

GALERIE MARIA BERNHEIM

If you're looking for a straight line go to the sea

Thomas Sauter

20 January - 25 February 2017

One of art history's best-known disputes took place during the Renaissance—the quarrel between the schools of Florence and Venice over whether painting's claim to represent reality was based on line or on color. What was at stake was nothing less than the claim to primacy in perception: between head and body, thought and the senses.

In choosing the title *"If you're looking for a straight line go to the sea"* for his solo exhibition in the Galerie Maria Bernheim, Thomas Sauter makes an ironic reference to the absence of straight lines in his painting's form. But Sauter (b. 1984 in Chur, Switzerland, today living and working in Zurich) is unquestionably also describing a paradox: that it is impossible to calculate distance in relation to the horizon, since the sea's surface offers no reference point with which to relate distance. This idea also describes a fundamental principle of Sauter's visual language. His oil paintings do not constitute pictorial space through spatial coordinates, but rather through an arrangement of thinly applied color planes, highly direct in their vividness. They seem like sections of something larger, details of a structure enlarged to immeasurable proportions. In this, they correspond to the usual vocabulary of visual abstraction, but Sauter's painting goes further, engaging with conditions of painting itself. By defining composition through negative forms, and thereby reining in his own painterly idiom, he questions the very idea of the painterly gesture, and more. In fact, he does not exclusively use canvas as a painting medium; he also applies paint to objects like tools and car rims, wrenching painting out of its two-dimensionality. Sauter's praxis confidently leaves behind every kind of medium-specificity, an idea once raised to a dictum by critic Clement Greenberg. In this exhibition, his open approach to painting arrives at an installation-like staging, with Sauter presenting four large-format diptychs, all of an equal size, positioned free-standing within the gallery space. The pictures are arranged in twos, each with its back to the other, supported on wooden struts. The positioning effectively prevents the spectator from looking at the works simultaneously. This prompts the viewer to move, since the blocked view of the whole demands that the body assumes a number of different positions within the space. But more importantly, it transposes the detail-like quality of Sauter's motifs into spatial experience. Removing the diptychs from the wall also means his abstract narration is confronted with reality; in other words, he makes the events in the gallery and the activity visible through the windows into the actual frame of the narration. The stringent placement pattern is broken by a further diptych, hung across a corner. Here, Sauter's engagement with the diptych format becomes explicit, making reference to the original function of the hinged, two-sided foldable picture, whose narration is grounded in a simultaneous joining and separation of its elements. In giving over his painting to the principle of two-sidedness, Sauter not only highlights its potential to expand, he announces the removal of its boundaries.

Sauter's works develop their specific dynamic because they are never limited to themselves. Rather, they oscillate between picture and space, between gesture and form, between abstraction and object, never coming down on one side or the other. They open themselves up to visibility, but without ever entirely revealing themselves. They do not hustle for attention-grabbing effects; instead, they present a challenge. The painter Asger Jorn saw art's potential as "agitation (action) and not description." Sauter's works are marvelous in their constant narrow evasion of final determination. They show that what is, is not everything: herein lies their engagement, their agitation. This is their appeal to the senses and their challenge to the mind.

Nadine Droste, translation: Brian Hanrahan

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Thomas Sauter

Mademoiselle Butterfly, 2016



Oil on canvas
Diptych - 200 x 300 cm
78 3/4 x 118 1/8 in
Each panel - 200 x 150 cm
(SAUTE000110)
CHF 14,000.00 excl. VAT

Provenance

The Artist

Exhibitions

If you're looking for a straight line go to the sea, Galerie Maria Bernheim, Zurich, Switzerland, 20 January - 25 February 2017.

GALERIE MARIA BERNHEIM

Thomas Sauter
Firefly, 2016



Oil on canvas
Diptych - 200 x 300 cm
78 3/4 x 118 1/8 in
Each panel - 200 x 150 cm
(SAUTE000106)
CHF 14,000.00 excl. VAT

Provenance

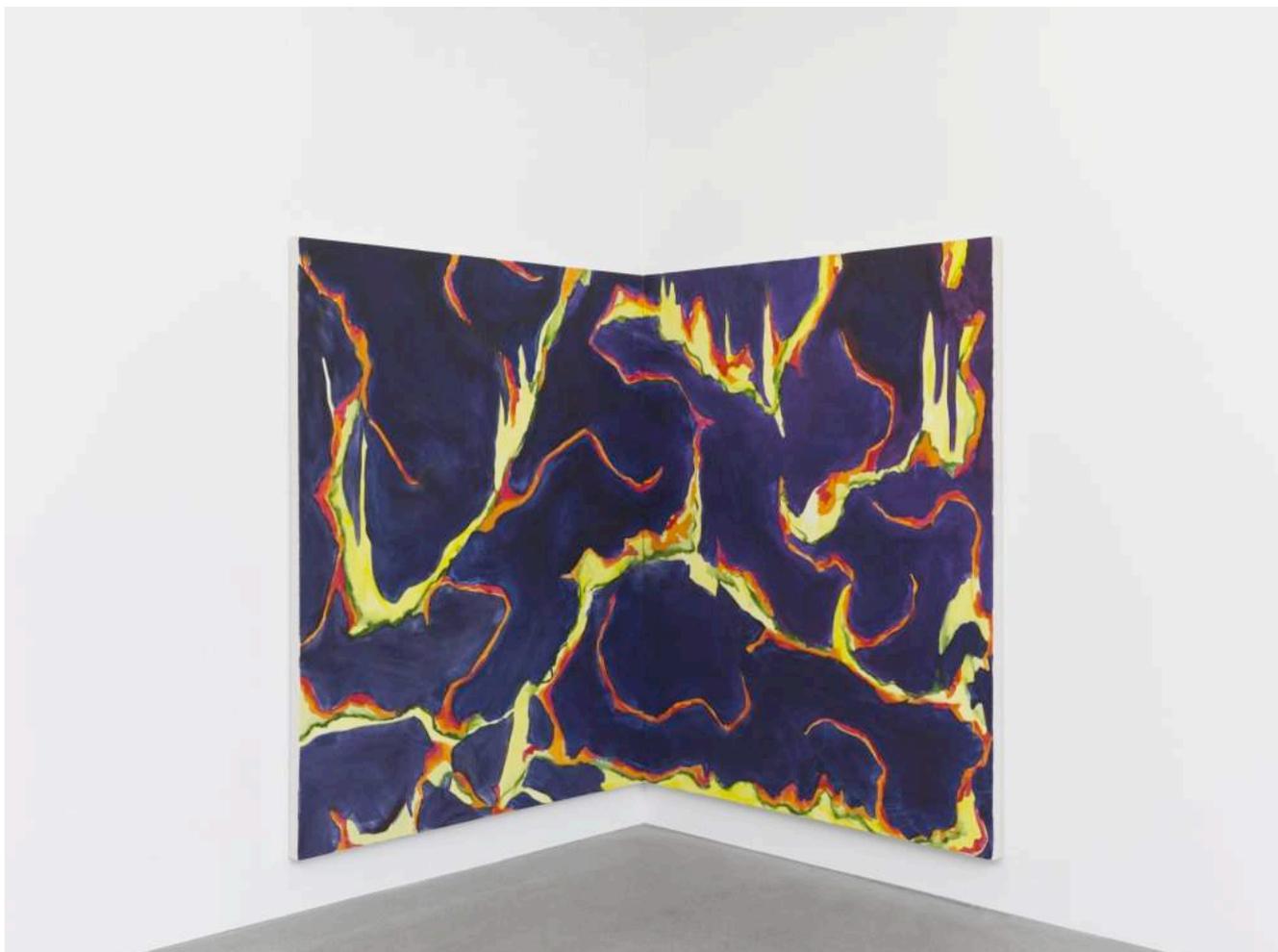
The Artist

Exhibitions

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GALERIE MARIA BERNHEIM

Thomas Sauter
Axons, 2016



Oil on canvas
Diptych; each panel 170 x 130 cm
66 7/8 x 51 1/8 in
(SAUTE00099)
CHF 12,000.00 excl. VAT

Provenance

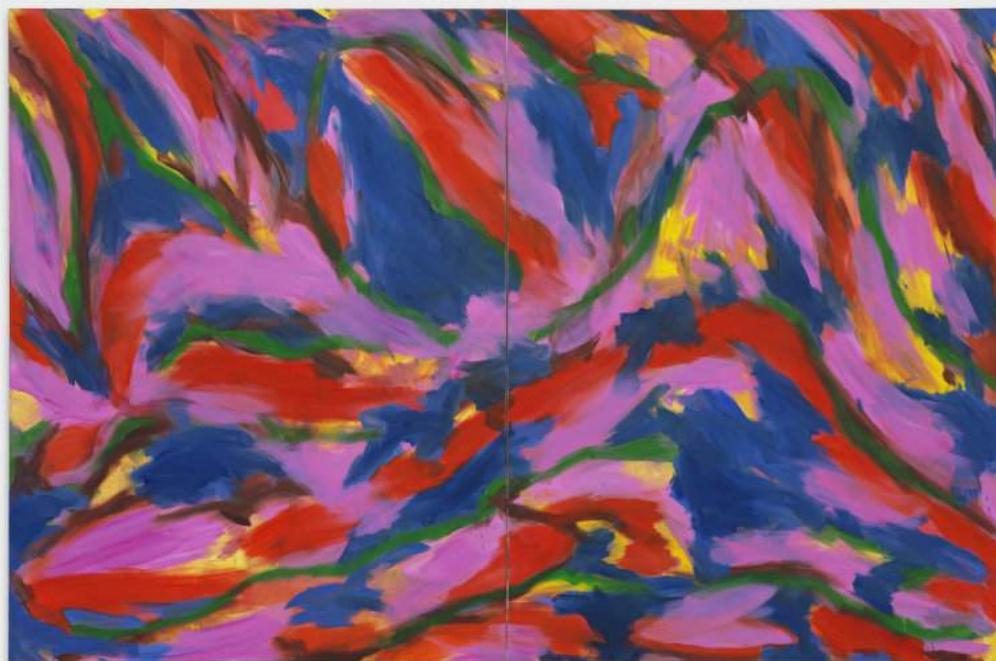
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GALERIE MARIA BERNHEIM

Thomas Sauter
Beta Blocker, 2016



Oil on canvas
Diptych - 200 x 300 cm
78 3/4 x 118 1/8 in
Each panel - 200 x 150 cm
(SAUTE000111)
CHF 14,000.00 excl. VAT

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GALERIE MARIA BERNHEIM

Thomas Sauter
Vanilla, 2016



Oil on canvas
Diptych - 200 x 300 cm
78 3/4 x 118 1/8 in
Each panel - 200 x 150 cm
(SAUTE000107)
CHF 14,000.00 excl. VAT

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