ALMINE RECH

# Günther Förg
# A Game of Chess

## Mar 5 — Apr 10, 2021 | Paris

Almine Rech is pleased to present 'A Game of Chess', Günther Förg's third solo exhibition with the gallery, organized in collaboration with the Estate of the artist, following on the shows the gallery organized in London in 2015 and 2018.

Förg was born in the Allgäu region and studied at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich, his ideas have continuously migrated through numerous media. In 1984, Förg earned his spurs after being included in von hier haus, an exhibition on new German painting that Kasper König curated in Düsseldorf. Since then, he has been associated with two trajectories in postwar art. The history of his reception within the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam illustrates the duality of his protean artistic practice. In 1995, the Stedelijk, which at the time was led by Rudi Fuchs, presented Förg as the successor to the Germanic painters grouped together as the so-called 'Neo-Expressionists': Georg Baselitz, Per Kirkeby, Markus Lüpertz, and A.R. Penck. 'A New Spirit in Painting' (1981) showed that these artists actually endeavoured to root themselves in the culture of their origins and the pictorial tradition. More recently — as seen in the retrospective held three years ago by the Stedelijk and the Dallas Museum of Art — Förg was portrayed as an artist concerned with the interpretation and exploration of modernism from a European and continental perspective (which Blinky Palermo inaugurated in Germany). The current exhibition at Almine Rech shows, however, that Förg's strength lies rather in his ability to create artworks that resist any kind of determinism, and are thereby not programmatic at all, which is to say that they are not embedded in the construction of a certain discourse on art. Förg expressed, basically, a *fragile beauty*, working at the *threshold* of 'Neo-Expressionism' and modernism.

Thirty years after his solo exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, it is now possible to see Förg's late work (whose origins date back to the 1990s) on Rue de Turenne. It appears to be a pendant to the work shown back then on the walls of the Palais de Tokyo on Avenue du Président Wilson. The gallery's main space features a wall painting — which echoes what Fernand Léger described as the *pictorial* place of color in architecture — as well as a series of black and white photographs devoted to Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, the eighteenth-century French architect. It is crucial to note that in 1933, the Austrian historian of art and architecture Emil Kaufmann conceived of Ledoux as the departure point of what he called autonomous architecture, i.e., modern architecture, whose arrival point he located in the work of Le Corbusier.

Thus it seems that Förg investigated the very idea of modernity. He subsequently attempted to answer the questions that such an inquiry triggered transplanting forms from architecture into painting.

The exhibition concludes with the *Grid Paintings*, whose structure echoes certain occurrences — from 1996, for instance — of another representative series by Förg: the *Grey Paintings*. It has often been said, and correctly so, that the *Grid Paintings* are based on a transformation of the motif that spreads out across *The Death of Marat* (1907) by Edvard Munch. But to give depth to what unites the two works, we shall turn towards the artist who, shortly before Förg, found in the Norwegian painter's oeuvre the energy he needed to reinvent himself: Jasper Johns— whose crosshatchings stem from *Self-Portrait Between the Clock and the Bed* (1940). Förg, with Johns, participated in the processes of enlargement and shrinking that traverse the history of painting. Förg's interpretation is nonetheless expressive, unlike Johns, who systematized the motif he perceived in Munch's *Self-Portrait*. In this regard, Förg can be connected, in a German context, to Baselitz, who in the 1970s painted works whose backgrounds gained their force from de Kooning's maritime and fleshy interlacings, which were themselves derived from Chaïm Soutine's Céret Landscapes. The second thread to follow in the *Grid Paintings* can be found in the intertwined windows of the Bauhaus building in Dessau, which Förg photographed in the 1990s. His modus operandi could thus be described as an allusive art of memory: through a single artwork, we are seeing the territories once explored by Förg.

- Théo de Luca, Author, Yale University