ALMINE RECH

# Markus Lüpertz
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"To explain nature and what surrounds us was and is painting's mandate and is the reason I make the effort."—Markus Lüpertz

One of the most important post-World War II artists in Germany, Markus Lüpertz helped chronicle and shape the postwar image of his country, achieving enormous success across Europe. Astonishingly, this is his first major museum retrospective in the United States. This exhibition, organized in close collaboration with the artist himself, explores his five-decade career, from his earliest works—the perplexing "dithyrambs" and provocative manipulations of German motifs, such as helmets and fields of wheat—to the more recent paintings that are redolent with mythological subject matter and art historical allusions.

Lüpertz began his career some 20 years before the reunification of Germany, when the country was still in the shadow of the Berlin Wall and the persistent moral gloom of the Nazi aftermath. German artists strove to refind their voices amidst the social stigma of their nation's recent history. In the years after the war, the art scene looked inward, becoming hesitant and provincial. By the early '60s, painting itself fell out of fashion as minimalism and conceptualism came to the forefront abroad. In this context, Lüpertz adopted a rebellious position, an irreverent disregard for dominant conventions through his steely and serious paintings.

Lüpertz's entire body of work is fraught with a fundamental tension between figuration and abstraction as the artist continuously challenges art-historical givens and norms of modernism. The viewer is often deliberately stumped by the "subject," while simultaneously gripped and convinced by the drama and authority of the painting. Lüpertz explains this contradiction: "Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important." Out of the richly diverse, confusing, and unrestrained amalgam of references and approaches, what emerges is vigorous materiality, a sense of the physicality of art-making, and the creative manipulation of mass and volume.

*Markus Lüpertz* coincides with the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden's *Markus Lüpertz: Threads of History* (May 24–September 10), an in-depth exploration of the artist's revealing early work. Together, the two presentations form Lüpertz's first major US museum retrospective.

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