

GAGOSIAN

CULTURED

Spray It Loud

Ryan Steadman



Katharina Grosse in front of Untitled (2016) at Gagosian Gallery. All portraits by Fracois Dischinger

For nearly two decades, German painter Katharina Grosse has pushed the limits of her spray-painted, site-specific installations into realms few—if any—painters dare to go. Her pioneering of large-scale productions, which has included everything from an historic railway station house in Sweden (swathed in bright blue) to a giant pile of multi-hued soil, culminated this summer with a colorful takeover of an abandoned aquatics building on the desolate beachfront of Fort Tilden, New York. Titled *Rockaway!* the masterful mirage of color-soaked psychedelia was a runaway hit with both the art cognoscenti and Instagrammers alike.

There was only one problem: What do you do it for a spring encore in New York City after dominating the previous summer? For Grosse, the most subversive thing she could envision after *Rockaway!*'s outsize success was to turn inward to upset the long-settled traditions of paint-on-canvas. "It's exciting to have different kinds of containers for the works, so I can think about painting in different ways," says Grosse. "And they inspire each other."

Her large-scale canvases, which went on view at Gagosian's cavernous Chelsea space in January, aren't the artist's first attempt at the form by any means, but this exhibition clearly represents her most ambitious attempt to date. Because of this, she gave herself copious amounts of time in the studio, mounting only two museum shows in 2016—a slow year for this in-demand installation artist—while limiting her public projects and speaking engagements.

Though Grosse's signature "sprayed" look is present in these more discreet works, the final canvases end up having a very different feel than Grosse's paint-blasted sites, which have also included a train yard in Philadelphia and an abandoned house in New Orleans's Ninth Ward created for the city's inaugural Prospect.1 biennial, among other unorthodox locales. "You can stack a lot of different shapes in a canvas where you compress all of your action," she says about her process. "The site-related works only happen in a short time frame of around a week, but a canvas can be revisited after a month or more and collect all different kinds of moments."

Also unique to Grosse's canvases is a range of painterly moves that are the result of a studio-based process, such as innumerable drip marks (thanks to close range spraying with a "really big gun") and a variety of crisp lines created with stencils that mask off areas of Grosse's prodigious spray assaults. "My first thought was to put too much on them," she said of the new canvases. "But then I went away from that and to my surprise, I settled on these very clear emblematic works." This could be a surprise to the casual fan of Grosse's work, whose in situ installations shatter our ideas of what can be considered a painting by enveloping rambling and often enormous spaces. But her canvases, with their multiple layers and tight compositions, lead the viewer in an entirely different direction: inward.

"Painting is an interesting activity because you think and act at the same time," says Grosse. "And as you change your thoughts, you constantly have to readjust your process—and the picture."