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Amuse

Katharina Grosse Has A Way With Spray Paint

"I want people to have that very extreme relationship with painting in space"

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Katharina Grosse, This Drove My Mother up the Wall, Acrylic on wall and floor, South London Gallery, 2017. Photo Andy Keate

German artist Katharina Grosse is celebrated for her high velocity, pigment-rich paintings that use whole landscapes and buildings as their canvas (perhaps most spectacularly on the seafront in New York's Fort Tilden). Her latest show at Camberwell's South London Gallery, *This Drove My Mother up the Wall*, reveals the full physical impact of her work and the thoughtfulness behind it.

The main installation masks vast swathes of the gallery's exhibition hall in layers of spray-paint (it's been the Insta hit of the season in London). On a more intimate scale, upstairs, Grosse presents two documentaries by female filmmakers that reveal her far-reaching influences and thought processes.

You're well-known for your outdoor paintings that can encompass roads, buildings and elements of nature. Where do you begin with these outdoor commissions?

All the outside works have to articulate themselves very visibly in relation to their surroundings, which are always so much larger and more noisy than interior spaces. So whatever I do, it has to

behave as if it is disturbing. The colour choices have to be very simple, so you can identify what you're looking at. I like to include different worlds within the area I paint. And I like my painting to seem as if it transgresses – it doesn't discern a difference between painting this tree or painting a house, it doesn't articulate itself as being choosy, it is not stopping.

How does your approach to interior commissions such as at the South London Gallery differ? How did you respond to the character of this space?

The SLG is already very clearly an exhibition space– it wants to exhibit, it wants to show, it is built for that. It is even a very classical idea of an exhibition space. It is a laboratory for exhibitions, and that is how I chose to use it, and why I laid a white floor to make it even more neutral. But most of all, I was responding to the volume of the space and the beautiful daylight that circulates freely in it.

How did you determine your use of colour in this installation?

I used the colour as structure makers. There are elements and characteristics that are important to that space, such as its architectural symbols and quotations of architectural history (its half columns, cornices and plasterwork) that are erased and painted over by my work. I used the colour to make the seam between floor and wall invisible – to eliminate it and make it soft and questionable.

When beginning a new work do you have the viewer's experience in mind?

I don't think I can influence a specific reaction or experience in a viewer, but I would like people to have a new way of looking at painting, and to experience painting as a very vital, flexible and present medium that can do things that you can't see in the image world of our everyday life. We rely heavily on screens, which are such homogenous and un-tactile surfaces. I do not respond to a screen with my body as I respond to a painted surface, and I want people to have that very extreme relationship with painting in space.

Why did you include works by other artists (the documentaries *The Gleaners and I* [2000] by Agnes Varda, and *Women Artists* [2016] by Claudia Müller) alongside your own work?

I felt that the one installation in that room was so clear, that I didn't want to add smaller drawings upstairs, so I thought maybe I could show something of my thinking. Agnes Varda's film *The Gleaners and I* is very important to me – the way she deals with residue, what we throw away, how it travels, and how it is reused. Things that are discarded by one person, all of a sudden seem very precious to others. It is a very inspiring, poetic film. The other film, *Women Artists* by Claudia Müller presents a proposal for an imagined show that only features women artists. I like the idea of curating a show in a small format. There are a lot of artists and influences from all generations in that show that I really cherish and find inspiring.

Do women artists play a particular role in redressing the imbalances between men and women in the world?

I think everybody plays that role. Everybody makes a proposal (whether we want to or not) on how we want to live together, by the way we live, the way we talk and the way we accept things. I would love to see how our lives would be different if we didn't do the same thing all the time. I think it is true that women are not granted the same rights as men. Maybe on paper, yes, but not in reality, and that should change, but that is not the obligation of women artists. On the other hand, so much has changed. In the 20th century there are so many more great women artists than there were before. But it is not a question of women or men. I think we should all find a way to accept the different voices that we could use.