



## Ute Diehl Rapidity as Method: Günther Förg's "Spot Paintings" as a Nod to the Incomplete

Günther Förg always painted his works in series: Lead paintings, colour fields, grid paintings, spot paintings. Once he felt that was enough, he would start on something radically new. The ideas should not become hackneyed through routine. He began his studies at the Münchner Akademie in 1973, at a time when broader re-definitions of art had plunged painting into a crisis. Jörg Immendorff, who had exhorted his fellow artists to "stop painting," was still doing precisely that and painted *Wo stehst du mit deiner Kunst, Kollege?* in 1973. Günther Förg answered the question regarding his stance a year later with an exhibition of six monochrome grey paintings. He had opted for a radical reduction of the artistic medium, going over the black primer with a sponge dipped in grey. Reminiscent of badly wiped school blackboards, these pictures were created out of a certain attitude of refusal, Förg later said. His role model was the American painter Robert Ryman (1930–2019), an exponent of Minimalism.

Förg's Minimal Art phase took a new turn in 1978 with the "Wall Paintings," in which oversized fields of colour partitioned walls vertically or horizontally. From his Munich years onwards, he would use a wide variety of painting mediums such as nettle fabric, plywood, or even rolled lead used in roofing. The lead's smooth surface, shimmering between grey and blue, allowed paint to be applied quickly and without pre-treatment, whereby the brushstrokes remained visible. It was these "Lead Paintings" that made Förg a star painter in the 1980s. Demand came mainly from the United States, prompting the artist to remark: "I've leaded up the whole of America!"

And then he started from a clean slate again in 1990s, painting window and grid structures on canvas and later switching over to a new phase of almost Impressionistic "Spot Paintings." The painting for sale being a prime example: The grids and geometric surfaces that preoccupied Förg during his entire career have almost completely disappeared. A faintly recognizable system of lines is all that holds together the patches of colour, which the painter distributes casually across the white canvas. The spots next to and on top of one another look almost like a musical score. If we could hear it played, the music would likely be subdued, given that Förg uses only muted colours such as dark pink, fawn, dark green, ochre, light grey and a few traces of violet, placing all of them in the picture four or five times, with black predominating.

Förg selected his colours before starting to paint and did not change or add to them during the process. He worked rapidly and completed each picture in one go. Legend has it that while painting with watercolours, he noticed the colourful blotches on the paper he used to press excess paint off the brush. However, the "spots" look rather more like calligraphic letters than daubings, with clearly visible traces of the brush's upward and downward strokes. Painting in oil was something Günther Förg was intensely averse to, particularly since it required the canvas to be primed, and also because he disliked the smell of oil and solvents. "It all smells too much like art," he would say. Though acrylic was his preferred medium, he was not entirely satisfied with this "industrial sauce" either, and would occasionally resort to oils "to put together something deep." In our painting, he could not make up his mind and used both media.

Given the many rather gloomy chromatic panels that had gone before, the artist's final series of paintings had something unexpectedly cheerful about them, featuring new and previously unseen colors. Günther Förg stopped painting in 2010, after suffering a stroke, and passed away in 2013. For Rudi Fuchs, who organized the artist's first major retrospective at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1995, Förg was "the last great artist of Modernism."



23 Günther Förg

Füssen 1952 – 2013 Freiburg

Untitled. 2007  
Acrylic and oil crayon on canvas. 201 × 240,3 cm (79 1/8 × 94 5/8 in.). Signed and dated with black chalk in the upper left: Förg 07. On the strainer two labels of Galerie Almine Rech as well as a label with the printed work details and the archive number. The painting is registered under number WVF.07.B.0254 in the archive of the Estate Günther Förg. [3117]

Provenance  
Private Collection, Germany (acquired at Galerie Bärbel Grässlin, Frankfurt a. M.)

EUR 400,000–600,000  
USD 449,000–674,000

Exhibition  
Günther Förg. Knokke, De Brock Gallery, 2010

Literature and illustration  
Rudi Fuchs: Günther Förg – Back and Forth. Cologne, Snoeck Verlag, 2008, ill. p. 129

We would like to thank Herrn Michael Neff from Estate Günther Förg for kindly confirming the authenticity of this work.

