

KATHARINA GROSSE: THIS DROVE MY MOTHER UP THE WALL



28 SEP - 3 DEC 2017
MAIN & FIRST FLOOR GALLERIES
ADMISSION FREE
EXHIBITION GUIDE



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Katharina Grosse and Margot Heller, Director of the South London Gallery in conversation, 23rd September 2017

Margot Heller: You've been working in situ here at the SLG for a few days now, but you've been planning your work for our main space for many months in your studio in Berlin, working on a series of models of the gallery. When you first visited the gallery last year, did you come to the space with a completely open mind and respond to it in an intuitive way, or did you come to it with preconceived ideas about how you might begin to approach it?

Katharina Grosse: I had no preconceived ideas at all: I hadn't visited the space in person and I didn't know about the context of the SLG: I needed to understand a little more about the institution and how you work.

In terms of what my work is about, of course I came to the space with things I am exploring, that I'm fascinated by and always look at and consider wherever I go. I wouldn't say that's a preconceived idea but it is like a concept, which is probably one of the reasons you invited me. I think a painted space is very different to a built space and when I put the two together they create something like a paradox. I can't quite say that the painting can exist without the surface of the architecture but the architecture is being transformed into something that wouldn't exist without the painting. This paradox is something I wanted to expose here, even more so because I am not bringing anything sculptural into the space, or another material that comes from the outside or from a different context.

MH: It's a distinctive characteristic of the project that you've decided not to include any sculptural elements, given how much sculpture has featured in your indoor installations in recent years. It's an interesting decision but at the same time it doesn't negate the sculptural potential of the work that you're producing. The sense of people walking into a painting is very strong, which is not how one normally interacts with a painting and relates more directly to the multiple perspectives from which sculptural work is viewed.

KG: Yes, that's a very good point; there is a sculptural surplus in the work in a sense. At the beginning I was thinking of bringing some sculptural elements into the show and then I realised that I should do the opposite and create a kind of void or an empty space, an untouched surface around which everything evolves.

MH: The vast white space in the middle of the floor and the expanses of white wall create a dynamic tension with the painted areas. The way you've incorporated that tension into the whole – the dialogue between positive and negative – seems to be an integral part of the work, which also provokes thoughts around presence and absence. You've often used stencils and masking, and that's clearly a central idea in this installation, where the decision to create a blank space activates rather than neutralises it.

KG: Yes, I expose the fact that something is missing in the show and ultimately that created an open wide, white space. In my studio work there is a process of stencilling and covering, and then exposing again and re-covering constantly, because there are many, many layers that make up one painting. Whereas here it's only one layer in a sense and it's an exposure of the process. Maybe it is, therefore, a more explicit way of showing a lot of qualities of that thought: it's not only that there is the white void

in the middle of the space, but it's also about how that void actually encounters the painted surface, how they merge and create a border, and how the border shifts; and then how that border is made, how it is sometimes multi-dimensional, and sometimes only one sharp line. All these qualities are very interesting so it's not an abrupt shift from painted to unpainted; rather it's quite defined sometimes, how the two areas encounter one another. I'm very fascinated by borders in general. So where does one thing end and another start? My painting just overtakes that: it ignores, or rather redefines, these areas.

MH: The notion of an edge, the different types of edge and boundary, and the seemingly endless permutations of that idea are very clearly evident within the installation. There are so many different types of edge contained within the work: some are crisp and hard but others are softer, and there are also some very determinedly gestural areas of paint marking out the boundary where the untouched surfaces begin. Your use of spray paint as a medium is very important in your ability to achieve these modulations so can you tell me about that choice and what motivates it?

KG: Obviously the spray allows me to expand my reach. I magnify my natural body size into a larger being, just as I do when using a ladder or a lift. The spray not only makes my reach larger but it also accelerates my velocity in painting larger areas. This is one of the reasons why I use it, which is basically that it allows me to construct the idea of aggression, or the experience of spontaneity. You asked me in an earlier conversation how much is intentional and how much is accidental and spontaneous in the work I'm making here. I would say that it is all intended and that, in a sense, I adjust my attention according to the process that I'm going through. So I made a model, and then I made a second model, and a third and a fourth; and then I had to decide which colours to work with. I am very clear about my starting points. But once I start to work in the space I have to invent the painting for that space from scratch and yet again, that is not spontaneous but it involves many questions that are predominant in my head at that very moment. This often has to do with other projects that I am working on at the same time; it also has to do with what the space is going to tell me, and with the experiment that is the basis for this show – which is how can I define an edge or the seam around a volume in a way that is visceral or tangible somehow?

MH: So is there quite strong degree of intuitive response involved as well?

KG: Intuitive, yes, but always within my knowledge and experience of painting, and within my project in painting. Intuition is a really big part of that in the sense that I constantly readjust my decision making according to where I am at that very moment in that project. When you are deep inside yourself and you feel your innermost desires, a labyrinth with many doors appears.

MH: Let's talk about beauty for a moment, because you have been making work for several decades now and it is hugely various yet there is a clear language that's been established throughout. Across the myriad of different forms you work in – huge indoor and outdoor installations, vast paintings on canvas but also smaller works on paper – there is a cohesive and distinctive painterly language that you have evolved. References have been made to American Colour Field painting but also to German Expressionism, both of which resonate in very different

ways, but for me a consistent thread throughout your practice is that it is never simply "beautiful". Even though there is a lot of aesthetic pleasure involved in looking at it, and its beauty can evoke a sense of awe, there is always a tension between that beauty and the fact that you then counter it with very deliberate gestures of rupture. Can you say something about this approach?

KG: I think you describe it really well. A painting has to be attractive otherwise one would not feel drawn to it. It has to attract on many levels, whether in a purely visceral way or through the colour, which is my main ingredient and something that affects one almost instantly. It gets into the system and the senses, a little bit like the human voice, and caught by it one might feel that it isn't all that attractive any more. So there is constant change: one isn't so sure if it really is that attractive or if one really wants to be that close. Is it maybe too large? Too absurd? Too overpowering?

MH: There's something quite aggressive about the way you have taken over the whole of the SLG's main space, and texts about your work have sometimes made a comparison with graffiti. How do you see your work in relation to graffiti?

KG: Graffiti is writing and making a claim, saying "This is mine. Do not enter my world". I am negotiating a totally different behaviour towards an edge. The edge in my work is an invitation for change.

MH: You mentioned earlier that you wanted your show to focus on this one work in the main gallery, and then in our first floor galleries you have chosen to show two films that set up a fascinating dialogue with your wider practice. One of them is a documentary where you curate your fantasy show of works by women artists: do you see yourself as a feminist artist, or a woman artist, or do you resist these labels altogether?

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Katharina Grosse was born in 1961 in Freiberg, Germany, and now lives and works in Berlin. Her work has been featured in international solo and group exhibitions, as well as major arts projects and biennales. Grosse's most recent site-specific installations include *Rockaway!* for MoMA PS1's "Rockaway!" programme (2016) and *Untitled Trumpet* for the 56th Biennale di Venezia (2015). Notable solo exhibitions include *Constructions à cru*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2005); *Atoms Outside Eggs*, Serralves, Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Porto (2007); *Hello Little Butterfly I Love You What's Your Name*, ARKEN—Museum for Moderne Kunst, Copenhagen (2009); *Two younger women come in and pull out a table*, De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art, The Netherlands; *WUNDERBLOCK*, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas both (2013); *yes no why later*, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow (2015); and *Museum Frieder Burda*, Germany (2016).

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To accompany the painted installation, Grosse has selected two documentary films which are shown in the first floor galleries, intended to frame her creative practice and research interests. In the short documentary from the series *Women Artists* (2016) by Claudia Müller, Grosse curates a fantasy exhibition by eight other female artists and discusses her selection of artists and artworks, and the relationship between their practices, guiding the viewer through a virtual realisation of her ideal group show.

The second documentary film is *The Gleaners and I* (2000), by Belgian director Agnès Varda, a source of inspiration for Grosse's South London Gallery installation that deals with the marginal, the residual, and the invisible. Filming with a hand-held camera and narrating the film herself, Varda travelled around France, profiling gleaners, from those who follow the country harvests through to urban scavengers, such as the bricoleur artist who finds objects and transforms them into sculpture, and Varda herself, who ponders the gleaning nature of digital filmmaking.

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www.southlondongallery.org/KatharinaGrosse

SLG

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Twitter: [@SLG_artupdates](https://twitter.com/SLG_artupdates) | Instagram: [@southlondongallery](https://www.instagram.com/southlondongallery)

Image: Katharina Grosse, *This Drove my Mother up the Wall*, acrylic on wall and floor, South London Gallery, 2017. Photo Andy Keate.

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SLG

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Image: Katharina Grosse, *This Drove my Mother up the Wall*, acrylic on wall and floor, South London Gallery, 2017. Photo Andy Keate.



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