

# galerie du monde

Group Exhibition

## **The Inner Light or the Expression of Color** **Curated by Philipp Bollmann**

**Exhibition Period:** 14 September – 28 October 2023

**Venue:** Galerie du Monde, 108 Ruttonjee Centre, 11 Duddell Street, Central, Hong Kong

**Participating Artists:**

Miriam Cahn, Helen Frankenthaler, Leiko Ikemura, Martha Jungwirth, Michael Müller, Maximilian Rödel

**Opening Reception:** 14 September 2023 (Thursday), 17:00 - 19:00

*Curator Philipp Bollmann and artist Maximilian Rödel will be present, and available for interviews.*

###

**HONG KONG** – Galerie du Monde is pleased to present the group exhibition “**The Inner Light and the Expression of Color**” curated by **Philipp Bollmann**, on view from 14 September to 28 October 2023. The exhibition places six artists of different generations and origins in dialogue — Miriam Cahn, Helen Frankenthaler, Leiko Ikemura, Martha Jungwirth, Michael Müller, and Maximilian Rödel.



Helen Frankenthaler, “Off White Square” (1973)  
Acrylic on Canvas, 201.9 x 648.3 x 4 cm  
Courtesy of The KD Collection.

A highlight of the exhibition is Helen Frankenthaler’s masterpiece “Off White Square” (1973) — one of the largest paintings Frankenthaler ever made, and its exhibition debut in Asia. This monumental painting exemplifies the highly expressive body of work that Frankenthaler produced during her transition from gestural abstraction to color field painting, featuring the expanses of pure color and her signature use of diluted paint.

“*Off White Square* shows her at the top of her game, pouring, painting, and drawing with complete confidence. She surely had a hot hand, trusted her instincts, and went for broke.” – Dr. Douglas Dreishpoon, Director of the Catalogue Raisonné project at the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.

## Curatorial Statement

### “The Inner Light or the Expression of Color”

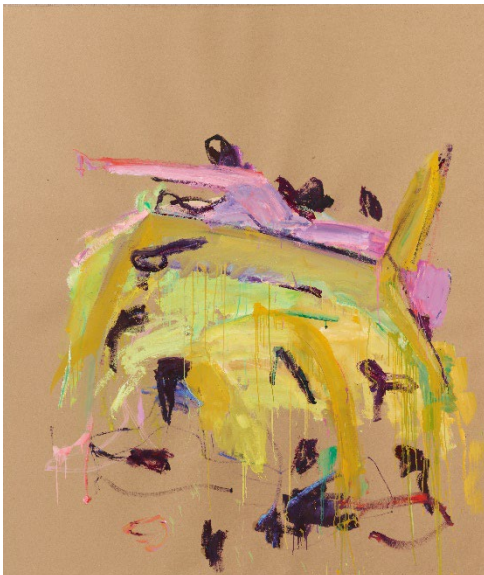
Philipp Bollmann

A complete history of Western art could be told about the representation of light in painting and its significance. Starting with the story of creation, light plays a central role in Christian visual culture and thought. Artists at all times have thematized light or made their works shine through a variety of methods, and attributable to different motivations. While medieval painting knew neither light sources nor realistic shadows and its light was primarily an expression of the sacred, light became a dramaturgical element in Baroque art. In the wake of the Enlightenment, secular thinking spread, which led to the symbolism of light developing into a moral category — away from the idea of a divine presence.

In the mid-19th century, the British painter William Turner revolutionized painting by dissolving representational forms into light and color, thus not only anticipating Impressionism but also preparing the ground for abstraction. The art of the 20th century represents a radical break in many areas, but light remained essential and had an even greater influence on artistic production, becoming a theme in itself for many artists.

The exhibition "The Inner Light or the Expression of Color" places six artists of different generations and origins in a dialogue that on the one hand celebrates the radiance of color, and on the other hand aims to point out how immanent the glow and light still are for contemporary art.

While light in painting can rather be characterized as a bright-dark contrast, luminescence describes an atmosphere evoked by color accents. To link these two related but nevertheless different aspects, the exhibition title suggests the term "inner light". The title also aims to recall Mark Rothko, who used this term to describe the effect of his abstract paintings.



But whereas for Rothko the distinction between abstraction and figuration was still ideologically motivated, the exhibited works indicate that this separation seems to make little sense today. Art is about finding form. Artists find form through composition. Composition arises through formal structure or through contrasts. Contrasts are created through color. In this, Miriam Cahn's work — which could be described as representational — does not differ from that of Martha Jungwirth, Michael Müller, Maximilian Rödel or Helen Frankenthaler.

Martha Jungwirth, "Ohne Titel (Tulpenstrauß)" (2022)  
Oil on Paper on Canvas, 238.5 x 202 x 2.7 cm  
Courtesy of The KD Collection.

The works by Leiko Ikemura, however, occupy a special position in the exhibition, as they are sculptures made of glass. The transparency of the glass and its ability to refract light make the works literally shine from within themselves. The colored light that radiates from the works into their surroundings leaves the material boundaries of the sculptures and expands them to a dimension of immateriality. They are surrounded by an auratic glow that could be described as dignified.

Leiko Ikemura, "Kitsune" (2020-2022)  
Cast Glass, 20 x 32 x 13 cm

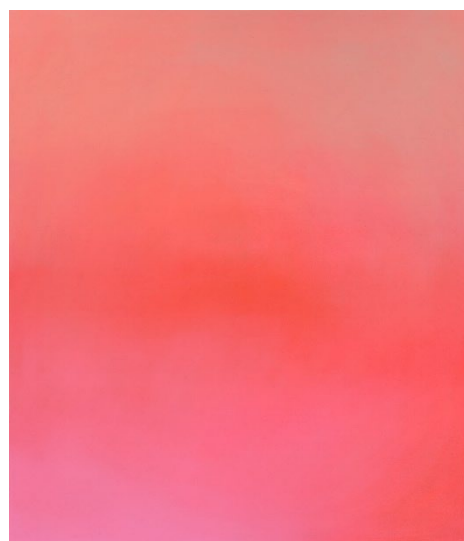




Miriam Cahn achieves something similar with the means of painting. Her painting "Schauen" (Look) (2015), which is featured in the exhibition, portrays a human-like being in shades of red, appearing ghostly against a monochrome yellow background. The strong red contours of the figure repeatedly dissolve into white-pink sections that blur softly with the background. The partially very thin application of paint also gives the yellow of the primer the opportunity to shine through the figure. This creates a colorful light figure that — in connection with the artist's ability to visualize emotions — meets us as a complex psychological being.

Miriam Cahn, "Schauen" (2015),  
Oil on Wood, 26 x 20 cm

The lucid use of color is also one of Maximilian Rödel's techniques to lend his paintings a luminosity. On the pictorial surface, which are predominantly located in the color spectrum of magenta and violet, clouds and shadows in delicate counter-coloring and an indistinguishable alternation of slightly divergent color temperatures appear in floating progressions. On the one hand, his works are color and sensory spaces that are unmistakably linked to exemplars of color field painting, but on the other hand they are also representations of the unrepresentable, as the title of the series reveals: "Prehistoric Sunset". Thus, the works refer to an indeterminate prehistoric time, which we can only access by means of our thoughts.



Maximilian Rödel  
"Prehistoric Sunset XVI" (2023)  
Oil on Canvas, 230 x 200 x 4 cm

A particular highlight of this exhibition is the painting "Off White Square" (1973) by the American painter Helen Frankenthaler, who played a key role in the transition from Abstract Expressionism to color field painting in the 1950s. With the "soak-stain technique" she developed and also applied in the exhibited work, she expanded the possibilities of abstraction. By no longer using oil paint thickly and opaquely, but thinning it with turpentine, Frankenthaler allowed the paint to be poured onto the unprimed canvas lying on the floor, where it dispersed — subjecting itself to chance. The colors that flowed into each other in this way mixed on the canvas, darkening or brightening each other and creating new hues. Frankenthaler's paintings are characterized by the fact that they always evoke associations with landscapes. However, it is not nature that she intends to depict. Her paintings bear witness to the endeavor to offer an abstract projection surface that embodies an idea of landscape, which in turn can only be experienced as such through light and shadow.

It is this intermediate area between the recognizable and the abstract that also interests Martha Jungwirth. Her work "Ohne Titel (Tulpenstrauß)" (Untitled (Bouquet of Tulips)) (2022) is from the series "Witches' Flight", which — as can be clearly discerned in the exhibited work — refers to Francisco de Goya's painting "Witches' Flight" (1797/1798). Goya paints three witch-like creatures floating in the air, carrying a man up in their arms. The flying group is brightly illuminated by a light source outside the picture. Jungwirth leaves the all-consuming black of the night untreated. Her background remains an undone beige-brown cardboard. In the center of the picture, where the illuminated scene takes place, luminous colors pour out in Martha Jungwirth's work, which she contrasts with some scattered splashes of dark violet. However, the luminosity in the center, the undefined background and the similarity of the ring composition are enough to connect the two works.



Francisco de Goya "Witches' Flight" (1797/1798)  
Oil on Canvas, 43.5 x 30.5 cm  
Image courtesy of Museo del Prado, Madrid.

The energy process derived directly from the physical, which characterizes Jungwirth's painting style, is also encountered in Michael Müller's work "William went swimming at the river Nile, but he lost his nose" (2021-2023). His exhibited work of gestural painting is purely committed to color and light. The artist creates the luminosity of the painting through a very complex color construction. Underlying layers of paint determine the final effect of appearance. The light pink-purple coloring in the left-hand center of the painting owes this effect to the delicate cream-colored undercoatings underneath. The opposite of this is the petrol-like paintwork on the right side of the picture, whose luminosity is absorbed by a dark undertone. In the interplay of these different color structures, the painting creates an enormous effect of depth. The work can be interpreted as a reflection on the effects of color and light in the medium of painting.



Michael Müller "William went swimming at the river Nile, but he lost his nose" (2021-2023)  
Acrylic, Lacquer and Synthetic Resin Lacquer on Canvas  
159 x 196.5 x 4 cm

###

### **About the Curator Philipp Bollmann**



Philipp Bollmann studied Art History and History at the Freie Universität, Berlin. Since 2008 he has held the position of curator at the Wemhöner Collection, the largest collection of contemporary Chinese art in Germany. Bollmann was appointed curator of the Berlin Masters in 2016. Recent projects include "John Isaacs – Today I Started Loving You Again" (Galerie Michael Haas, Berlin, 2021); "Michael Müller: Schwierige Bilder" (Sammlung Wemhöner, Berlin, 2021); "Shattered – Transformations of Cubism" (Sexauer Gallery, Berlin, 2022); "Energetic Gestures" (Kunstsaele, Berlin, 2022); "Isaac Julien: Playtime" (PalaisPopulaire, Berlin, 2023); "Leben in Bildern. Ein Portrait des Sehens für Rudolf Zwirner" (PalaisPopulaire, Berlin, 2023).

### **About Galerie du Monde**

Founded in Hong Kong in 1974, Galerie du Monde has been specializing in modern and contemporary works by internationally established Chinese artists for 49 years. The gallery also nurtures and promotes emerging talent, presenting a varied program of solo and group exhibitions with a strong focus on works of art on canvas, paper, sculpture, photography, and new media. To celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2014, Galerie du Monde introduced the GDM Project series to strengthen the gallery's support to a wider group of artists from different geographical regions, providing them the opportunity to exhibit outside of their own areas.

Website: [www.galeriedumonde.com](http://www.galeriedumonde.com)  
Instagram: [@galeriedumonde](https://www.instagram.com/galeriedumonde)  
Email: [enquiry@galeriedumonde.com](mailto:enquiry@galeriedumonde.com)

*Galerie du Monde opens from Monday to Saturday, 10am to 7pm*

## About the Artists

**Miriam Cahn** (b.1949, Switzerland) is above all a figurative painter, but she has always associated her artistic project and its pictorial expression with other exploratory processes, such as performance or installations. From 1968 to 1973, she studied art at the Gewerbeschule in Basel. In 1984, she represented Switzerland at the Venice Biennale. Her work can be seen the influence of the feminist movements and thought of the 1970-1980s, any depicted body radiates beyond its physical condition, whether it be men and women, or animals and vegetation. She places the body and its expression in an aura of profoundly emotive, subjective colors. Her work evokes bodily desire, just as much as it does the violence that bodies undergo.

**Helen Frankenthaler** (1928-2011, United States), whose career spanned six decades, has long been recognized as one of the great American artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She was eminent among the second generation of postwar American abstract painters and is widely credited for playing a pivotal role in the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Color Field painting. Through her invention of the soak-stain technique, she expanded the possibilities of abstract painting, while at times referencing figuration and landscape in unique ways. Frankenthaler experimented tirelessly throughout her long career. In addition to producing unique paintings on canvas and paper, she worked in a wide range of media, including ceramics, sculpture, tapestry, and especially printmaking.

**Leiko Ikemura** (b.1951, Japan) immigrated to Spain at the age of 21 to study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Seville. She moved to Switzerland in the 1980s, then to Germany to teach painting at the Berlin University of Fine Arts from 1992 to 2015. Ikemura's work is inspired by the myths and legends of human creation from around the globe, reflecting on the human desire for a sense of belonging. Central to these explorations is the search for light and lightness within her media, investigating opacity both in terms of form and concept. Her glass sculptures are characterized by organic and irregular shapes, she explores the alchemic properties of the medium to create contrast between rough and polished surfaces. Her glassmaking influences her painting practice, to elaborate her visual language into abstraction and experiment with watercolors.

**Martha Jungwirth** (b.1940, Austria) has been a central figure in the Austrian art scene for over six decades. Neither figurative nor resolutely abstract, her works draw on a variety of sources, from the artist's travels to the media, as well as mythology and the history of art. All of these are described as 'impulses' by Jungwirth, which she channels onto the paper in 'a flow undisturbed by reflection'. From 1956 to 1963, she studied at the Academy of Applied Arts in Vienna and was awarded the Msgr. Otto Mauer Prize, the Theodor Körner Prize (1964) and the Joan Miró Prize (1966). She was a co-founder and the only female member of the Viennese collective Wirklichkeiten (Realities). In 1977, Jungwirth was included in documenta 6 in Kassel.

**Michael Müller** (b.1970, Germany) studied sculpting and fine arts at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. He is an artist whose manifold, proliferating oeuvre cannot be ascribed to any one-way interpretation, his work encompasses painting, text-based work, sculpture, installation, music, and performance. Müller examines painting's classical approaches, methods and techniques, as well as its formats, materials, presentation and reception. He questions our learned expectations of painting. Using a range of materials, from glass, canvas and metal as surfaces to paint on, Müller explores possibilities of shaping the relationship between an image's projected spatial effects and its nature as a painting and three-dimensional object.

**Maximilian Rödel** (b.1984, Germany) studied at the Braunschweig University of Art, and completed his MFA at the Berlin University of the Arts in 2011. In Rödel's works, color itself is elevated to the central pictorial object, thus transcending its primordial function as a representational carrier medium. Boundary-dissolving, space opening and immersive, allowing associations and yet intangible and adhering to the hidden, the compositions harbor a seemingly effortless complexity. Color Field Art and the Minimal Art movements have an immense influence on Rödel's practice. He translates these characteristics stemming from the history of abstraction into highly contemporary and simultaneously supra-temporal paintings of glistening beauty and raw imagery.