

Galerie Nordenhake is pleased to present a solo exhibition by German artist Günter Umberg. Here, Umberg continues his personal investigation of painting in a show that combines recent and earlier works.

Umberg is one of the major figures among contemporary artists questioning notions of abstraction, perception and materiality in painting. He started to paint in the 1970s, from the outset creating monochromes with unconventional materials and supports. Using semi-carbonized plant and animal material to prepare his own pigments, the artist has developed variations labeled, for example, «grape black», «bone black» and «ivory black». The result is a gradation of black shades: the grape derivative is tinted slightly brown, while the ivory is cast in a cooler blue tone. Painting on such surfaces as wood or sometimes aluminium, Umberg has developed a process involving repetitive pigment layering. This patient process can extend over the course of months or even years. The end result is a fully integrated painting structure, where raw materials are transformed into a picture. While the works serve as individual expressions of the artist's painterly actions, they do not communicate anything personal or betray any traces of an individual style. Through the intensive act of layering pigment, Umberg incorporates physical operations as an imperative part of his artistic practice and adds an intellectual dimension to his technical process.

In the first exhibition space, Umberg explores a new mode of serial display and presents a large group of paintings isolated on one wall. Using the span of the wall, he interposes black pigment paintings - which at this point have become his signature style - with smaller works in different shades of green. Together, the pictures can be perceived as a cohesive group that emerges from relations and interactions between each singular work. Simultaneously, these works can be viewed as individual pieces, each of which echoes an apparently similar one in an effort towards approximation. Painted on wood with variable depths, the hanging distances them further from the wall and projects them into the space of the room. In effect, this initiates a dialogue, bridging the gap between observer and picture.

On view in the second space is a diptych facing a single painting in a nearly square format that is quite frequently used by the artist. Umberg considers installation to be part of the artistic process, and consequently always installs his paintings himself. He does not conceive of the exhibition space as a neutral container, but works actively with the gallery's architecture and considers all possibilities of presentation. He thus invites us to look carefully at his paintings, asking us to take our time with them. His paintings not only create a visual experience, but also require the viewer's active observation involving the entire body. Through their format and placement, Günter Umberg's paintings pull our attention towards the absolute opaqueness of their rich surfaces. However, it is

only by engaging with the works as they extend into the gallery space that we might fully apprehend the paintings' materiality as spatial experience.

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