

RÉMY ZAUGG

In Erinnerung

April 10 – May 31, 2025

This exhibition is held in memory of Rémy Zaugg (1943–2005), one of the most radical Swiss artists, making 20 years since his passing. It offers a chance to revisit his work and reflect on the lasting impact of his artistic vision. Rémy Zaugg's work and writings consistently engaged with the interplay between the role of the painter and painting, perception, and space. His conceptual practice sought to redefine the viewer's role in experiencing art, emphasizing the significance of language in shaping visual reality.

Rémy Zaugg's analytical thinking, influenced by his interest in mathematics, chemistry, and physics, combined with his intuitive curiosity about the universe, informed his approach to art. He was convinced that the binary opposites by which the mind divides the world into light and dark, intellect and sensation, art and nature, are artificial. He sought to explore the mystery of seeing and its representation, understanding what constitutes reality and what constitutes an image.

For Zaugg, the phenomenon of seeing and its translation into understanding creates an intrinsic relationship between the world and its viewer, and between the viewer and the image: "The painting constitutes you, and you constitute the painting."

Every attempt at representation is, in a sense, a code influenced by this reciprocal relationship. The image acts as a mirror, capturing the unique reflection of a perception, and must therefore be questioned. Zaugg remained preoccupied with human perception and investigated and applied his analytical concept through various mediums. His paintings, works on paper, videos, public sculptures, architectural interventions, curating and criticism explore how vision and consciousness are linked. Zaugg remains best known for his text-based paintings in various languages on canvas and aluminium and his obsessive personal research of Cézanne's *La maison du pendu*, dedicating several decades to analyzing it through a rich exploration of drawings and writings. Since the early 1970s he used his notes as screenprints in his famous painting series *A Sheet of Paper* and *Esquisses Perceptives*.

This homage presents works from three pivotal groups of work by the artist:

About Blindness, A Sheet of Paper and New Paintings (N.P.)

The compelling and thought-provoking body of work SCHAU, ICH BIN BLIND, SCHAU / LOOK I AM BLIND, LOOK, conceived in the 1990s, explores themes of perception, blindness, and the act of seeing. Through a careful interplay of text and minimalist imagery in complementary colors, Zaugg presents the paradox of vision—simultaneously acknowledging blindness and the desire to see. The repetition of the phrase SCHAU, ICH BIN BLIND, SCHAU / LOOK I AM BLIND, LOOK becomes an ironic provocation, urging viewers to question not only their ability to see but their deeper understanding of what they perceive. Zaugg uses his body of work to investigate the limits of perception, revealing how sight can function as both a tool and a barrier in our interaction with the world. The process of creating the work is equally intricate: the paint is applied by an auto body painter, the text by a screen printer, and a transparent lacquer is then added to unify the contrasting techniques, neutralizing the materiality of the paint and the complexity of the process itself. The result is an image that transcends any sense of production or time dimension, existing in a state of pure, immediate presence.

In 1973, Rémy Zaugg began his series *A Sheet of Paper*, by covering packing paper found in his studio with paint in its natural brownish tone. He saw these painted sheets as embodiment of the ambivalence of painting at the end of the 20th century: the brown color refers both to the paper and to itself, representing the paper while existing as painting. This blend of the representational and material traditions means that both are present simultaneously, and neither can be excluded.

Since the late 1970s, Zaugg applied on these sheets of paper mounted on a canvas all various states of art and questions a painter raises with the realization of a painting. Beginning with the brown sheet of paper, its portrait in brown paint, the use of screenprints of his obsessive studies of Cézanne's *La maison du pendu* or descriptions of what one sees and how the painter acted on the sheet of paper. Furthermore through the projection of Picasso's painting *Portrait d'un peintre d'après El Greco* paraphrasing in brown paint painters referring to other painters. In doing so, the *A Sheet of Paper* works become allegories of perception, making the search for connection palpable. Perception itself becomes the subject, especially when Zaugg uses his Cézanne sketches. Language activates the viewer's imagination, competing with the painting itself. With *A Sheet of Paper*, Zaugg established his own concept of the image: it is both painting and "a sheet of paper" that carries language.

With the two works, STELL DIR VOR, DER BODEN WÜRDE DICH ANBLICKEN, 1996/1998 and UND WÜRDE MIR, SOBALD ICH DENKE, DIE WELT ENTFREMDET., 1997, the viewer encounters a new form of the subjunctive. Both express possibilities, consider actions, and link them to consequences. The image itself becomes an active subject, physically engaged. With these forms of possibility, Rémy Zaugg comes closest to the lyrical use of language. The color he chose to combine, ranges from representation to analogy, and ultimately to a detachment from the text.

MAI 36 GALERIE

Exhibitions, especially monographic ones, were of central importance to the artist, as they represented a comprehensive project. They provided him with the opportunity to develop and influence the history of his work. Each exhibition was an occasion for a publication, which allowed the displayed sequence to be archived and a theoretical focus to be developed, adhering to a very particular philosophy – one that grounded the coherence of his work between pragmatism and utopia, between the rational and the irrational, between a strict concept and an almost "eschatological" view of art.

His first major solo exhibition, *Dedans-Dehors*, was held at the Kunstmuseum Basel in 1972, setting the stage for his conceptual investigations. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, his work was exhibited in leading institutions across Europe, including Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Kunsthalle Basel, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Kröller-Möller Museum Otterloo and Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon. Notable exhibitions such as *Für ein Bild* (1988) and *Schau, du bist blind, schau* (1999) further established his reputation for challenging traditional notions of visual experience through text-based works. Zaugg also participated in the Biennale de Paris (1977), Documenta 7 in Kassel (1982), and the Biennale of Sydney (1990).

Posthumous exhibitions were held 2015/16 at the Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen and at the Palacio de Velázquez in Madrid. His collaborations with the Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, particularly in shaping Tate Modern in London, further highlight the architectural dimensions of his artistic vision. Across his career, Zaugg's work has consistently challenged viewers to reconsider how they see, read, and interpret their surroundings, securing his place as a pivotal figure in conceptual and perceptual art.