

# Tatjana Gerhard

by Chiara Argentini

*A small figure sits on the floor,  
clothed in black from head  
to toe.*



## Tatjana Gerhard

ABOVE

"Spiegelung," 2008

Oil on canvas, 45 x 58 cm

Courtesy Rotwand Gallery, Zurich

FOLLOWING PAGE FROM LEFT

"Spielende I," 2008

Oil on canvas, 140 x 160 cm

Courtesy Rotwand Gallery, Zurich

Untitled, 2008

Oil on canvas, 50 x 35 cm

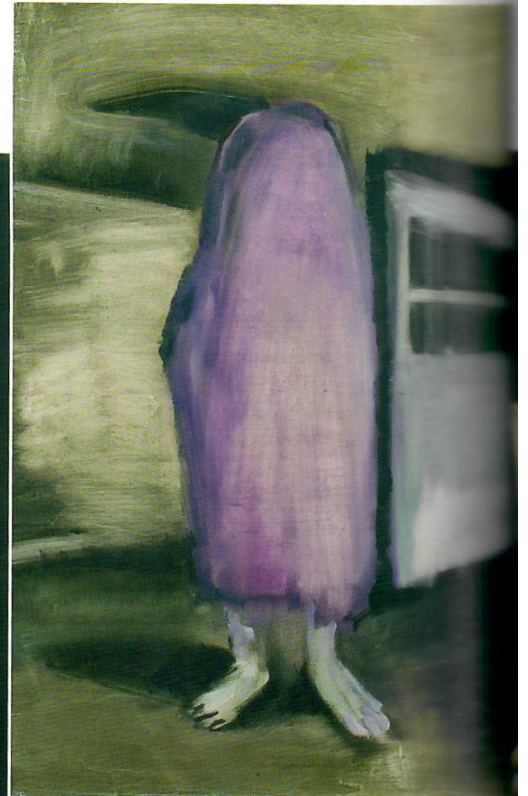
Courtesy Rotwand Gallery, Zurich

With its right hand, it reaches for something blue amidst the slices of color that spread from beneath its small right foot. Its dark saucer-shaped eyes look directly at me; a wide smirk illuminates its chubby face. What is this – a thief, a ghost? Why is it smiling that way? What is it sitting on? I immediately think of cartoons and bizarre characters with strange voices, of childhood stories, of a dream. I see a red kite, a puddle. Images of arts and crafts I made as a little girl come to my mind.

This mysterious and somewhat eerie painting is called "Spiegelung" (Reflection), and is one of the recent works by Tatjana Gerhard on exhibit until 11 October at the Rotwand Gallery in Zurich. While visiting the exhibition I return to these paintings again and again, as I attempt to ascertain the effect they have on me. What is it that makes Tatjana Gerhard's paintings so hypnotizing?

Gerhard is a graceful young woman, a bit shy but with an intense and challenging gaze. Somewhat hesitantly, she begins talking about her work. It is about "shreds of memory," she explains, about things she may have seen once somewhere; images that rise from the subconscious. One of these fleeting images can be the basic idea for a painting. Without preliminary plans or sketches, Gerhard paints this idea directly on the canvas. The work develops during the process of painting, while adding or removing elements. This applies to both the color and motifs. Gerhard believes that it isn't very important for the viewer to know where the subject of a painting comes from – more important is the idea behind it, as well as the way in which the work develops during the act of painting.





Born in Zurich in 1974, Gerhard's career has not been without struggle, and she has only recently begun to enjoy recognition from a wide audience. Until two years ago, Gerhard worked in oil on plastic. The nature of the plastic surface enabled her to literally shuffle the different planes of color: if a color didn't fit with the composition, she could just rub it off. Eventually, however, she felt constrained by the plastic support, and started to paint in oil on canvas. She applies a ground of several layers onto the canvas, the last one with a palette knife whose visible traces have become the hallmark of Gerhard's painting.

Paintings for her are a means to depict things that do not yet exist, allowing her to work spontaneously, almost intuitively. She sees her new works as a sum total of the different way stations she has passed through, including changes in her own life and personality. Painting is a demanding activity for her. She is very self-critical, ever pushing herself and her art into new areas.

Above all, Gerhard's intention is to communicate through her art: to give the viewer a feeling to take away with him;

to transport him to a specific atmosphere. Although she deals with personal images and thoughts, the viewer's own ideas or memories arise; therefore, she explains, the paintings transform into something very personal for each viewer.

For Gerhard, the best paintings are those that are not completely "finished." This makes me think of the small untitled work, showing a figure completely covered in purple fabric, with only its feet protruding. The figure's surroundings are only intimated; not shown. This seemingly sad and desperate image simultaneously manages to convey a very comical aspect. Again, innumerable ideas and impressions cross my mind, and it occurs to me that this ephemeral and mysterious quality is what characterizes Gerhard's art. Her paintings contain secrets, and this is precisely what attracts the viewer.

Until now, Tatjana Gerhard has been an insiders' tip, but that may soon change. The success of her solo show at Rotwand Gallery speaks for itself: after one day, all of her paintings were sold.

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