

GAGOSIAN

## PURPLE DIARY

AN INTERVIEW WITH KATHARINA GROSSE ON HER “PROTOTYPES  
OF IMAGINATION” EXHIBITION AT GAGOSIAN, LONDON

Jethro Turner



*Photo Charles Geoffrion*

JETHRO TURNER — You work a lot outside as well as inside gallery spaces. What did you intend to do here when you knew you had this space to work with?

KATHARINA GROSSE — I wanted to make amazing use of the daylight. I think it’s a beautifully lit gallery and I had done this site specific work for the South London Gallery last November, so I knew I was going to do something very different here. I wanted to show the canvases I’ve been painting over the past six or seven months and also have one very large painting that has a relationship with the space. One work that kind of has an impact on the architectural space. I thought that was going to be the hinge around which the other two galleries pivot, in a sense.

JETHRO TURNER — Did you paint the works in Berlin?

KATHARINA GROSSE — I painted all the works in the studio in Berlin. I have two very large painting studios. One is really well lit via skylights and is in the city. The other one is a little drive away and is an old gunpowder factory where I painted the big cloth and some other works around it. I paint a lot of works at the same time.

JETHRO TURNER — So you switch a lot between works?

KATHARINA GROSSE — I do. I paint on everything at the same time. I don't say 'today I'm going to do this bit or that bit', but I go from one decision to the next, to the next, and I try to find out 'what if I did this here, and what if I did that differently there'.

JETHRO TURNER — Do you also set up particular colors to use at specific times?

KATHARINA GROSSE — No, I use all the colors together as a raw material. I have a palette of maybe thirty five colors that are more or less the spectrum, warm and cold, and opaque and transparent. You have about five or six colors that match all these qualities, and then I use the colors together. I never say 'this is an isolated pink and I like that one especially'. It's always about coming up with a lot of different colors at the same time, and they kind of generate a stream that flows.

JETHRO TURNER — I was reflecting on the 'imagination' in the title of the show, but also a sense I had of hallucination and 'falling into things' that I think you can feel when you look at the paintings. What's your intention with the use of color here?

KATHARINA GROSSE — Color can do a lot of different things I think. One is that it creates an immediate resonance with you. Before you know it, you're looking at it and you have a visceral reaction to it like a voice in a performance where it hits you before you hear the words or lyrics. I think that it kind of gets your system. Another reason is that it allows me, within a painting, to mark different moments in time. It structures the work and it sets the atmosphere and the mood – a certain emotional quality. But I think also think color is totally independent of space or site.

JETHRO TURNER — Unlike with the smaller paintings, with the larger work, people can move around behind it and it operates on the reverse as well. You've obviously done a lot of installation works that people can explore around, but this is interesting because there are just two planes, you have one side and then the other.

KATHARINA GROSSE — Yes, it is a painting that is on a very thin surface, so there is no mask or multidimensional surface like you have in the installation work. The thin fabric allows the color through, so you could even say it's like a sieve. You can play a lot of different games with the work – you can look at it from up front and see the structure and how it vibrates and is vital and even nervous, and leave it there. But you can also see how you have a 3-dimensional space with a floor and a back wall and all of sudden there is something very soft coming up, as if it was a knife cutting smoothly through butter. In that sense there is something occurring in the space that is interfering with this very 3-dimensional, neatly-built architecture which makes it soft and kind of disturbs it as well.

JETHRO TURNER — I found it a strangely calming space.

KATHARINA GROSSE — You have your own space as well so it kind of divides the volume of the space into something narrow and high and something more lush and open. And then it is also of course the surface and the back of a painting, so it gives you all the different realities of that kind of structure.

JETHRO TURNER — I also wanted to explore this sense of spillage or chaos versus a sense of intention and structure in the work. That seems to be one of the major features here – you’re very careful about where you make your marks or spray your spray, but there’s also this kind of wildness to the drips.

KATHARINA GROSSE — I can control the drips – make them stronger or not appear at all. But you’re right – that’s what I’m interested in. I have an intention, then I start working, which is very clearly laid out with a certain structure and movement that I have. But then it can also really move and open up into a lot of different possibilities. It’s like when you’re on a trip that you plan really carefully, but then you break your leg on the second day, and it suddenly turns into a very different trip. But you make a new decision that it’s going to be great and you have a new experience. I’m fascinated that you can have a very clear, beautifully designed plan, but you have to be totally open to sacrificing it. And that opens the work up to develop into something that’s very contemporary, which means: it takes place right now. If you exclude all those extra things, then it becomes something that can’t develop for the future. It becomes something that you have a recipe for and you execute. And that’s not how I want to paint.

JETHRO TURNER — These paintings kind of fix moments or things in time, don’t they, while going far beyond time?

KATHARINA GROSSE — If I only knew what time was! As a painter you have a very different idea of time. You start something and you end it, and all the different things you do on that field are, in the end, all there at the same time.

JETHRO TURNER — Which is what is so fascinating about light in paintings isn’t it?

KATHARINA GROSSE — That’s very true. In a book you have a first page a last page, and it’s a more linear movement. The cluster is constructed in a different way. Whereas in a painting you have all the things at the same time, even the things that seem to contract each other. That’s why I like painting, because it makes me experience things like hot and cold at the same time. It’s like a paradox. It’s not saying only ‘this’ is possible and ‘that’ isn’t. Both are possible at the same time.

“Prototypes of Imagination” is on view until July 27th, 2018 at Gagosian, 6-24 Britannia Street, London.