

Artforum
March 1, 2017

GAGOSIAN

ARTFORUM

Katharina Grosse

GAGOSIAN / 555 WEST 24th STREET

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Katharina Grosse, Untitled, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 12' 4 7/8" × 12' 11 7/8".

The acclaimed German painter Katharina Grosse is known for her boundless approach to her chosen medium, spraying with an industrial paint gun not only canvases, but also mounds of soil, uprooted trees, architecture, sculptural elements, and—for the pleasure of beach-goers last summer—an entire one-story building, inside and out. In Rockaway!, 2016, a startling neo-Earthwork, superhuman gestures in wild sunset hues transformed a decaying structure, part of the old Fort Tilden army base on the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens, that was condemned in the wake of Hurricane Sandy's devastation. Grosse did not renew, repurpose, or memorialize the site in any conventional way. Instead, she drew out the spectacular quality of the catastrophic storm with her own show of force and excess, using gallon upon gallon of magenta, red, and white paint (as well as a crane) to obliterate the ruin, feathering its edges into the surrounding sand. So, of course, I looked forward to seeing what she'd do with some twenty thousand pristine square feet at Gagolian's West Twenty-Fourth Street space for her first solo gallery show in New York.

Grosse chose not to ravage the place as she has in previous in situ work. But her sixteen towering paintings, all of them untitled and created over the course of 2016, did not disappoint. Impossibly dense with saturated, dripping layers, they felt like portals to a garish and bewildering world of pigment that continued on beyond the walls. Though decidedly nonobjective, the works evoke alien landscapes or deep theatrical sets with multiple planes of sleek geological features and strange flora. Grosse achieves her dazzling effect of seamless collage with countless freehand

coats of blaring color and huge stencils cut from cardboard or foam rubber. The apparently masked areas are often equally built-up with paint, meaning her order of operations is difficult to discern, so we quickly give up trying to figure out exactly how she does it. The monumental graphic compositions are bold; they're also intricate with accumulated accidents—marbleized or cracking borders, and instances where a stencil's brusque or premature removal has peeled away a long vein of sticky acrylic.

The two largest paintings, positioned kitty-corner in the gallery's cavernous west room, were knockouts of different varieties. A horizontal canvas measuring approximately ten by nineteen feet was a hazy, primary- and secondary-colored beast bleeding off the edges, its middle more defined, like some Futurist meta-machine; while a roughly thirteen-foot, squarish composition recalled Joan Mitchell's levitating tangles with its rhythmically shredded curtain form in cross-faded Popsicle tones. Grosse's works do not all look the same but are distinguished by the range of her propulsive, mediating tool—we're always aware of the territorial airborne-ness of her method. The spray gun can summon the plasticky, oozing, devouring aesthetic of Lynda Benglis's poured floor sculptures, and it can easily deliver a polished simulation of the arc-and-splatter style of the AbExers Benglis so magnificently spoofed. But Grosse, fascinatingly, doesn't seem to be spoofing anyone. She unironically—in fact, entirely convincingly—embraces the role of a true action painter, however grandiose, invasive, mischievous, or decorative such a project may prove to be today.