



**Laura Aberham**

20 March – 24 April 2020

Friday – Saturday, 12–6 pm and by appointment

Opening reception

Friday 20 March 2020, 6–9pm

“No one uses a paintbrush in the way that I do.”

Laura Aberham’s work is a homage to colour. She approaches the surface with explosive gestures, long brushstrokes and a multitude of layers of paint. More than expressing a deeper psychological concept, Aberham’s work lives and breathes through the concept of colour itself. Through the very physical use of paint, the artist finds her own handwriting to explain structure, form and space and manages to turn the two-dimensional painting into an almost three-dimensional body. In incorporating means of spaciousness and physical dynamic, she creates a sensation to the eye that reaches beyond the realm of the usual canvas.

The artist was born in 1994 in Düsseldorf, Germany, and studied at the renowned Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, under the teachings of Jürgen Drescher, Katharina Grosse and Ellen Gallagher, all of whom have influenced her work in manifold ways. Her exhibition at Peter von Kant is her first solo show in the UK.

Anneli Botz (AB): You graduated from Kunstakademie Düsseldorf just last year, after only five years. Quite a fast pace.

Laura Aberham (LA): Exactly, five years are the minimum. There was a moment early last year where I could feel my mood swing. I realised I had to be done soon. I was simply fed up with the art school lifestyle, the slow pace. I asked myself what there was left to learn, where I would find my input now. As much as I loved and appreciated studying at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, I felt it was time for me to move into the outside world.

AB: Which is a bold move.

LA: I just had to take that leap of faith and see what happens. I think it was the right move because a lot of great things have happened since. I signed with a gallery immediately, exhibitions started to line up. This reassured me in my decision and prevented me from getting stuck in the slower pace of an artist's lifestyle. That was never really my thing - to sleep until 2pm and then put one line on the canvas before opening a bottle of beer. I was always someone that would get there early to start working. I enjoy having a normal life next to my artistic work, where I can also go home in the evening and chill out, or meet friends. The lifestyle where it is art school or nothing does not apply to me.

AB: It is true that some students spend a lot of time in a space of contemplation in front of their work and then spend all day and night at their art schools. Everybody works differently of course. But you like efficiency.

LA: There is certainly some danger in the vibe of just "hanging out" and this kind of self-perpetuates this mode of being. It then often becomes more about talking about art rather than actually making it.

AB: Practicality is bliss.

LA: Exactly.

AB: Were you one of those artistically minded kids?

LA: When others did sports, I painted. It was always like that. Nevertheless, it was not until my dad told me: "Laura, you are constantly painting. Why would you study anything else but that?", that I actually considered this path more realistically.

AB: You got accepted at one of the best schools in the country.

LA: I got really lucky. The portfolio I had handed in included some naturalistic pieces and then some abstract variations of those. I wanted to show the full range of my capabilities at the time. And that worked out.

AB: Naturalism is currently not a thing in your art.

LA: When I was young my idea of painting was pure representation in its most perfect form. Which is normal for a child, I think. I was always known as 'Laura that can draw and paint exactly like a photograph'. So for some time abstraction did not even cross my mind. Art school really broadened my horizon and I learned to love the moment of the unknown, of the unplanned. When colour happens in a way that you did not foresee. So I slowly started to work my way closer to more abstract forms, first through collages, photographs that I would take analog and then apply to the canvas in enlarged fragments. Just to have some kind of representational structure that I could work alongside. And over time I liberated myself more and more towards a free and pure use of colour. I began to ask myself: "How can I influence structure through colour? How can I enable myself to accept randomness?" It was a really liberating process, I have to say.

AB: You had three very renowned teachers.

LA: The most important phase was probably right in the beginning of my studies. At that time I did not understand the whole competitive mentality that is kind of standard at art academies, I guess. I was a bit shy in finding the right class and teacher. So I ended up in the class of a sculptor, Jürgen Drescher, who had nothing to do with painting. This experience taught me a lot as it also gave me a lot of liberty to create a sort of three-dimensionality in my paintings. My teacher wanted my paintings to function like a physical body despite being two dimensional. So that they can sort of move into the wall after all. It really helped to free my mind of pre-conceptual ideas.

AB: Later you joined that class of the famous Katharina Grosse.

LA: I was with her for two years. She is the goddess of abstract painting right now if you ask me, and I adored her work. During that time I was facing some internal struggles in terms of explaining abstract art to the outside world. People would always ask me for the underlying deeper meaning of my art. I hated that. But she reassured me that painting can be self-sufficient. That it can be about painting in its uttermost form, about the expression of structure and space through colour. That it does not need to always be about a psychological concept, a political situation or some inner turmoil of the artists. It helped me a lot that she enabled a discourse within the classroom that actually dealt with the art of painting more than with the art of meaning. The final part of my studies was accompanied by Ellen Gallagher who is a very politically driven artist. At first I did not know how that would go as we do make very different art but she really showed me how a painting is built. She taught me that the way I paint can become some sort of personal signature. Even though there is nothing literal on the canvas, my paint is my own handwriting. This helped me to understand my own unique status as an artist. No one uses a paintbrush in the way that I do.

AB: The influence of Katharina Grosse seems undeniable when looking at your artwork now. Having such a mentor is a wonderful gift, but how do you, as a young artist, create your own identity?

LA: This is certainly a question I started facing when I was about to leave the academy. Finding this identity is an ongoing process and so is learning how to push the process of constant growth. To me it is important to keep a golden thread without ever stagnating. When I look at what I have created throughout the years, there is continuous change. I especially love where a different use of the surface has been taking me.

AB: You recently hung a beautiful monumental piece in a parking lot. Layers of plastic sheets with a multitude of colour.

LA: I wanted to distance myself from the wall and the canvas. One of my girlfriends at the academy, a sculptor, was working with these plastic sheets that I loved. She gave me some of her leftovers and I developed a system of three layers with colours where you can still see through to the wall to some extent. The material fit perfectly into the parking lot as well. I had to use varnish instead of paint which was a fascinating experience.

AB: Some of your artworks are large, and really large. I assume you enjoy doing those.

LA: Ellen Gallagher told me last year that she was seeing a lot of power and dynamic in my work. "I feel like you might need more space on the canvas", she said. So I started to go bigger and bigger. This was a fundamental experience for me as I was not focusing on the whole image or the whole painting anymore. I mainly paint sitting on the ground and all of a sudden I became the painting. I was a part of it, working from the inside.

AB: This seems very physical.

LA: Most definitely! I love the movement, I love being with the paint, being the paint. At the end of the day I am often exhausted, but in the most productive way.

AB: How do you approach your show at Peter von Kant?

LA: What I find interesting about Peter von Kant's gallery space is that he has, what I like to call "fucked up" walls. We often thrive for the white cube experience but here I really enjoy mixing this up in a more rough space. The raw brickwork provides a challenge for me in how to incorporate my artwork. His advice to me was to either fight the walls or to try to blend in. I love these kind of challenges, and blending in is not what I want. My goal with this show is to manage to make my pieces stand out as an autonomous work of art that keeps its unique identity. The art should be stronger than the wall behind.

Interview by Anneli Botz



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Laura Aberham graduated from the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in 2019, where she studied in the class of Ellen Gallagher (2018–2019), Katharina Grosse (2016–2018) and Jürgen Drescher (2015–2016). Recent and forthcoming solo shows include Laura Aberham at Peter von Kant, London (2020); 'MUR BRUT 16', Interferenz, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (Parkhaus) (2020); SPACE, Galerie Rupert Pfab, Düsseldorf (2019–2020). Recent and forthcoming group shows include 'Graduates of Kunstakademie Düsseldorf 2019', Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen K21, Düsseldorf (2020); 'Farbe | Fläche | Form – Malerie und Skulptur' – Laura Aberham, Uta Paffgen, Paul Schwer – Galerie Heinz Holtmann, Köln (2019); 'art-hoc', Galopprennbahn Düsseldorf (2019); 'augenfällig – fresh positions', BBK Kunstforum Düsseldorf e.V. (2018); 'Klasse Katharina Grosse stellt aus – Malerei', Galerie Eichenmüllerhaus, Lemgo (2017); 'Positionen', Raum für Kunst, alte Fabrik, Möckmühl-Ruchsen (2017).

Anneli Botz is an art historian and a journalist that writes for many international publications such as Kunstforum International, Monopol, Frieze Magazine, Interview Magazine, Vogue and Harper's Bazaar.

For all further information please contact the gallery.

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