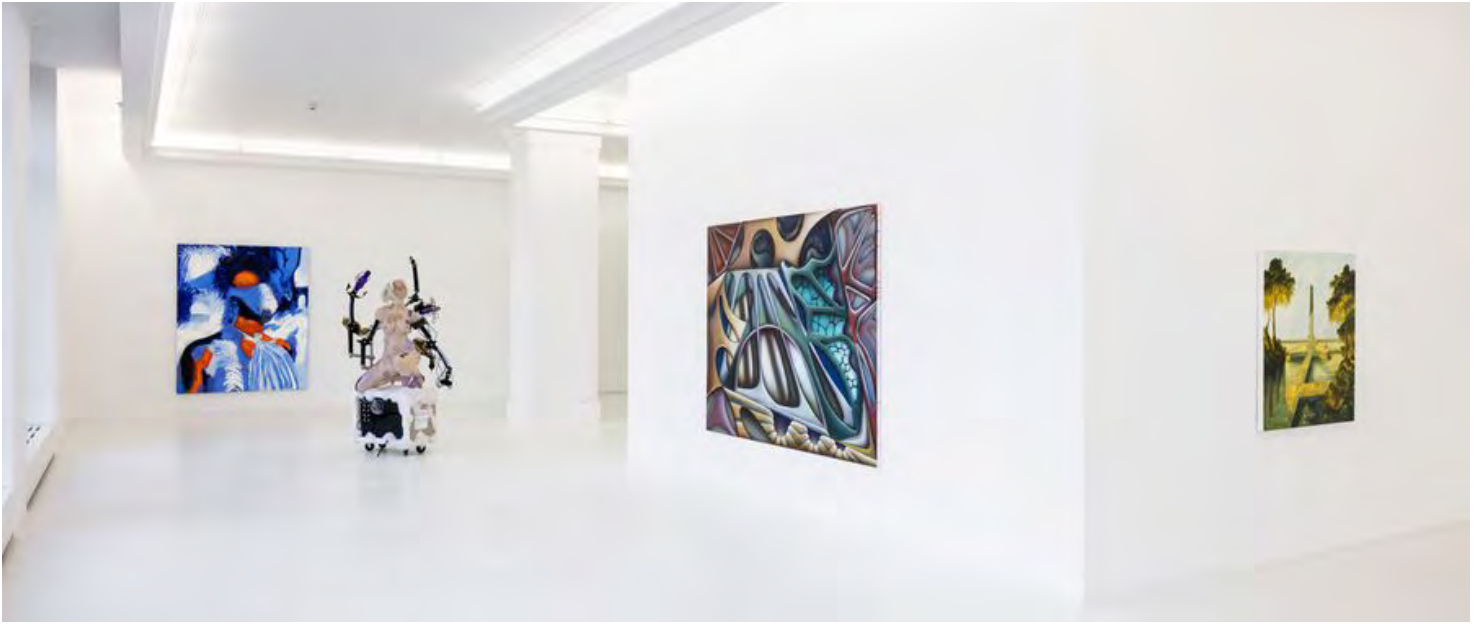
“Colour in a painting is like the tonality of a song” – In conversation with Harm Gerdes

German painter Harm Gerdes’ work seems surreal, blending abstract compositions of both colour and materiality. Having hosted his first solo exhibition, *Staying with the Trouble*, at Peres Projects this year, he’s now returned to contribute to the gallery’s group exhibition *Utopia*.

‘Utopia’ explores the imagery of mysticism as a vehicle for understanding the complexity and ambiguity of contemporary life and our unstable realities. It will run until the 7th of January at Peres Project’s and feature works from Sholto Blissett, Harm Gerdes, Nicholas Grafia, Donna Huanca, Bayrol Jiménez, Shuang Li, Cajsá von Zeipel and Ziping Wang.

KALTBLUT caught up with Harm Gerdes to discuss his work and his connection to video games, even if he himself doesn’t really play them.

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KALTBLUT: Congrats on your installation in the Utopia exhibition at Peres Projects! Can you tell me a little bit about the work you contributed?

Harm Gerdes: Thank you, I'm very happy to be part of it. I'm showing one large painting in the exhibition. It's an abstract work, that investigates tension, biomorphic forms and visual complexity. I wanted to create organic chaos tessellating the canvas as well as evoke different sensations – like looking at your skin and seeing your tendons span beneath it while moving for example. Various elements in the painting seem stretched, some are reminiscent of cells or nerves. The frame of the painting plays an important role in acting as the end of tendons, the entity that allows the forms to span.

KALTBLUT: The exhibition seems to be heavily inspired and influenced by mysticism. How does your work relate to that theme usually?

Harm Gerdes: I think what's interesting about the term mysticism is that it's so vague. Does it mean the non-rational or is it the spiritual? To me, it's about trusting your instinct while working. My painting process is usually very intuitive and the way I generate ideas for paintings is as well. Working feels more like I'm constantly trying to figure something out rather than having a clear concept that I'm following. In this way, I feel very connected to artists to whom the concept of mysticism played an important role, such as Joseph Beuys, Hilma af Klint or Emma Kunz.

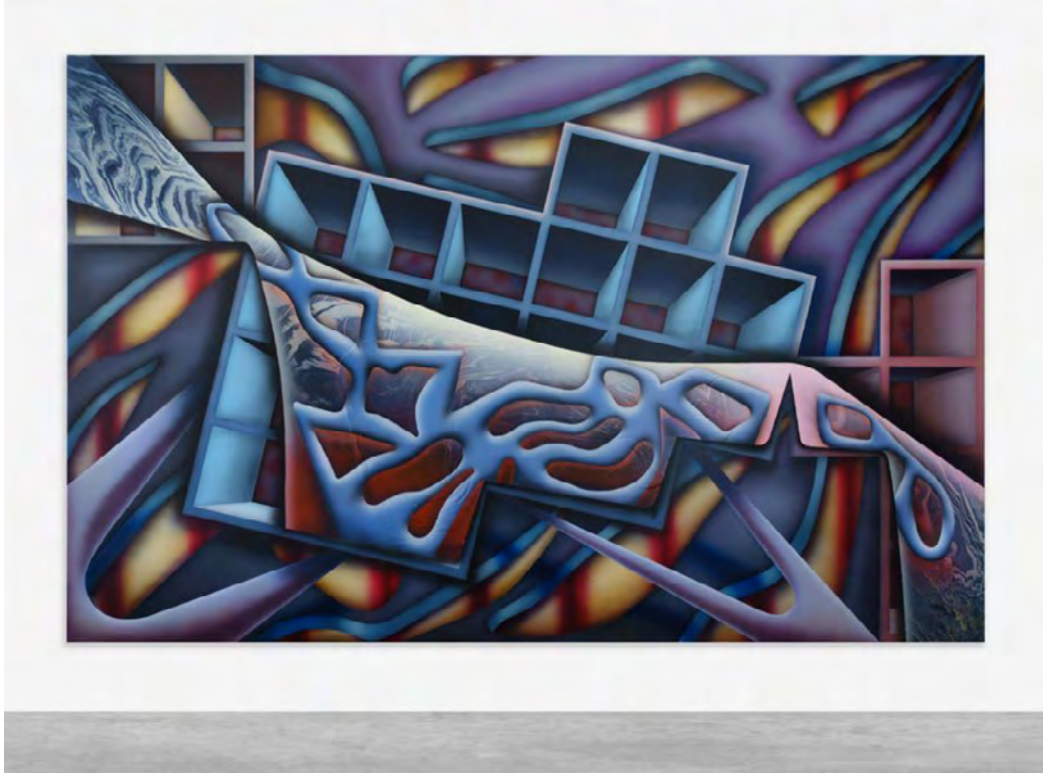
KALTBLUT: Your work is very abstract and you use very earthy colours. How do you choose the colours for your work?

Harm Gerdes: Sometimes I start the paintings with a few specific tones that I want to use or see next to each other. The first couple of colours usually determine the rest. I choose them very intuitively and use easily a hundred tones and hues in a painting. If the graphical qualities of a painting are more important to me, I'll calm down the colour, as I did for the painting in the show. If I want it to be "louder" I'll use clearer tones. Colour in a painting is like the tonality of a song.

KALTBLUT: It's incredible, when looking at your paintings it's very hard to figure out whether your work is digital or "real". Was that your intention?

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Harm Gerdes: I definitely like the ambivalence of it. Moving between off and online feels very natural to me and somehow this translates into my paintings. Getting there has to do with artistic decisions like using a super flat canvas where no texture is visible to create a fascination similar to looking at a high res display. Seeing the texture of a canvas feels like looking at a pixelated screen to me. You also won't see any brush strokes, as I'm working with an airbrush which makes the gradients even smoother. I'm putting this very clean and digital looking technique in contrast with a very spontaneous material, poured colour that balances it out. This contributes to the "confusion" between the natural and the robotic.



KALTBLUT: Your art really reminds me of video games somehow. Are video games playing a role in your work?

Harm Gerdes: I do not play any video games, but I have always been fascinated by their aesthetics. I think it's a more general interest in computer-generated images.

KALTBLUT: You've had your first solo exhibition at Peres Projects in Berlin recently. How did it feel to have your own exhibition? How do you want people to look at your art?

Harm Gerdes: Having had my first solo exhibition feels great. Seeing the paintings in the gallery is a nice way to reflect on them. I've always wanted my art to be very accessible. I think you can look at it from very different perspectives and get engaged. It's a celebration.

Utopia runs from 26th November to 7th January 7, 2022. Find out more about the group exhibition [here](#).