



ALF LÖHR  
paintings from three continents

a d a m g a l l e r y



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paintings from three continents

**a d a m** gallery

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Delightful grey animal  
Ink on Paper / 150 x 120 cm



No. 49  
Ink on Paper / 150 x 120 cm



Brecht Tage 1  
Ink on Paper / 150 x 120 cm

Brecht Tage 2  
Ink on Paper / 150 x 120 cm

Standing in the shadow of the sparrow  
Ink on Paper / 150 x 120 cm



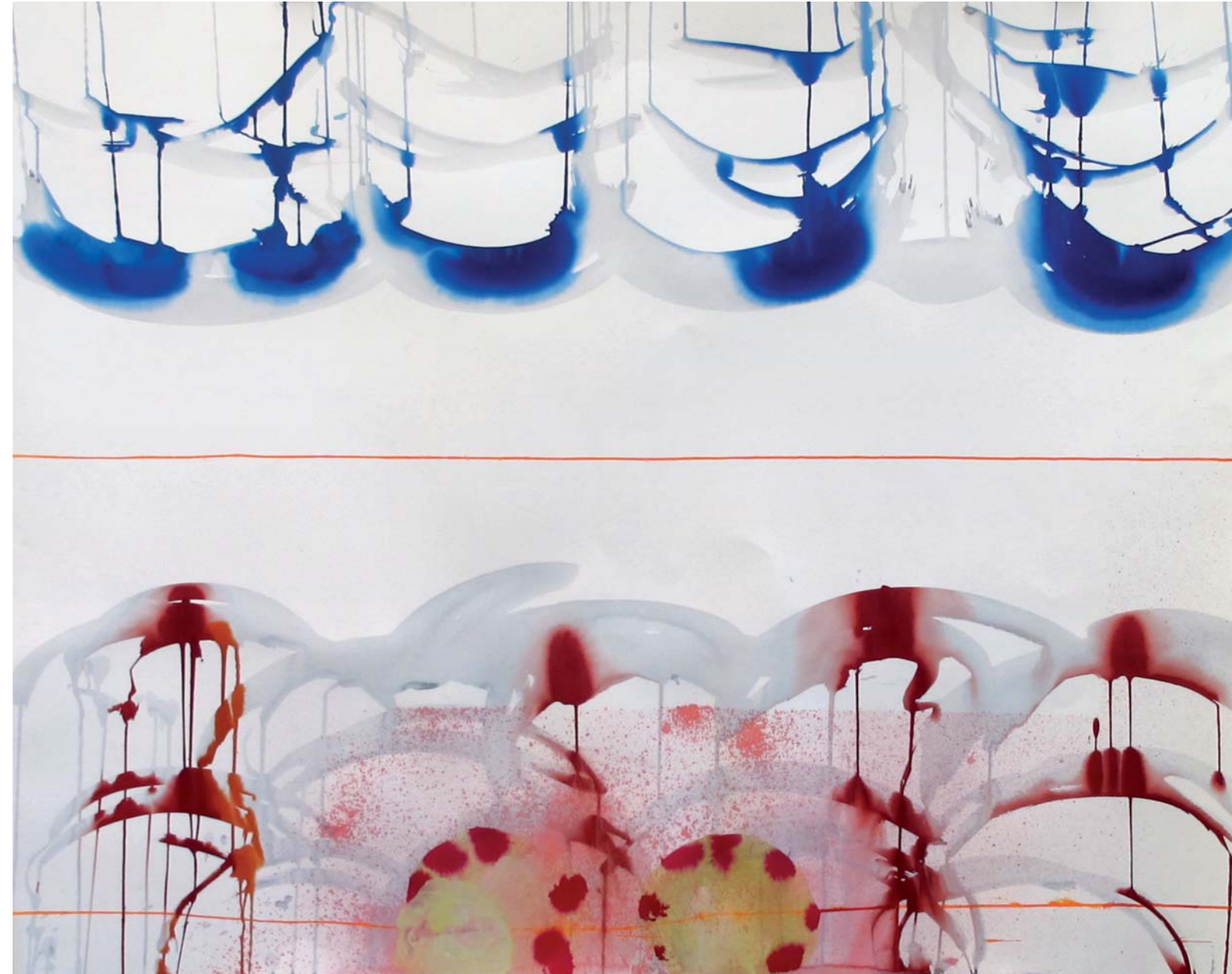
Young korean composer  
Mixed media on canvas / 170 x 200 cm



Midnight in New Dehli  
Ink on Paper / 160 x 210 cm



Coffee season singing from the trees  
Ink on Paper / 150 x 120 cm



Nara  
Ink on Paper / 120 x 150 cm



Pama-Nyungan  
Ink on Paper / 150 x 120 cm



Yellow River  
Ink on Paper / 150 x 120 cm





Billa Bong  
Ink on Paper / 150 x 120 cm



At Kakadu  
Ink on Paper / 150 x 120 cm

### time and fluidity

When the directors of the gallery selected paintings for the upcoming show, it so happened that not one of them was painted here in London. Nothing but a coincidence, I assured them, London has been my home for more than 25 years, I have had many studios in many changing neighborhoods. However, such a coincidence asked for further thought.

A cosmopolitan city like London should provide enough diversity and inspiration to make art. It does and it doesn't. Any place where you live provides you with structures and, as helpful or entertaining as they are, they often don't allow you to think outside the box. The seemingly stimulating competition is always just a competition on how well you fit in, and often means that a committee has reached a consensus. In my experience, people turn to art as the last bastion of something truly individual, something that has not already been reassured, hoping for a thoughtful and intimate object, which will show its meaning with time and not on the label. Tired of the newest, the best, the tallest, the fastest, the whitest, the greenest, the hippest, the coolest, artists look for niches on the fringe of supportive structures where there are fewer obligations, or simply search for unknown places.

Art and travelling have two things in common, the wish to create new reference points and a willingness to see things differently. In a way, travelling is the marginalisation of the ideals you've built yourself. You challenge yourself and this has its rewards, as being an outsider in a familiar place means that people often don't take you seriously, while in a foreign country, it can mean that people treat you with respect. You are outside but in, rather than inside but out. A new environment amongst strangers causes your perceptions to be heightened, which in turn prompt your work to flow forwards in new directions.

When I roll up my canvas and sheets of paper to take them to Spain, India, Italy, Australia or Africa to capture something beyond my imagination,

I see my reference points shifting quickly. If your only reference is your own culture, your road is short. To extend it, more than knowledge is required. I had to overcome my fears and trust my intuition. This too takes time, a different time.

In her essay *Against linear time: icons old, new, and evolving*, Lydia Matthews, Prof. Director of Curatorial Design Research Lab, Parsons The New School for Design in New York, writes:

“On the Mediterranean island of Hydra in summer 2012, melodic church bells sound off throughout the day to structure the local people's quotidian rhythms. Life is navigated on foot through cobblestone pathways, with cars replaced by donkeys, the faint scent of their dung mixing with jasmine, oregano leaves, and pine. Things move slowly, deliberately, sped up only when the tourist boats arrive or depart at the port's edge. From its labyrinthine streets to its inhabitants' daily patterns that shift according to the sun's intensity, Hydra defies a paradigm of time that plagues much of the rest of the world.

Time here refuses to be rational, linear, or to enact the myth of progress. Going from 0 to 60 does not mark accomplishment, and digressions are welcomed. “Time is not something to be spent, precisely accounted for, or even mastered. On Hydra, such rigidly mathematical logic is revealed as a grand fiction, one wholly irrelevant or pathetically misguided, at best.

“While the current European economic crisis is acute – with its debilitating burden palpable on the backs of the locals as they struggle to survive inhumane austerity measures mandated by absurd mathematical logic – certain rituals and belief systems beyond those of capitalism remain unchanged on this island, practiced now as they have been for millennia. People share open-air conversations with friends and strangers at cafés. Women lovingly prepare meals that end when the stories have finished rather than when plates are empty or the clock bell rings. Fishermen untangle their

nets, children play games, and everyone goes for a swim in the deep blue waters. Hydriots reserve time in the day to rest, to wait (for something, someone, or nothing at all), to make love, or to light a candle and pray.” (The full essay at <http://lydiamatthews.com>).

Back in London, phenomenology of time-consciousness provides important contributions to philosophical issues such as perception, memory, expectation, imagination, self-awareness, and self-identity over time. There is no objective sense in which time is flowing. However, if the flow of time didn't have an objective existence, then we would simultaneously experience all moments in our lives.

Philosophical definitions can never quite explain the mysteries that a work of art can provoke in the viewer, although they often are the only explanations we have. A drawing or a painting as a chain of events, of which some might even be minute or trivial, caused by gravity or wind, by temperature or temperaments of the actor, forms an independent awareness, and with it, in us, a wish to be close by to hear the story of its journey.

My paintings aim to be read by a person of any culture from any time and any place, which limits the amount of reference I can use. A red splash of paint hanging in the top corner may remind you of a gesture that Degas bravely used; other informed gestures will point towards Pollock, Stella, Motherwell, Rothko and the constant searching of oneself. None of these names mean anything in India, rural Australia or Africa. Yet, all were influenced by the culture in those places. “What is wrong Sir, about the notion that beautiful art, especially abstract, can simply be a joy to behold?” a man with a turban once said to me. Such are the wonders of travelling; you stop doubting that paintings are wonderful visual experiences that transform one's thinking.

When I first went to India, their extensive knowledge and use of fabric overwhelmed me. Talking with a craftsman who continues a 500-year

old tradition of his family business is not necessarily straightforward when trying to apply relatively contemporary ideas. Craftsmanship often has the advantage in not requiring a detailed rationale to appreciate it. But, for a meaningful collaboration to emerge – which does not merely use somebody else's skills – there has to be a form of translation that can only be found with time.

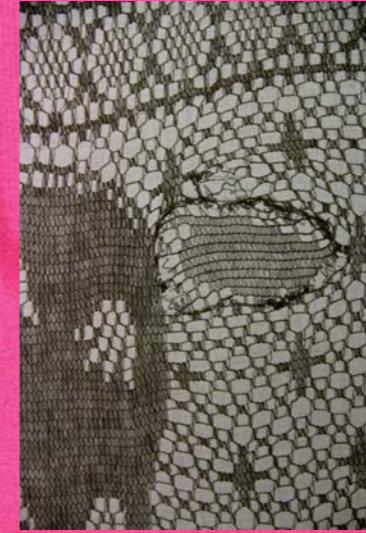
Spending weeks watching weavers in Australia performing their daily routine, and observing Lalchand Chipa and his block printers and dyers in Bagru in Rajasthan, eventually found a translation into the 210 x 160 cm canvases I painted in Spain in 2012.

Here the inks flow freely down the canvas mixing with each other at different points in their run to form new colors by themselves. While in the works on paper, the found emptiness of a white is an intended purity, now the new discipline of reducing gestures of painting to a horizontal line, which is made, and a vertical line, which is found, give the paintings a textile – like appearance. While executing these paintings holds a lot of control the result graciously does not. Instead, an elegance is revealed that compares to handloomed fabrics.

The paintings carry the luminosity that they were painted in, and I am always surprised how the temperature in a room seems to go up when they are brought out. There is a reliable continuity in the matter that I pursue. A ray or a line, drawn or cast, is no different than a thread in the hands of a tailor, may it be cotton or silk.

*Alf Löhr*





### colour catcher

Writing about Alf Löhr's paintings is an exciting but not an easy task. For years now I have seen and experienced these huge color-runs of various sizes and states, with different titles and comments. I see my friend in his studio, he is gesturing impulsively, his analysis is very careful and detailed. Outside these walls, I see him standing in the sea or in the forest working in all weather on large sheets of paper and canvas. He says: "At last, the paper is taking on some of the surroundings and is able to hold the green like the iridescent algae." I see the contradiction: to describe a strong movement through a still picture. A famous quote from Cézanne comes to mind: "I was pleased with myself when I discovered that I could not paint the sun but had to represent it with something else.....with color."

I realize how this stillness is placed like a forced status, a necessary interruption, pushed into lines, color patterns, points, rays, rhythms. Movement that comes to a halt abruptly. I read his letters and note that he writes, already seated in the plane: "I am on this journey so that the dark cloud, which floats above me, lifts itself." Moving through the clouds, the traveler finds the state of brighter light. The height promises good things, a sense of freedom, at least for a while.

As we know however, this only changes the position; that which is dark and hovered over him is now as dark under him. As he approaches the latest of the continents to which he travels the familiar shift will again be revealed, he below, the clouds on top. One way to escape this up and down would be to leave this position all together. This would mean being immediately and always in the midst. No orientation – everything always in motion. As he writes, "the daily, vital dose of creativity", forces him to describe (in this case, through color), to pause, to note, to hold . But how to keep a river still? Jumping into it as it flows? Or should he venture to the river's edge to determine the river's position and speed ? "The second option would require a static point.

But to stand on the bank is not really an option to him. So he steps right into the water, the lake or the sea or river and captures the colors on his paper. A process of creation that allows movement. This reminds me of Heraclitus: "We step into the same river, and yet not into the same, we are and we are not."

The creative act of the color catcher bypasses this question through the intimacy of his presence, by connecting the mandatory contact between paper, ink and painter. He writes: "If we do not live our creativity, the world comes to a standstill or, at best, turns in circles." Of course he knows that neither he, nor the world is going to stand still, everything is always in motion. The implementation is the result of reduction that leads to the point. The splash, the mark, the line, the color, can be read as notes from a myriad of possibilities. The record refers to the knowledge that there is something that can be set and put to rest for a moment. But only for this moment, then movement continues, another image is superimposed, negated, flowing and folding, denying one direction and moving on – beyond the edge.

How can I keep what is not to be kept? He says that he painted these paintings in three different continents, as if there was a place where this conflict could be resolved. His titles refer to other places, say, states of mind: "From a distance of more than 500 Years" (2010), "All in one day" (2010), "Equivocation" (2011). He writes: "Unfortunately, my zeppelin is not yet on the ground again ..... with shelters at such dizzy heights, I often feel quite lost. The only way to get through this is by writing about or sketching down the reflection, but for this I lack the technique."

I note: How reassuring that such lack of technique leads to such far-sighted and overwhelming paintings and to a truly artistic position. What a pleasure to be allowed to witness this process over such a long period of time.

*Prof. Matthias Kohlman*



Mit dem Atem eines fernen Wassers  
Mixed media on canvas / 160 x 210 cm



Spanish painting  
Mixed media on canvas / 160 x 210 cm



Hüsün  
Mixed media on Canvas / 200 x 230 cm



London  
Ink on Paper / 120 x 150 cm





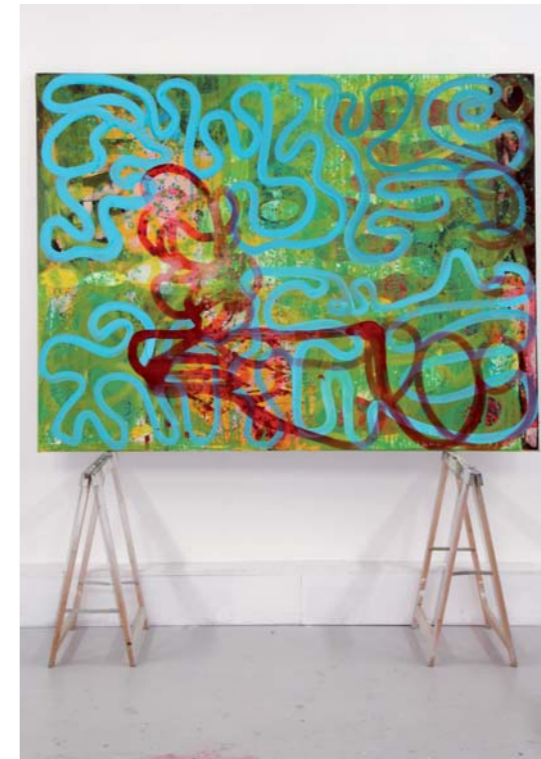
Birch tree poem  
Ink on Paper / 120 x 150 cm



visions rather than views  
Ink on paper / 120 x 150 cm



Body  
Ink on Paper / 150 x 120 cm



Mighty free and easy on a raft  
Mixed media on canvas / 170 x 200 cm



To build a sort of speech  
Mixed media on canvas / 160 x 210 cm



We look into the life of things  
Mixed media on canvas / 160 x 210 cm



With strength and restoration  
Mixed media on canvas / 160 x 210 cm



To chasten and subdue  
Mixed media on canvas / 160 x 210 cm



Time and place  
Mixed media on canvas / 200 x 230 cm

## Liminal Encounters

Happily ensconced on the deck overlooking Lago Maggiore, the sky reminds me of an Alf Löhr painting. The mountains rise all around it as they have for millennia. Nothing stirs its surface as it spreads itself beyond both north and south vistas and disappears around its sinuous shores. How far it goes is impossible to know from this deck, though it's safe to speculate that it goes far. I always find myself wondering how deep the lake is, and what the contours of its bottom are. I can't help myself from drifting into metaphysical speculations. How far does light penetrate? Is the lake floor secluded in utter darkness? What would it be like to swim below the surface along the join where the sunlight meets darkness?

Again, I imagine Löhr's paintings.

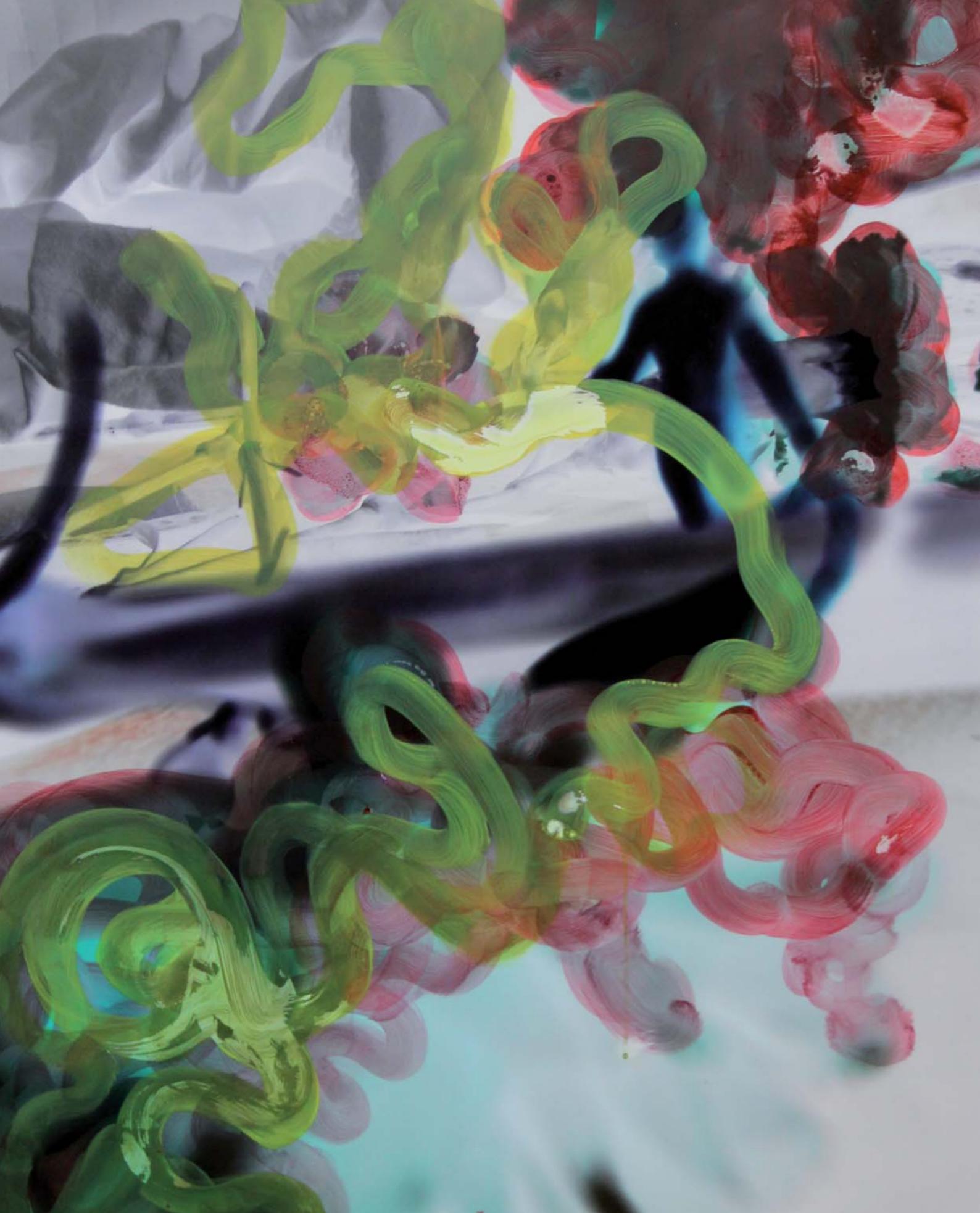
It's a rare, warm evening in September that, though the sun has drifted below the western range of Italy's Alps, is still illuminated by the scattered cirrus radiatus. They streak across the sky as the resplendent lingerie they are. Well, as you can see, I've shifted from metaphysics to physique, I mean, physics. However you want to imagine it, they drift slowly and resplendently across the sky with the now silvered lake, as clear as any mirror, directly below, so they can gaze at themselves with the fervor of Narcissus. (I'm reminded of Lohr's paintings.) Azure has deepened to an azul with a mix of the slightest of emerald undisturbed by the French dog that ferociously barks, though also timorously, in the via that borders the western side of C's piazza, though that is far too grand a term for what exists there. It's not even paved, though a 16th century church made of rough hewn stone by peasants and is no bigger than a small warehouse stands on its eastern flank. It is extraordinarily beautiful even in, or perhaps because of, its ancient decrepitude. Night has now descended and the French dog has easily given up his watch, probably because his enemies have the advantage where they lurk in the darkening shadows, while he stands guard in a ridiculously revealing pool of lamp light. Such is the wisdom and caution of man's best friend.

Again, I imagine Löhr's paintings.

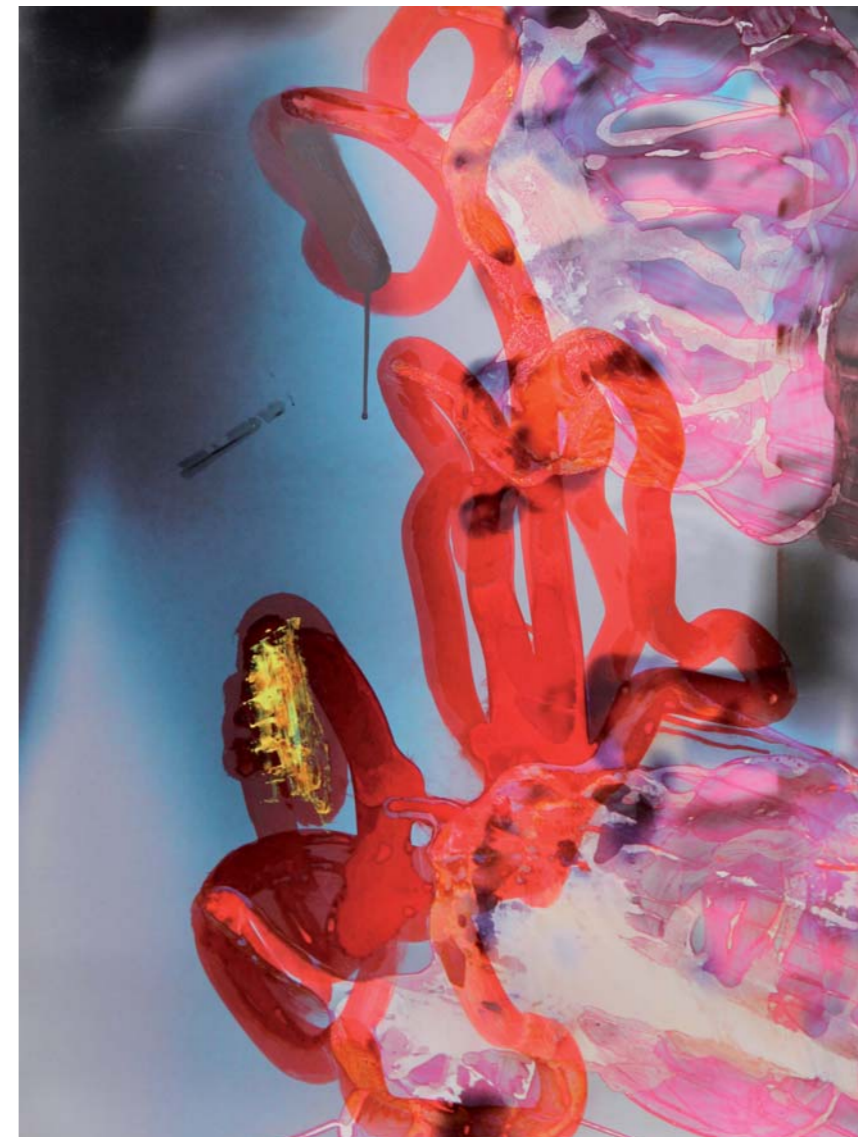
They keep coming to mind in this unexpected place precisely because they reflect on such exquisite lightnesses and darknesses. They sometimes even bark like the ferociously timorous French dog. What I'm trying to suggest is that Löhr's work embodies the keenest of contradictions that make us human. They can challenge the French dog vociferating in its pool of lamp light, or, float through our imaginations as do the cirrus radiatus over Lago Maggiore. Having looked at literally hundreds of them, personally, I can only imagine his body of work as an epic commentary on our human, often messy, condition. His works articulate these themes with extraordinary precision, and passion.

As we all know, the photograph is the medium of voyeurism par excellence. It captures its subject and holds him or her there, forever, in just that pose, for our eyes. Yet, today, that form of pleasure is deeply in need of revision. It seems to me that such a straight-on gaze needs a bit of foreplay. Yves Klein once perfected that by first painting his female models in blue paint, before having them press themselves onto canvass. He showed only the canvasses as paintings. In contrast, Löhr is less literal and so goes deeper. He abstracts the photo with paint in order to tap into the liminal zones where our desires are formed. His masterful photo-paintings render the photographic like the cirrus radiatus floating over Lago Maggiore. Like music, they conjure up in us possibilities that the literal photograph forecloses. They address the soul and not just the eye. They suggest ways that we can go beyond ourselves and the limits we too easily cave in to, even though we set them, or at least agree to them, on some level. So to treat the photographic with paint is a form of transgression that allows us to feel and see the world anew.

*Dr. Mark Barlett*



Walking home bare foot  
Paint on c-print / 120 x 85 cm



Love on hard floors  
Paint on c-print / 100 x 70 cm



Souls in touch is all it takes  
Paint on c-print / 120 x 85 cm



Innocent jewellery of life  
Paint on c-print / 100 x 70 cm





## Alf Löhr

Born 1957 in Bochum, Germany

### Education

1985–88 Ph. D. Royal College of Art, London  
 1977–83 MFA Kunstakademie Düsseldorf

### Exhibitions

2013 “Atelier Huftiersaal”, Berlin, Museum für Naturkunde  
 “Paintings from three continents” Adam gallery, London  
 2012 Residency at Saaram Centre, Kottajam  
 “In Context”, Performance at Situation Kunst, Bochum  
 with Stephan Ullrich, Voice, and Wolfgang Sellner, cello.  
 Working in India, Spain, London  
 2011 Sanskriti Foundation, New Delhi  
 “Inversion”, Adam Gallery, London  
 “Alf Löhr at St. John” London  
 “Precious Light”, Edinburgh City Art Gallery,  
 Group exhibition as part of the David Mach exhibition.  
 Working in India, Spain, London  
 2010 Galerie Jones, Cologne  
 “Between Chance and Determination”, Adam Gallery, London  
 Working in Spain, London, and Istanbul.  
 2009 Atelier Aperti, Orvieto, Italy  
 “It shouldn’t have happened to me”,  
 book on trauma with Anna Walker  
 Working in Italy, Spain, London.  
 2008 Muka Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand  
 “Objective Emotion”, Broadbent Gallery, London  
 Galerie Truebenbach und Jones, Cologne  
 “Bias Bond”, Melbourne,  
 “Dreams of Art Spaces Collected”, IGBK, Berlin  
 2007 Conny Dietzhold Gallery, Sydney  
 Victorian Tapestry Workshop, Melbourne  
 “Looking for the Tasmanian Tiger”, Broadbent Gallery, London  
 Residency at VTW, Melbourne  
 Visiting Prof. at Monash University, Melbourne  
 Travelling in Northern Australia, New Zealand

2006 “Einblicke”, Galerie Witzel, Wiesbaden  
 “Conversations on Cork Street, Adam Gallery, London  
 “Quiet Strokes of a Night Swimmer”, The Ambassador’s Residency, London  
 Visiting Prof. at Monash University, Melbourne  
 Travelling in Australia, Tasmania,  
 2005 Angus Broadbent Gallery, London  
 Travelling in Senegal  
 Working in Spain and London  
 2004 The German Ambassador’s Residency Gallery, London  
 “Slow Art”, Broadbent Gallery, London  
 2003 Newlyn Art Gallery, Cornwall  
 Kunst und Ausstellungshalle der BRD, Bonn  
 Kunstverein Rastatt  
 2002 Pumphouse Gallery, Battersea Park, London  
 Howard Garden Gallery, Cardiff  
 Firstsite at the Minories, Colchester  
 2001 Goethe Institute London  
 Gloucester Cathedral, Gloucester  
 2000 Galerie Christoph Grau, Hamburg  
 “Ist die Photographie am Ende?” Aktuelle Photo- und Medienkunst  
 Staatliche Galerie Schloß Moritzburg, Halle.  
 1999 Museum Bochum

### Awards and Honors

2003 Kunstfonds, Bonn, Arbeitsstipendium  
 1996 Senior Fellow, University of Wales, Institute of Cardiff  
 1992 Kaiserringstipendium, Museum für moderne Kunst, Goslar  
 1989–91 Feodor Lynen Research Fellowship,  
 Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Bonn  
 1987 DAAD German Academic Exchange Service



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