

NINO MIER GALLERY

NEW YORK | BRUSSELS

Stefan Müller

Touch But Don't Look

New York | Soho

June 20 – August 9, 2024

Nino Mier Gallery is thrilled to present *Touch But Don't Look*, our first exhibition with German artist Stefan Müller. A pioneer of contemporary painting in Germany, Müller's novel experimentations, characterized by a unique blending of raw and refined pictorial and material elements, are grounded in but expand upon a rich lineage of German painting. The exhibition will be on view at our Soho space from June 20 – August 9, 2024.

Touch But Don't Look features a suite of acrylic on canvas works, some of which also employ oil stick and ink. A tension between the deskilled and the meticulous charges the patterns and gestures characterizing each composition. Grid-like structures comprising repeating circles fade in and out of some paintings, while others are washed with muted or bleached-out colors.

Müller's paintings merge representational and abstract art, with comic and other figural motifs dissolving into abstract patterns. One painting quotes a sketch the artist's girlfriend made of him with her dog, while another references a child's drawing Müller found on the street, and yet another recalls the cartoon Charlie Brown. These figures are not immersed within pictorial landscapes or interior spaces, but rather within complex abstractions. When discussing their presence or absence in his paintings, Müller affords them an almost mystical life of their own: "If a figure steps into my work, I will let them in," he says. "They are just wandering through."

Over time, Müller has developed a formal vocabulary of circles, spheres, lines, and rectangles. But they are always a far cry from hard edge geometric abstraction. Instead, the structures appear only to further emphasize other moments of unrestrained improvisation within the compositions. Darker networks of lines and curves splay out like gossamer or dense topographies, immersed within washes of color. Rather than impersonal and objective, Müller's approach to abstraction is highly charged.

To create each work, rather than beginning with a conventional priming process, Müller stains the material with watery pigments, runs them through washing machines, bleaches them, cleans them, or otherwise sullies them by using them like rags on his studio floor, assuming detritus like paint, dust, dirt, and various spilled liquids in the process. This embrace of chance reflects Müller's openness to accident and spontaneity – both in material and in composition.

Despite their large scale, Müller's paintings retain an intimate and inviting quality, infused with energy and lightness. *Touch But Don't Look* invites viewers into the process of its creation, like the exhibition's title cheekily suggests.

Stefan Müller (b. 1971 in Frankfurt am Main, DE) lives and works in Berlin. Recent solo exhibitions of Müller's work include "Flirren ist Menschlich" with Viola Relle, Neue Galerie Gladbeck, 2024, "Frighten the Corners", Galerie Nagel Draxler, Köln 2022. 'Stefan Müller' (2021) at Galerie Bärbel Grässlin in Frankfurt am Main, 'Schlendern im Verweilen' (2019) at Galerie Nagel+Draxler in Berlin, 'Der Unzulänglichkeit schönste Konsequenzen' (2016) at Kunsthalle Giessen in Giessen, and 'Allerliebste Tante Polly' (2013) at the Kölnischer Kunstverein in Cologne. Müller attended Frankfurt's Städelschule between 1996 and 2001, studying with Professor Thomas Bayrle.