

THERESA
MÖLLER

DIS-NATURE

She BAM! Galerie Lætitia Gorsy

KERBER ART

COSMORAMAS

by Lætitia Gorsy

Theresa Möller grew up in the German port town of Hamburg near the North Sea. In her early years, influenced by the rich and diverse architecture of the city, she painted abstracted building sites ("Baustelle" in German), developing a visual vocabulary with strong vanishing points. The architecture gradually gave way to a whole new genesis coming from an inner world, in which nature howls and tormented waters evolve throughout a surrealistic temporality, and where figurative elements can only appear if you summon them. This transition of patterns in her paintings occurred when the artist moved to Leipzig in 2014.

Theresa Möller is a dreamer with a sharp eye and brisk, precise, and determined gestures. The psychedelic delirium we dive into appeals to colours that are literally thrown at us. Only then the shapes may appear. Nevertheless, the inspiration is not naturalistic. The shades that the artist uses are sweet mallows, powdery blues, fruity oranges and Sea-Green. The forms emerge in the details: leaves, branches and trunks are revealed if you focus. Sometimes, the mineral pigments remind us of those summers when the sky becomes purplish. In other artworks, turquoises become cold as they recall this strange and timeless force that awaits in silence, in the shade. Architectures occasionally reappear through horizon lines and geometric forms created by Nature.

The patterns look alive but are not human. We are facing some sort of cosmoramamas devoid of protagonists, where the strength and the energy of the shapes build peculiar and eerie worlds for us to wander around.

The mystery and fantasy contained in Theresa Möller's paintings do not encourage narrative. They intentionally leave room for feelings, and we must take time to regard them closely. The artist's role here is to sublimate the invisible. The sunny tones of her palette are powerful and appeal to the subjective senses of the viewer. On Theresa Möller's canvases, the world we live in seems to be afflicted by a lethargic and incurable tragedy that defies a fast-paced and voracious pop culture. Her art may appear like a delusion but sums up the major contemporary concerns of our time.

A WANDERER IN THE WILDERNESS

by Sarie Nijboer

A wander in the wilderness is what my first experience with Theresa Möller's paintings felt like. A journey that took me past many details in textures, shades of light and gradations of colour. As someone who grew up next to the forest and enjoys spending hours in it, I feel an immediate connection to Möller's work. We have the opportunity to activate our senses in unforeseen ways when we are a visitor in the forest. Forests are symbioses of different material forces, including plants, trees, insects and other species, which both influence and shape each other. The relational dynamics between each force is important for the coexistence of the forest as a whole. It is a vibrant space, defined by its harmony within the chaos. The forest therefore can never be one-sided, and cannot be perceived from one perspective. Like the complexity of the forest, Möller's works offer a similar perceptual experience that mimics the multi-layered structure of it. The paintings reveal the surface and texture of the forest in its full potential, filled with light, tactility and a balanced chaos.

PAINTING AS A CONSTANT FLUX

Möller begins her paintings by throwing acrylic paint on the canvas that is lying on the ground, often starting with one or two colours. After applying these accidental layers of paint to the canvas, she then moves the canvas with both hands allowing the paint to drip and roll, sliding across the flat surface. It is a way of pushing the paint to its limit, working with the force of gravity while creating a constant flux of material that gradually evolves across the canvas. There is no certainty in this approach, the form is

never fixed and spreads out in different directions, like flowers that pop up when the rain has fallen and the sun has shone on them. After this process of movement and blossoming, Möller seeks for places on the canvas where something can still be revealed. She then begins to fill these “openings” by painting trees and leaves with oil paint, creating a new layer on the surface. The trees cross the canvas in all directions, but always in linear lines. The boundaries between the background and the foreground become clear and a dynamic movement emerges taking the viewer’s perception in many directions. The contrast created by this layering gives shape to new forms that are created by the blending and mapping of the two layers. Each line creates a new form, each form offers depth. Some of the layers she brushes away with sponges, so that a translucent layer emerges, leaving visible what has been painted underneath. These translucent layers add another layer of depth and spacious light to the painting, like a misty cloud that appears in the morning when the sun rises. Whereas her earlier works focus more on the geometry and graphic forms found in mountains or urban landscapes, her more recent work (such as *Branches 2021*, *Grain 2021*, *Structure 2021* or *Nexus 2020*) bring together fragments. These fragments are of nature, she is blending them or erasing them, and then adding layers of quick brushstrokes or dots of colour that are playful, disruptive and ambivalent. The brushstrokes appear like imaginary leaves or insects flying over the surface, affected by the wind that carries them along. They are dancing on the canvas creating a flowing dreamlike image.

When I look at all these layers, I feel the care that Möller devotes to each layer of depth – every area is carefully filled with new details and stratifications of colour, but have arisen organically. To the artist, it is also about the process of time, waiting for the paint to dry, then adding another layer, before adjusting and re-applying new layers. This method requires working with and understanding the quality of pigment, tone, texture and grain. The sense of harmony created through the working of the structures and forms demonstrates the wild and exciting potential of paint, away from a traditional brush. Möller finds a harmony in chaos, in playfulness, in light and darkness and it is this that make the works so challenging to observe. With all those layers, with paint moving in all different directions, the works reveal a continuous process of discovery, of becoming rather than being.

COLOURS AS A LANGUAGE

One of the main elements that make the vibrant paintings of Möller so intriguing is her constant play with colour. Her intricate compositions reflect the incredible complexity of painting with the vast array of palette used. She mixes the deep depths of blue and turquoise with bright shades such as violet, pink and orange. The contrasting colours simultaneously emphasise each other whilst giving the painting greater intensity and depth. These explorations of colour bring to the front the constant flux and energy that is a vivid signature for all her works.

When looking at Möller’s work, I am reminded of the Ukrainian-born French artist Sonia Delaunay (1885–1979), who in her work sought colour combinations that could evoke a multitude of possible interpretations and create simultaneous meanings. Delaunay’s paintings are composed of contrasting or complementary colours that interlock or overlap in patches. By perfectly allowing the placement of colour on the canvas, both movement and energy are created. This technique would later be coined as Orphism by French poet Guillaume Apollinaire in 1912. For Delaunay, the process of exploring colours involved discovering harmonies and dissonances in colour that could give them a life of their own. She

placed colours next to each other that could create a pulse or a vibration from which a rhythm was created evoking emotion and activating sensation. Just like Delaunay's, also Möller's paintings – through the placement of colours that complement and contradict one another – rhythm and movement is felt. This technique is forcing the viewer to experience the fullness of the canvas, driving the eyes in all directions to enable the constant discovery of new details. Eventually, the canvas becomes a pulsating playground of colour that evokes a playful anarchy in which hierarchies collapse.

Different in form, but also famous for her intense and colourful abstract and expressionist paintings, is American artist Joan Mitchell (1925–1992). Inspired by natural phenomena and the energy of life, Mitchell's work is characterised by a fresh and spontaneous abstraction that evokes landscapes, memories, poetry and music. For Mitchell, abstract was not a style, she simply wanted to make a surface work. She painted from her memories of landscapes, which she then transformed onto canvas in innovative ways. Möller too has a collection of images from nature, which are never directly translated onto canvas, but rather used as inspiration for structures and textures. Painting is an adventure into the unknown. The act of painting forces her to look at the brushstrokes in front of her, to take distance before returning to what has been painted. Rather than depicting what has been stored in her memory, the act becomes a way of activating the process of creation. Like a gardener who plants the seeds, waters them and then waits to see how the light affects growth, Möller's paintings are a personal study of how colour can affect a painting. With each layer of colour added, the neighbouring colour takes on a new meaning. A compelling tension is created!

Painting offers the possibility to identify with the subject, to interpret the images from our own memories. In the case of Möller's intense colourful paintings it's my memory of being in nature that I am transported to, of sorts. I experience an almost sculptural quality, a three-dimensional way of looking into her work, as if I, in a sense, am existing within the painting. Möller's work is an invitation to reconnect with the natural world, allowing visitation to memories passed, but also enabling travel to a new world, one rich in textures, with light and colour, a world in which I am a wanderer passing through, in a constant state of discovery.

Theresa Möller (*1988) lives and works in Leipzig and Montréal.

She studied at Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig (Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst) and received her diploma in painting and fine arts graphics in 2018. Before, she studied illustration and painting at the HAW Hamburg.

Since then, she received several grants and had residencies at Künstlerhaus Eckernförde (Germany) and Fonderie Darling (Montréal, Canada). Theresa Möller has participated in many international exhibitions in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Portugal, Switzerland, and the United States.