



Galleria Giampaolo Abbondio

Gerhard Merz

Gerhard Merz was born in Mammendorf, Germany in 1947. He lives and works in Berlin and Pescia. Among the many solo exhibitions are: Accademia Tedesca Villa Massimo, Roma (2011), Kunsthaus Bregenz (2003), Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2002), Kunstverein Hannover (2000) Helmhaus Zürich (1998), Kunsthaus Bregenz (1998), Padiglione Tedesco, Biennale di Venezia (1997), Kunst-Werke, Berlin (1995), Kunsthalle Basel (1995), Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (1994), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles (1992), Deichtorhallen, Hamburgo (1992), Kunsthalle, Hamburgo (1992), De Appel, Amsterdam (1990), Kunstverein Hannover (1990), Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1989), Kunsthalle Zürich, Zurigo (1989), Kunsthalle Baden-Baden (1987), Le Consortium, Dijon (1987), Kunstverein München, Monaco di Baviera (1986), Kunstverein Kassel (1984), Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh (1983), Kunstraum München (1982), Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven (1980), Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Monaco di Baviera (1978), Kabinett für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremerhaven (1978), Kunstraum München (1975). In 1983 he won the renowned "Arnold Bode Preis".

Professor at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf (1991-2004) and at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich (2004-2011), where he studied from 1963 to 1973.



Rissa in galleria II, pigment on canvas, 2017

ÇA IRA | GERHARD MERZ

curated by Frank Boehm

Galleria Giampaolo Abbondio - Piazza Garibaldi7, Todi (PG)
12.02.2025 - 08.09.2025

For over half a century, Gerhard Merz has challenged audiences with work that is at once lucid and profoundly complex. From his very first exhibition at the Kunstverein München in 1971, the artist established the enduring theoretical foundation of his practice. An early photograph—depicting a tear bar, a steel ruler, and a light bulb package—emerges as a manifesto that remains relevant to this day. Proportion, order, light, and—just as in that initial exhibition—geometric fields of color constitute the essential and self-sufficient means for an art that aspires to the absolute. Even here, one discerns the early signs of a transcendence of genre boundaries. Inspired by revolutionary architecture, Merz's work dissolves the distinctions between model and realization, between the conception of painting, space, and architecture.

In the ensuing decades, Merz took part in the most significant artistic manifestations, including four editions of Documenta in Kassel (1977, 1982, 1987, 1992), Westkunst in Cologne (1981), Von hier aus in Düsseldorf (1984), Chambres d'Amis in Ghent (1986), and the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (1997).



Ça Ira, pigment on canvas, 2025

For the latter, he conceived a white room within the pavilion, where the structure and the glow of thousands of fluorescent tubes transformed the visit into a unique, almost physical experience, erasing all historical and design connotations of the building. Since then, he has exhibited large-scale paintings and sculptures—some at architectural dimensions—in numerous solo exhibitions.

Merz advocates for a radical disillusionment, a purification of art from deceptive content, randomness, approximation, messages, and themes that claim to mirror contemporary concerns. In this stance, he stands in opposition to the prevailing tendencies of contemporary art. "Merz seems to portray an emptiness in his work that implies neither transcendence nor submission to the mundane," Thomas McEvelley observed in 1995. This reduction of content, paired with a rigorous and far-reaching formal abstraction—one that is, in reality, a construction—might have led others to conceptual inertia, perhaps even to a sense of resignation. Merz's work, however, demonstrates that negation can function not as a constraint but as a form of liberation. He explores the possibilities and trajectories that, paradoxically, become all the more distinct precisely through these apparent limitations.

His artistic practice is pursued with absolute precision, whether through drawing, photography, painting, or the realization—by others—of full-scale models, pavilions, or buildings. "I defend the human right to make art for no reason," Merz asserts, insisting on an approach that transcends pure conceptualism.



Ça Ira, pigment on canvas, 2025

Numerous titles of works and exhibitions within Merz's oeuvre attest to his deep appreciation for Italy and its artistic heritage: Archipittura, Costruire, Brennero-Duomo-Dove Sta Memoria, Mare, Mondo Cane. Merz unwaveringly continues his trajectory, despite, or perhaps in response to, the turbulence of our times. After a significant period of reflection, the artist returns to his creative activity with a new series of works, *Ça ira*, created for the space of Galleria Giampaolo Abbondio and inspired by the revolutionary song from the era of the French Revolution. The monochromes in white and orange, along with a diptych in green and pink dedicated to Marcel Duchamp, radiate with an autonomous presence within the Renaissance architecture of the gallery. The exhibition is curated by Frank Boehm, curator and architect, founding director of the Museum Mitoraj in Pietrasanta since 2024.



Duchamp's Shirt, pigment on canvas, 2025



Primavera, pigment on canvas, 2025

Sguardi Protagonisti

Viva Liala!
di Roberta Scornese

Commosse dalle moto

Dopo la Grande guerra, anche in Inghilterra il destino delle donne aveva due alternative: moglie o dama di compagnia. Constance sceglie la seconda e va a fare la governante per una signora che ha una villa in un paese

di mare. Mal gliene incolse. Incontra Poppy, coetanea con una insana passione: le moto. Le ragazze del club della motocicletta di Helen Simonson (traduzione di Francesca Totich, Nord, pp. 464, € 20) fa ridere e commuove.

Astrattista radicale, frequentatore di Documenta e della Biennale, **Gerhard Merz** espone ora a Todi in una mostra con un titolo ispirato a un canto della Rivoluzione francese. «La parete intorno al quadro è altrettanto importante»

Non c'è più nulla da mettere su tela

dal nostro inviato a Todi (Perugia)
ANDREA FANTI

Torna ad esporre dopo un lungo silenzio il tedesco Gerhard Merz (Mammendorf, 1947). L'artista che fin dagli esordi, nei primi anni Settanta, ha affrontato in modo critico e radicale il concetto di arte pittorica con coerente e crescente incisività, si era preso una pausa di riflessione senza abbandonare mai la progettualità e la pittura.

La Galleria Giampaolo Abbondio, a Todi (Perugia), gli dedica l'evento *Ca ira* («Andrà») a cura di Frank Boehm. Il titolo prende ispirazione da un canto popolare della Rivoluzione francese. «È un attimo: *Ca ira, ça ira, ça ira*. È il detonatore, l'impulso può essere qualsiasi cosa. Può darsi — racconta Merz a «La Lettura» — che in sottofondo, alla radio, si senta Edith Piaf che la canta. Magari non mi interessa nemmeno, all'improvviso mi resta in testa e inizio a seguire l'idea: ma cos'è, in realtà? Secondo Ludwig Wittgenstein un pensiero si sviluppa proprio così, mentre si parla. Questo concetto è fondamentale: un pensiero si sviluppa mentre si parla».

L'artista vive e lavora tra Berlino e Pescia (Pistoia), ha partecipato a quattro edizioni di Documenta (dal 1977 al 1992), concepisce opere che annullano il confine tra pittura, spazio e architettura. Alla Biennale di Venezia del 1997 ha realizzato il padiglione della Germania, un ambiente immacolato nel quale applica la legge della forma, della misura e della luce, elude il bisogno di lanciare messaggi e si rifugia solo nella purezza del linguaggio estetico teorizzando che l'arte è «uno spazio, bianco, vuoto e chiaro». Nelle sue opere unisce il classicismo della cultura europea con l'eredità americana di un pragmatismo tecnicamente razionale, restituendo dipinti di un rigore formale ineccepibile.

Nel 1971 con una fotografia Gerhard Merz ha creato un documento che sintetizza la sua idea di arte. L'immagine presenta gli strumenti dell'artista nello



L'appuntamento

Gerhard Merz (Mammendorf, Germania Ovest, 1947; qui sopra), artista astrattista radicale, è noto per il rigore delle opere e la forte interconnessione che sviluppa tra architettura e pittura. Con *Ca ira* («Andrà»), a cura di Frank Boehm, ha realizzato un progetto specifico per le sale cinquecentesche che ospitano la Galleria Giampaolo Abbondio, a Todi (Perugia), fino al 31 maggio (info@giampaoloabbondio.com)

Le immagini

Nella foto grande: i sei monocromi e la tela in bianco e nero che compongono *Ca ira*, sotto: *Spring*, qui accanto: i monocromi di *Last call*; in basso: *Duchamp's shirt*

Il link

Qui sotto il QR Code per il collegamento a una videointervista con Merz



studio: una squadra, una riga metrica e la luce (rappresentata da una lampada). Come la fotografia racconta in modo oggettivo sempre ciò che mostra, così questo scatto oggettivo i mezzi dell'artista e li rende visibili come cose tangibili. Immediatamente, la squadra T, il righello e la lampada perdono il loro carattere di strumenti e si rivelano per quello che sono: incarnazioni di forma, misurazione e luce. Con queste premesse ha definito la sua arte «archipittura», reinterpretando il termine coniato da Osvaldo Licini (1894-1958): la singolarità della sua posizione, la radicalità del suo pensiero sono in continuo equi-



brio tra raffinatezza estetica e fermezza. «Anch'io sono un architetto», è l'altra formula sintetica con cui Gerhard Merz annuncia la complessità della sua pretesa artistica eliminando ogni dettaglio superfluo e offuscando dalle opere.

Al piano terra del cinquecentesco Palazzo Atti-Pensi di Todi, l'artista ha realizzato con le sue tele un intervento specifico: l'opera d'arte è rappresentata dalla totalità dell'ambiente, rispettando i principi fondamentali ai quali fa riferimento (misura, colore, luce e spazio).



La prima stanza, che dà il titolo alla mostra, *Ca ira*, contiene 7 tele da un metro di larghezza per 240 centimetri di altezza; una è divisa in due campiture, bianco e nero, che incontrandosi delineano un segno netto diagonale suggerendo l'immagine di una ghigliottina. Di fronte, su due pareti d'angolo, sono appese altre 6 tele, rigorosi monocromi arancioni di uguale formato. Il pigmento restituisce un effetto fluorescente carico di energia, dove lo sguardo si perde ipnotizzato, quasi abbagliato.

Spesso all'autore interessa fare un accenno a un altro artista, crea un passato di riferimenti non sempre evidenti. La seconda stanza opera, ad esempio, intitolata *Duchamp's shirt* («La camicia di Duchamp»), ci offre due dipinti affiancati, entrambi due metri di base per 260 centimetri di altezza, uno monocromatico verde e l'altro monocromatico rosa. «La citazione all'artista è diretta, senza mediazioni: sono i colori di una camicia che Marcel Duchamp — racconta Frank Boehm, il curatore — indossa in una famosa fotografia. Non ci sono dubbi: si sta alludendo a lui, non alle sue opere».

In tutte le sale, Merz ha preso la decisione di puntare i farettili al pavimento, scegliendo un'illuminazione perpendicolare. La luce, non orientata verso le tele, crea una certa indipendenza tra i dipinti e il contesto architettonico. «Per me — continua Merz — lo spazio che un quadro ritaglia sulla parete, lo spazio negativo, è importante quanto l'opera». Ecco che riemergono luce, spazio, misura e colore.

La sala successiva, *Last Call* («Ultima chiamata»), stupisce con quattro monocromi quadrati bianchi di un metro e mezzo di lato. Il formato è un riferimento a Ad Reinhardt (1913-1967), artista statunitense astrattista, che come Merz è arrivato a un punto in cui non c'è più quasi niente da mettere dentro al quadro a parte un colore o una linea, un atto di minimalismo concettuale radicale. Merz si trova in sintonia con lui e prende esattamente il formato di una serie di opere di questo artista, solo il formato, poi ne fa tutta un'altra cosa.

Gerhard Merz ama preparare il pigmento secondo le proprie esigenze. Il bianco di queste tele è un bianco che lui definisce «diurno», è quasi irreale e si stacca decisamente da quello delle pareti. Il particolare contrasto crea una vibrazione molto forte, è una tinta *Tageslicht* («luce del giorno»). Significa che il colore sulla tela ridefinisce un'opera molto astratta, inusuale, che cambia tono a seconda dell'incidenza della luce sulla tela stessa e dell'ora del giorno in cui la si guarda. Il bianco è un tema fondamentale che affascina l'artista: «Anche Melville per raccontarlo scrive molte pagine in *Moby-Dick* — dice Merz — e James Joyce lo propone in diversi lavori». L'allusione all'*Ulisse*, opera letteraria radicale, è sottintesa.

Spring («Primavera») è il titolo dell'ultimo ambiente, contiene una tela racchiusa in una cornice di rame dal bordo geometricamente frastagliato. Questo è un quadro dedicato all'astrattista Barnett Newman (1905-1970): si tratta di un monocromo ottenuto con un getto di vernice. Non ci sono colori, è l'attimo fissato, un secondo eterno. Questa libera espressione, non controllata, si risolve in un unico momento nel quale con un solo colore Merz cita l'autore di *Dionysius* (1949). Sembra molto diversa dalle altre sue opere ma è concettualmente in linea con i riferimenti al passato e all'arte.

«Sono un pittore, non un poeta, e quindi non posso raccontare che cosa voglio esprimere, ma solo quello che si vede. A Todi — conclude Merz — ho avuto una bella sensazione, ho pensato che il mio lavoro era adatto a quel luogo. Ecco perché ho accettato di esporre in questa galleria: l'ambiente mi sembrava adatto. Tutto qui».

VENEDIG, OR THE LAW OF FORM, MEASUREMENT AND LIGHT

By Gudrun Inboden

“(…) In the dazzling light of VENEDIG is any meaning used up? Does the empty space show nothing other than its own clarity? Where in this brightness is the actual object of illumination? What clarity is meant here, apart from the real one articulated in measurement, form and light?

That art «transcends the sense of language» is well enough known as a postulate of modernism; but in this space in Venice such longing, with the darkness that is natural to it, is not longer dominant. Instead, what stands clearly before our eyes is that «meaning has vanished into verse»[T.W.Adorno1961], and that in this apparently insignificant deviation of the indicative from the utopian tense of modernism a profound difference is communicated. Modernism worked towards the autonomy, the purity of language. Modernism wanted at last to redeem language from its task of conveying meaning and then – having as its vehicle reached the destination – withdrawing selflessly behind it. But this vision addressed the germ of superordinate meaning, and in order to become concrete itself, it sought its semantic echo in the aesthetic subject. Thus modernism unintentionally allowed the scheme of means and ends to survive. In the emptiness of VENEDIG, however, even this dark remnant of a pathos formed on the aesthetic subject-object-relationship has given way to the ethos rooted in the incorruptible spirit of reason.

Released in this way from modernism and loosed from their telos, the means of measurement, form and light no longer speak in the idiom of the «aesthetic message», and in VENEDIG any question about this merely echos in the void. The light shows nothing except that it is there. It does not illuminate «What it is for», but «That it is». That art is may thus become the occasion for a basic (and thus astonishing) inquiry in which the functional is perceived to be secondary. (...)”



Venedig, brickwork plastered with gypsum, 1997

ARTFORUM

Gerhard Merz

Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)

By Colin Gardner

Gerhard Merz has built a reputation in recent years with a series of site-specific installations that attempt to realize the utopian Modernist dream of a formalism that fuses art and architecture in a seamless, nonutilitarian whole. While this seems at first glance to be a hopelessly nostalgic yearning for the “total” art epitomized by the art-for-art’s-sake movements of the early 20th century, Merz introduces enough contradictory elements to create a visually provocative, if theoretically futile work.

Archipittura, 1992, Merz’s recent installation at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, was a logical step in this development, combining the dual elements of architecture (*architettura*, in Italian) and painting (*pittura*). A large room was split into unequal “halves” by an open-ended dividing wall, which allowed the viewer to walk around it but never to view all of the walls of the room at once. Each face of the divider featured an identical black mural with a surrounding white border. Approximately one-third of the way in from the left edge, a vertical, stainless steel bar suggested a three-dimensional Barnett Newman stripe or a Mies van der Rohe structural reference to an I-beam. This architectural grid was further reinforced by the overhead lighting (neon tubes arranged in parallel pairs at 90-degree angles to the wall) and concrete floor (interlocking rectangles).

Merz’s debt to the International Style was underlined by a large inscription, on one of the facing perimeter walls, which stated: “FOR LUDWIG MIES VAN DER ROHE LESS IS MORE MCMXCII.” The opposite wall, which featured a square glass panel suspended away from the surface in stainless steel mounts, opened onto a smaller anteroom which Merz calls a “studiolo” or study. This housed a smaller, dark-ocher canvas that not only suggested an equivalent to the mural in the form of an easel painting, but also replaced the vertical bar with an oversize, stainless steel T-square. The interior and exterior rooms thus established a complementary formal interplay of painterly and architectural vocabularies, so that any initial binary relationships were blurred if not dissolved.

By encouraging the viewer to interact bodily with the space-as-painting and painting-as-space, Merz seemed to be referencing El Lissitzky’s “Proun” installations of the mid ’20s, in which painterly surface and sculptural volume metamorphosed according to the viewer’s changing position. However, Lissitzky’s program was rooted in a practical, utilitarian, constructivist ideology in which painting and architecture were inseparable from a program of revolutionary socialism. Anchoring his work in the reifying, esthetic sphere of the museum, Merz appears to be deliberately eschewing any wider social agenda. This resorting to a purist estheticism thus aligns Merz with a Kantian/Greenbergian formalism, rooted in Platonic ideals of transcendental form. Ironically, it also allies Merz with the retardataire Neo-Classicism of Carlo Maria Mariani, whose retrospective coincidentally occupied the galleries next door. Strange, but appropriate bedfellows indeed.

ARTFORUM

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By Colin Gardner

REVIEWS

arrangement of cans with their complexly textured surfaces reads like a miniature Louise Nevelson in metal. Constructed of cans of perishable food products, the piece references the *Vanitas* theme again, raising questions of rot—of the shelf life of food products, as well as of specific modes of artistic conception and display.

Aldrich also creates artfully ephemeral objects out of waxed paper: a "painting" entitled *Time To Buy 'Cut-Rite'*, 1992, is constructed of a cascade of compressed translucent sheets with rough edges torn by the serrated aluminum strip on the box, arranged in a frame, and *Cumulonimbus*, 1992, (a less interesting version of her earlier elegant waxed paper takeoffs on Robert Morris' felt pieces) consists of a tumble of waxed paper suspended from the ceiling on paper-towel holders.

Aldrich's strategic imbrication of the domestic with the high cultural relates obliquely to earlier feminist projects of recuperating and reinvesting domestic materials and modes of production. The strength of her work comes from the connections it proposes between signifiers of suburban domesticity with broad ideologies of bourgeois subjectivity, as well as from her deployment of diverse materials and formats within a coherent conceptual framework. The exhibition itself becomes an open-ended commentary on the intertwined discourses and sites of bourgeois humanism and Modernist artistic practice.

—Amelia Jones

GERHARD MERZ

LOS ANGELES COUNTY
MUSEUM OF ART

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Gerhard Merz, *Archipittura*, 1992, house paint and stainless steel. Installation view.

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—Colin Gardner

TORONTO

RENÉE VAN HALM

S. L. SIMPSON GALLERY

Renée Van Halm's large-scale sculptural works challenge Modernist conventions by incorporating marginalized artistic practices that have fallen outside the high-art canon into an ostensibly Modernist framework. For Van Halm, the marginalized consists of decorative flourishes, conventions that acknowledge the presence of the individual, and genres overlooked by the Modernist machine. Slowly moving away from her large-scale outdoor, architectural sculptures of the '80s, Van Halm has fabricated measured and distilled works that comment on their own status as art objects, subtly challenging Modernist esthetic protocols.

Using fine wood veneers that relate to furnishings and interior decor, each of the four structures exhibited serve as imposing frames for smaller paintings displayed on the sculptural support. The form of *Translation*, 1992, is based on an S curve, split into a pair of vertical walls onto which are hung two small canvases hand-lettered

Renée Van Halm, *Translation*, 1992, mixed media 93 x 93 x 81". Installation view.

with the words "NATURE MORTE". Encased in box frames, these canvases suggest specimens illustrating the secondary status that genre styles, such as still life, have been given in art history.

Similarly, in a work entitled *Verification*, 1992, the signature of the American Impressionist Mary Cassatt is transcribed in three different forms onto framed roundels, each colored in muted tones suggesting Cassatt's palette. Focusing on an artist who has been marginalized in late-19th-century art history, Van Halm is once again using the strategy of framing—isolating the artist's signature—as a method of validating obscured claims to authorship.

Van Halm's strategy is clear. She questions accepted meanings, repeatedly underscoring the need to move beyond static readings of objects and structures. Selecting a specific set of parameters, she focuses in on the cultural construct of the artist and the art object. Yet she remains in the protected domain of art history, relying on generic symbols such as the illustration of branches chosen to represent nature in a wall piece entitled *Origin*, 1992. Rather than tackle the slippery terrain inhabited by the contemporary artist in her attempts to challenge the legitimacy of Modernism, she brings forward illustrations of discarded forms that remain in the rarefied precinct of history, and are ultimately overpowered by the expansive Modernist frames. Unfortunately, the result is work the meaning of which is in danger of being overwhelmed by the legacy of Modernism, unable to cut free of its still-reigning authority. While Van Halm's frames serve to critique, they also align her with the tenets of pure form, buying into the version of formalist Modernism that is legitimated both by scale and high production values.

—Linda Genereux



Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), 1992



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