

Ça ira
Gerhard Merz

curated by Frank Boehm

Opening day:
12.04.2025, 12 – 7 pm

On view:
12.02.2025 - 31.05.2025

For over half a century, Gerhard Merz has challenged audiences with work that is at once lucid and profoundly complex. From his very first exhibition at the Kunstverein München in 1971, the artist established the enduring theoretical foundation of his practice. An early photograph—depicting a tear bar, a steel ruler, and a light bulb package—emerges as a manifesto that remains relevant to this day. Proportion, order, light, and—just as in that initial exhibition—geometric fields of color constitute the essential and self-sufficient means for an art that aspires to the absolute. Even here, one discerns the early signs of a transcendence of genre boundaries. Inspired by revolutionary architecture, Merz's work dissolves the distinctions between model and realization, between the conception of painting, space, and architecture.

In the ensuing decades, Merz took part in the most significant artistic manifestations, including four editions of Documenta in Kassel (1977, 1982, 1987, 1992), *Westkunst* in Cologne (1981), *Von hier aus* in Düsseldorf (1984), *Chambres d'Amis* in Ghent (1986), and the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (1997). For the latter, he conceived a white room within the pavilion, where the structure and the glow of thousands of fluorescent tubes transformed the visit into a unique, almost physical experience, erasing all historical and design connotations of the building. Since then, he has exhibited large-scale paintings and sculptures—some at architectural dimensions—in numerous solo exhibitions.

Merz advocates for a radical disillusionment, a purification of art from deceptive content, randomness, approximation, messages, and themes that claim to mirror contemporary concerns. In this stance, he stands in opposition to the prevailing tendencies of contemporary art. "*Merz seems to portray an emptiness in his work that implies neither transcendence nor submission to the mundane,*" Thomas McEvelley observed in 1995. This reduction of content, paired with a rigorous and far-reaching formal abstraction—one that is, in reality, a construction—might have led others to conceptual inertia, perhaps even to a sense of resignation. Merz's work, however, demonstrates that negation can function not as a constraint but as a form of liberation. He explores the possibilities and trajectories that, paradoxically, become all the more distinct precisely through these apparent limitations.

His artistic practice is pursued with absolute precision, whether through drawing, photography, painting, or the realization—by others—of full-scale models, pavilions, or buildings. "*I defend the human right to make art for no reason,*" Merz asserts, insisting on an approach that transcends pure conceptualism.

Numerous titles of works and exhibitions within Merz's oeuvre attest to his deep appreciation for Italy and its artistic heritage: *Archipittura, Costruire, Brennero-Duomo-Dove Sta Memoria, Mare, Mondo Cane*. Merz unwaveringly continues his trajectory, despite, or perhaps in response to, the turbulence of our times. After a significant period of reflection, the artist returns to his creative activity with a new series of works, *Ça ira*, created for the space of Galleria Giampaolo Abbondio and inspired by the revolutionary song from the era of the French Revolution. The monochromes in white and orange, along with a diptych in green and pink dedicated to Marcel Duchamp, radiate with an autonomous presence within the Renaissance architecture of the gallery.

The exhibition is curated by Frank Boehm, curator and architect, founding director of the Museum Mitoraj in Pietrasanta since 2024.

Gerhard Merz was born in Mammendorf, Germany in 1947. He lives and works in Berlin and Pescia. Among the many solo exhibitions are: Accademia Tedesca Villa Massimo, Roma (2011), Kunsthaus Bregenz (2003), Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2002), Kunstverein Hannover (2000) Helmhaus Zürich (1998), Kunsthaus Bregenz (1998), Padiglione Tedesco, Biennale di Venezia (1997), Kunst-Werke, Berlin (1995), Kunsthalle Basel (1995), Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (1994), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles (1992), Deichtorhallen, Hamburg (1992), Kunsthaus Hamburg (1992), De Appel, Amsterdam (1990), Kunstverein Hannover (1990), Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1989), Kunsthalle Zürich, Zurich (1989), Kunsthalle Baden-Baden (1987), Le Consortium, Dijon (1987), Kunstverein München, Monaco di Baviera (1986), Kunstverein Kassel (1984), Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh (1983), Kunstraum München (1982), Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven (1980), Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Monaco di Baviera (1978), Kabinett für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremerhaven (1978), Kunstraum München (1975). In 1983 he won the renowned "*Arnold Bode Preis*".

Professor at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf (1991-2004) and at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Munich (2004-2011), where he studied from 1963 to 1973.

Galleria Giampaolo Abbondio:

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Opening hours: Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 2.30 pm to 7 pm; Friday and Saturday from 11 am to 1.30 pm and from 2.30 pm to 7 pm / by appointment