

Gregor HILDEBRANDT

L'Officiel,

Gregor Hildebrandt, The Art of Cinema

July 2022

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Until July 29, 2022, multidisciplinary artist Gregor Hildebrandt exhibits his work at the Perrotin New York gallery. From his cinematographic inspirations to his future projects, the artist called L'Officiel to discuss his work in a wide-ranging interview.

12.07.2022 by Jenny Mannerheim



Gregor Hildebrandt photographed by Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin

Gregor Hildebrandt is one of those whose art does not go unnoticed. From his obsession for music, cinema, and his dream muses, he translates everything in the form of gigantic installations, pictorial or sculptural works - as realistic as they are breathtaking. His signature medium: a multitude of audio cassettes and vinyl records. Practicing collage, the artist assembles them into paintings, sculptures, and installations that appear minimalist, but have a latent romanticism. Its goal: to trigger collective and personal memories. The result: an unparalleled artistic wandering, which offers us reminiscences as nostalgic as they are beautiful.

L'Officiel: Your exhibition at Perrotin in New York is titled "WAS GEHT UNS DIE SONNE AN" (WHAT DOES THE SUN MATTER TO US). This is a reference to the German film theorist Siegfried Kracauer. Can you tell us a bit about this new solo exhibition?

Gregor Hildebrandt: The title of the exhibition is a reference to an essay by Kracauer about the day cinemas in Münzstraße — which also happens to be one of the first streets where I lived in Berlin. I decided to title the exhibition like this because, at that time, we were living in such a harsh – even shocking – time. My escape was to the cinema, which is a world of dreams, or at least something similar. Think about it: during the day, you go to a place plunged in darkness, to see a film in light and color. I like this duality, oppositions, the dark parts of the sun, and the light parts in the dark. The Yin and Yang.

The gallery offered me the opportunity to hold an exhibition and told me of its desire to have my cassette box artworks in the show. I bounced back by suggesting that it would be good to do an exhibition about cinema. In the end, it's not even a purely cinematographic exhibition! But that was the idea. The exhibition refers to another milestone in my connection with cinema because I started my studies in Mainz with Friedemann Hahn - who was famous for his paintings around the world of films. In short, the exhibition stems from a multitude of intersecting facts about my personal life, and actually, everything in my work comes from my personal life.



L'O: *This is not your first exhibition with the Perrotin gallery, you have been collaborating with Emmanuel Perrotin for a long time.*

GH: Yes, we started working together in 2013. We met in Paris through the art fairs. While I was exhibiting at the Almine Reich Gallery, Emmanuel noticed my work. Our collaboration happened naturally because we also share very good acquaintances, like certain artist friends present at the gallery Samuel Boutruche and Benjamin Moreau.

This is my third exhibition with Perrotin in New York. The first was on Madison Avenue on the Upper East Side. Then the second took place in 2018 in Orchard Street, in the same space as today. Besides New York, I have exhibited elsewhere in the world with the gallery: in Seoul, Shanghai, Hong Kong, as well as several collective exhibitions in Paris – including one which is currently taking place.

L'O: How do you prepare for an exhibition in New York? Is it different from preparing for an exhibition in Shanghai?

GH: Yes, but not so much in thinking ahead. Most of the time, I start with the space. I have the space to myself, and I think about what I can do with that space. In Shanghai — for the exhibition which will start on July 15 — it is a very tall and very long space, punctuated by countless columns on the way. So I decided to make a wall of records, covering the columns in a curved shape, and having a second space inside the space that is more secret. The title of the exhibition in Shanghai, which is also in German "WO DU MICH LIEBST BEGINNT DER WALD (WHERE YOU LOVE ME BEGINS THE FOREST)", is the lyrics that come from the words of the song Dolores, a very nice song, by the German group Anna. The whole exhibition is inspired by the song: each work in the exhibition has a title from a passage of this song, so the exhibition makes the song complete. The idea was to build a forest into the room made of my record columns — mostly decorated in green, and also a little bit has been inspired by the work of Martin Kippenberger, a piece with white trees, but mine is columns standing up straight. Coming back to New York, I wanted to focus on a different approach. I designed the exhibition around my favorite new favorite works — so it's a reflection of what I'm creating right now.

L'O: The title of your exhibition at Perrotin in New York is in German, is it important for you to identify yourself as a German artist and to express yourself in your mother tongue?

GH: No. It's not necessary, but I've never learned English — believe me, my English is so bad... When I'm faced with a title in English, I don't always fully understand its exact meaning. This title WAS GEHT UNS DIE SONNE AN was originally in German, so I left it in German. However, I sometimes give a title in English, as with my exhibition at Perrotin Hong Kong — called "Coming by hazard". It's a slightly strange English sentence, but it came to me like that, and so I chose this title.



Installation View of Gregor Hildebrandt's *Was Geht Uns Die Sonne An (What Does the Sun Matter to Us)* at Perrotin New York, 2022. Photographer: Guillaume Ziccarelli Courtesy of the artist and Perrotin.

L'O: *Can you describe what we see in the exhibition at Perrotin New York?*

GH: I unveil a new piece: *Steine auf der Landebahn | Stones on the landing strip*. It is a painting made of records. But it's also a new way of working. The first major work in the exhibition. It is a piece that is inspired by a Terrazzo floor in Venice. In this work, I reconstruct the stones by inserting marble records into them — all following the original patterns of a Terrazzo floor, from a photograph I took in Venice. Here, I tried to get as close as possible to the original model — even if the manufacturing technique is different, I try to test the most faithful representation in terms of the colors of the work, for example.

L'O: *You create with used cassettes, once they become a work of art, they are silent. And so, it's kind of a glorification of music, or media, but it's also kind of an act of vandalism because after you cut the cassettes into pieces, you can't listen to the music anymore. About this technique that you developed, could you tell us a little more?*

GH: Yes, actually there are some cassette tapes that I didn't want to use in the past, but my studio is so big now and everyone who works with me doesn't necessarily know where my cassettes come from, and they sometimes get put right into my workflow, to the point where I was shocked when they used my really old personal tapes, but it happened, and it's because they were sometimes not well labeled because I know them so well! I know exactly what music is on each cassette, as I used to listen to a lot of music. I didn't always have enough cassettes as now I use 720 cassettes for a single cassette box painting. So I had plenty, but never as many as I needed. I always wanted to have a huge personal collection of tapes, a collection of perfect mixtapes.

For my paintings, they are recorded separately, because in my work, I make a painting with only

one song, and then I record the song in repetition over and over again. And I only use one side on the tape. In the beginning, I used side A and side B. But lately, I only use side A or B. Because I make a mark on the tape when the song is finished, so that you can see it and that it is part of the composition of the painting, you can see where the song ends and starts again. And when you see the white dots in the painting on both the A-side and the B-side, it's weird and confusing and I don't like it.



L'O: There's a lot of cinematic inspiration and certain muses that come back to your work, like Romy Schneider or Shirley MacLaine. Can you tell us a bit about your muses, the fascination for these women, and cinema?

GH: Shirley MacLaine is a muse that came to me spontaneously. I used to go to a restaurant in Berlin called Irma La Douce decorated with a large number of movie posters. I thought it was a very good idea to do something with this great film by Billy Wilder, who also lived in Berlin. I now live in Schöneberg. So I think that's a good reason to echo Billy Wilder and Irma La Douce, which is a great movie. This film is a bit like a fairy tale, which was my starting point for this work. I am also a big fan of The Apartment, another great film also directed by Billy Wilder.



L'O: *You are now a successful artist with many exhibitions and participations in all the major art fairs. Do you still have time to watch good-old movies in the theaters and go to concerts?*

GH: It depends. I don't go to concerts so much in general. Only lately I have been going to a lot of concerts, but a bit by accident. What I like is listening to music at home, in my bedroom, while playing chess and drinking coffee.

L'O: *You did a large installation work around chess, with a multitude of chessboards on the floor and all the pieces on the shelves in front. Can you tell us about your fascination with chess?*

GH: I had done this work for an exhibition in Zurich in 2016. I had the idea to build a "Pawn" shop — where it is possible to find chess figures. When you isolate them from the game, each pawn becomes like a sculpture, and that fascinates me. To make this piece of art, I, therefore, asked my studio to buy a lot of pawns given the monumental installation I was preparing. Coming back from my trip, I was surprised to discover a ton of chess games. I only wanted pawns. But, you know, most of the time you have to buy the whole game. You can't just buy pawns, you also need the king, queen, horses, knights, and chess board. So I understood that I had to do this installation with the full set of chess pieces. Another fascinating fact: chess is a game in black and white, but also symmetric.

L'O: *Who are your favorite artists of all times?*

GH: I have a few, they change over time. I'm a big fan of René Daniëls... I've liked this artist for a long time. I also remember a very important exhibition that I saw at the American pavilion at the Venice Biennale, by Robert Gober. It was super special for me to see an exhibition like that. At my place, you can also appreciate paintings by Matthias Spitz, Axel Guys, and of course my friend Dalizio. I am lucky to be surrounded by many artist friends, and I am also a big fan of Thomas Tripp. Just like Lionel Esteve, with whom I realized an exhibition project in my gallery space.



L'O: What are your most exciting upcoming projects?

GH: I am looking forward to my personal exhibition in Prague. It is in a huge place: a new foundation called Kunsthalle Praha, which is the foundation of the Pudil family. This will be the first solo exhibition in this space. It is very central, directly below the castle, so really well placed. You can get there by train, it's only a four-hour journey from Berlin.

L'O: When will this exhibition start?

GH: September 23. The guests will arrive in Berlin, and then we will all take the train to go there together!

GREGOR HILDEBRANDT

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Until July 29, 2022

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