



RUDOLF
STINGEL

RUDOLF STINGEL

May 26–October 6, 2019

Introduction

Rudolf Stingel was born in 1956 in Merano, Italy, and moved to New York in 1987, where he has mainly lived and worked up to the present. From the outset of his career, in the late 1980s, he has explored painting in a conceptual and self-reflective manner, investigating its potential and media-specific boundaries in interaction with artistic processes, materials, and forms. In addition to various series of abstract and photorealistic paintings, he also creates large-format works out of styrofoam, cast metal and spaces lined with carpets or insulation boards that can be touched and entered into. Common to all these works, despite their material differences, are randomly occurring or consciously generated traces of the painting process that appear on the surface. They also formulate fundamental questions about perception and the understanding of art as well as the themes of memory and transience.

The exhibition brings together Stingel's most important work series from all phases of his career over the last three decades, thus offering a comprehensive overview of his multifaceted artistic practice. A series of new paintings will be presented for the first time in the show. Also featured are new, site-specific works made of carpet and Celotex insulation boards. The Fondation Beyeler's entire restaurant will be transformed into a silver installation that visitors can interact with.

Conceived room by room, the exhibition curated by Udo Kittelmann in close collaboration with the artist does not follow a chronological order, focused instead on the specific confrontation of individual artworks, whose selection and display have been conceived in specific response to the spaces designed by Renzo Piano.

Front:
Rudolf Stingel, *Untitled*, 2014, Electroformed copper, plated nickel, and stainless steel frame, 240 x 1200 x 4cm, © Rudolf Stingel, Photo: Alessandro Zambianchi

ROOM 1

1 Untitled, 2019

The subject of *Untitled*, 2019, is taken from Rudolf Stingel's 1989 artist book titled *Instructions*. In this step-by-step photographic description, he explains in six languages how his abstract paintings are made. One of the last steps is the application of silver paint with an airbrush onto a canvas coated with oil paint and covered with tulle. *Instructions* provides readers with the techniques of how to make a Rudolf Stingel work; at the same time, it highlights the ambivalence between the original and the copy. Stingel's photorealistic paintings are always the result of a rendering process. An existing image, in this case, a black-and-white photograph that he himself commissioned, is transposed onto another medium, namely, a large-format painting. Here, the transformation is particularly evident: the airbrush, the painter's tool, is painted, and the canvas visible in the *Instructions*' photograph is enlarged and translated back into an actual canvas.

2 Untitled, 2008

The creative process shown in the opposite picture—applying paint by airbrush onto a canvas covered with tulle—seems to be realized in *Untitled*, 2008. Extending over the large, silvery surface of the canvas is a white grid structure whose clear and exact lines create the impression of having been printed by means of a technical process. This painting is at once an abstract and a photorealistic work: its lattice structure appears like a decorative pattern devoid of any reference and yet it represents a real object, a chain-link fence. A subtle play with the different dimensions of 'openness' also emerges. The picture suggests unveiling in the form of a latticework through which we can seemingly gaze—but appearances are deceptive because the silvery surface reveals nothing lying behind it.

ROOM 2

3 Untitled, 1992–2019

Rudolf Stingel uses unconventional materials in his artistic work. In this room, an industrially produced carpet is brought together with styrofoam panels and a classic oil painting. The artist first presented a carpet in this specific orange color as early as 1991—as the sole work—at his first gallery show in New York. At the time, the carpet spanned the entire floor area of the otherwise empty white cube of the exhibition space. At the Fondation Beyeler, the carpet is instead mounted on the wall, making the room feel surprisingly striking and altering one's atmospheric sense of space. The soft wall carpet may be touched; visitors can leave behind painterly traces on its surface and so temporarily change the work's appearance.

4 Untitled, 1999

Traces play an important role in Rudolf Stingel's work: signs of production, of use, traces of time and artistic thinking. The ten cerulean styrofoam boards carved with a sharp tool display angular indentations. Recalling frozen snow or ice, they develop a dynamism that is as painterly as it is sculptural. The relief-like appearance of *Untitled*, 1999, engages in a suspenseful, richly contrasting dialogue with the uneven, softer, and ephemeral traces in the orange carpet on the opposite wall as well as with the folds in the photorealistic painting of a Madonna sculpture.



Rudolf Stingel, *Untitled*, 1999, styrofoam, 304.8 x 487.6 x 10.1 cm; 10 panels © Rudolf Stingel, Photo: Bill Orcutt, Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

ROOM 3

5 Untitled, 2015

A ghostlike figure with a wide-open mouth, deep eye sockets, and arms flung upward in dismay or fright gazes unexpectedly out of the painting at the viewer. The figure is shrouded in a cloak of white fabric suggesting both presence and absence. This visual motif derives from the image of an old marionette that the artist transposed into a painting. He then spread out the painted canvas on his studio floor to expose it to the most varied influences. The dynamic superimpositions on the picture surface illustrate the element of process within the artistic work and the crossing of boundaries between figuration and abstraction.

6 Untitled, 2012

The paintings in this room were made in a multilayered process—an artistic method that we encounter time and again in Stingel's work. In this group of works, the so-called Serapi carpet pattern was applied with oil paint and enamel onto a canvas whose surface had already been covered by different layers of paint. Here, along with the processual aspect, Stingel's typical approach of working in series also takes on tangible form. Rather than concentrating on the individual work as such, the artist instead produces a whole series of comparable and interrelated pictures dealing with a particular motif. The individual visual motif can reappear in different variations. The Serapi pattern seen here was used not only for this group of paintings but also in several creative phases for the overlapping of photorealistic painted motifs such as portraits and landscapes.

ROOM 4

7 Untitled, 2014

A dense net of carvings and impressions extends across the silvery surface: scratches, grooves, and gouges coalesce into signs and gestures, letters, and symbols. Rudolf Stingel repeatedly covers entire gallery or museum rooms with Celotex boards (an industrial insulation material) in which visitors can leave their traces behind—as in Room 9 of the exhibition, and for a few weeks in the Fondation Beyeler's restaurant. The malleable surface of the aluminum-coated foam panels can be transformed by applying minimal pressure with one's hands or fingers. *Untitled*, 2014, originated in an installation from 2011 in the Serralves Museum in Porto. In this case, the artist selected a section of the insulation board shaped by exhibition visitors. It was then recreated by means of electroforming, a casting process known for its absolute precision and particularly even application of metal particles. The work is now hard, permanent, and can no longer be touched.

8 Untitled, 2013

Poised in the center of the picture is a realistically painted red fox in a snowy landscape. The reference for the work is from an old German calendar in which each of the weekly pages shows a different animal in its natural surroundings. *Untitled*, 2013, with its precise brush stroke, meticulously reproduces the photographic original, adopting all its imperfections. The work is part of a series for which Stingel copied animal portraits from the same calendar—an owl, a woodpecker, and a wild boar, all native to the Alpine landscape—each in the identical square format. The motif of the fox appears familiar and is linked with numerous stories, ranging from its role in mythology and fairy tales to completely subjective associations.

ROOM 5

9 Untitled, 2010

As a model for his landscape painting, Rudolf Stingel often uses found, historical photographs and their material qualities in the painting process. Hence, in this painting of a peak in the South Tyrolean Alps, we notice not only the attention to detail in the rendering itself but also the dust and scratches accumulated on the surface of the original photographic model. Memories and traces take on a central role in the artist's work, evidence of exploration on the autobiographical plane, as well as of both conscious and unconscious processes. The dynamics between control and chance become themselves the subject of investigation through the medium of painting. As in other work groups, these canvases were left on the studio floor for some time, absorbing gestures and traces of Stingel's everyday artistic practice. The three luminous, matte gold paintings reveal this creative process in multilayered form, such as in the juxtaposition of light and dark or of occupied and unoccupied areas. Landscapes emerge—entirely specific and at the same time completely abstract—that open up a view of perspectival space.



Rudolf Stingel, *Untitled*, 2010, Oil on canvas, 335.3 x 459 cm The Broad Art Foundation, Photo: Christopher Burke Studio, Image Courtesy Gagosian

ROOM 6

10 Untitled, 2018

In *Untitled*, 2018, a magnified flower field extends across three large panels, taking the form of a classical triptych. The gaze wanders over the painted floral landscape with pink roses and peonies, white lilies and daisies, blue chrysanthemums, and red poppies. The rhythm of the painting is based on the photographic representation of a mid-nineteenth century wallpaper. On the facing triptych, *Untitled*, 2014, the repetitive motif of a damask wallpaper pattern contrasts with the magenta background. The apparent imperfections of the green paint underneath, together with the silver reflections on the surface, make the repetitive pattern unique. This room offers a beguiling comparison: two triptychs are juxtaposed, each based on motifs from historical wallpapers. While the former appears to be figurative, the latter becomes abstract. Closer examination, however, reveals that both floral motifs are rendered in endless repetition. Besides conceptually investigating painterly effects on pictorial surfaces, Stingel's work addresses notions of ornament and décor in relation to space.



Rudolf Stingel, *Untitled*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 241.3 x 589.3 cm; in 3 parts, each: 241.3 x 193 cm, © Rudolf Stingel, Photo: John Lehr

ROOM 7

11 Untitled, 2019

The paintings in this room tell the story of their genesis, which is clearly manifested in the appearance of their surface. Evidences of a multilayered process are dispersed into the fine textures on the canvases. Similar to the wet drapery technique in Greek sculptures (i.e. wet canvases thrown over a living model, whose folds remain in the once chosen arrangement) the traces left by the folding of the tulle transform the flat surface into tridimensional volumes. They evoke the impression of barren landscapes permeated by prominent veins, suggesting thin, shimmering layers that seem to extend into the room. Rudolf Stingel first painted works of this kind in the late 1980s. Their making is described in his artist book *Instructions* (see Text 1). Since then, the artist has repeatedly worked with this technique developing new variations. These five paintings, specifically conceived for the present exhibition at the Fondation Beyeler, have been deliberately arranged in dialogue with one another and with the architecture of the space.



Rudolf Stingel, *Untitled*, 2019, Oil and enamel on canvas, 241.3 x 193 cm © Rudolf Stingel, Photo: John Lehr

ROOM 8/9

12 Untitled (After Sam), 2006

Hanging on the walls of this encompassing carpet installation (see Text 13) is a colossal portrait of the artist, as melancholic as it is solemn, large and overwhelming like a movie screen. Rudolf Stingel poses as the protagonist of a film. Rather than a self-portrait, it is a meticulously painted reproduction of a photograph by his fellow artist Sam Samore, hence the reference in its title *After Sam*. On the opposite wall is *Untitled*, 2009, a cast featuring the artist's footprints—a 'self-portrait' of considerable suggestive force.

13 Untitled (Sarouk), 2019

A wall-to-wall carpet printed with a Sarouk Persian rug motif extends through Rooms 8 and 9, spanning the entire cross wall of the museum. Stingel presented a similar work as early as 2006 at a gallery show in Milan. That time, however, the carpet was installed on the entire gallery floor. Here, the artist has shifted the carpet—an object that is generally laid out horizontally and can be walked upon—onto the wall and thus into a vertical position. The orientation as well as the function of the object have thereby changed: the carpet becomes a gigantic, frameless picture that merges with the architectural context and influences our perception of it. Through the strong magnification and the halving of the actual motif, the pattern also takes on an almost spatial dimension, similar to a landscape painting.



Rudolf Stingel, *Untitled (After Sam)*, 2006, Oil on canvas, 335.3 x 457.2 cm © Rudolf Stingel, Photo: Elen Page Wilson

INFORMATION

Catalogue Rudolf Stingel

Edited by Udo Kittelmann for the Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel
Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2019, 380 pages, 475 illus., CHF 65.–
Further publications on Rudolf Stingel are available at the museum shop: shop.fondationbeyeler.ch



The exhibition is generously supported by:

Beyeler-Stiftung
Hansjörg Wyss, Wyss Foundation
Luma Stiftung
WestendArtBank

Upcoming exhibition:

RESONATING SPACES
October 6, 2019–January 26, 2020

Room texts: Tasnim Baghdadi, Iris Brugger, Udo Kittelmann, Daniel Kramer, Janine Schmutz, Rahel Schrohe, Elena Tavecchia
Edited by: Rahel Schrohe, Tasnim Baghdadi
Translation: Joann Skrzypzak-Davidsmeyer
Copy editing: Andrew Horsfield
Graphic design: Heinz Hiltbrunner

FONDATION BEYELER

Baselstrasse 101, CH-4125 Riehen/Basel
fondationbeyeler.ch

#beyelerstingel
[f](#) [i](#) [t](#)