

**HANS HARTUNG**  
**Painting – Gesture – Liberation**

**7 December 2013 – 31 January 2014**  
**Opening 6 December 2013, 7 pm**

During nearly two months *Setareh Gallery* will give an insight into the oeuvre of the artist Hans Hartung (\*1904, Leipzig - †1989, Antibes). Clearly, Hartung belongs to one of the great names of the Informel. Gestural painting and Golden Ratio, Tachism and composition, freedom and calculated action; all these seemingly diametric terms match the artist's creative process. Werner Haftmann says about Hartung in his essay *The great masters of the Lyrical Abstraction and the Informel* that he transforms psychomotoric energies into formal processes. The well-known anecdote about Hartung's reaction to a thunderstorm as a child, illustrates this vividly. To overcome his fear of thunderstorms, the child tries to become equal with thunder and lightning through fast streaks on paper:

I ask myself, if I wasn't more scared of the noise of the thunder than of the actual lightning, which preceded it. ... I wanted to see. And even more: I wanted to draw. In one of my notebooks I caught the quivering flashes of lightning on the fly. Already before the thunderclap hit in, the zigzag lines needed to be on the paper. This way, I tamed the lightning.

Besides his studies at the academy in Leipzig, Hartung attends lectures at the philosophical faculty; art history, psychology and philosophy become his elective courses. 1925 he meets Kandinsky, 1926 he attends the *International Art Exhibition* in Dresden, which makes a big impression on him. His intellectual curiosity leads him to Paris, where he continues his studies in painting. Many journeys will follow. Simultaneously, Hartung starts taking part in exhibitions. As a consequence of a traumatic interrogation with the Gestapo in 1935, he turns his back on Germany for definite and moves to France together with his wife Anna-Eva Bergman. As a soldier of the Foreign Legion he will later fight against Germany.

His eventful life continues after the war. Both nations highly decorate Hartung; the Federal Republic of Germany awards him the *Grand Cross with Star for Distinguished Service of the Order of Merit* in 1984. In France he is appointed *Grand Officier de la Légion d'Honneur* in 1989 amongst other honours. Early on, Hartung participates in the most important international art exhibitions of post war times including documenta I, II and III and in 1960 the Venice Biennial awards him the *Grand Prize for Painting*.

But what makes Hartung's paintings so interesting and concise? What makes his style unique? Within the fine arts the traumata of the past wars generated the insight amongst others, that reality simply can't be depicted figuratively. The Nazi's ban of abstraction may have contributed to the fact, that figurative representation temporarily became obsolete after the war. However, abstraction in a very fruitful manner became the new language for a time of new beginnings.

Hans Hartung already created his first abstract drawings in the 1920s. During his time in the midst of the Avantgarde in France from the 30s onwards, he continues to develop completely new, gestural forms of abstraction. Characteristic for this new abstraction is a particular subjectivity, which has been unknown until then. It becomes a vital influence not only on the École de Paris but also later on the arts in Germany. At first, this subjectivity appears impulsive but then it intermingles with something one can call *spontaneous calculation*, as Hans-Werner Schmidt and Dirk Luckow state in 2007. At first, this term seems paradox but it proves to be precise as soon as one takes a look at the drawings that Hartung creates as drafts for his works on canvas. They indicate the deliberate composition that give the basis for the spontaneous and expressive impression of the paintings.

Each single work that is shown as part of the exhibition at Setareh Gallery develops an intensity which one hardly can resist.

Five months after the gallery opened, *HANS HARTUNG. Painting – Gesture – Liberation* already marks the third show. At the same time it is the first one dedicated solely to one artist. It gives insight into all of Hartung's creative phases, starting with the rarely shown works from the 1940s to his late works from the 80s.

In this compilation of works so many facets become visible, that one might want to conclude that all terms only can remain approximate. The complexity and enormous freshness in Hartung's oeuvre stays impressive and continuously stands out.

## Exhibitions (selection)

- 2010 *Vom Esprit der Gesten – Hans Hartung, das Informel und die Folgen*, Kupferstichkabinett Berlin
- 2007–2008 *Spontanes Kalkül*, Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig and Kunsthalle Kiel
- 1980 Retrospective of his early works for his 75th birthday, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
- 1975 Metropolitan Museum in New York
- 1974 Retrospective for his 70th birthday at Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne
- 1969 Retrospective, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, Museum of Fine Arts Houston and Québec, Montreal
- 1962-1963 Retrospectives in Zurich, Wien, Düsseldorf, Amsterdam and Brussels
- 1961 *École de Paris*, Tate Gallery, London
- 1960 *Grand Prize for Painting* of the Venice Biennial
- 1957 Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover, documenta II, Kassel
- 1955 documenta I, Kassel
- 1952 Kunsthalle Basel, Biennale Venedig
- 1948 Venice Biennial
- 1938 *20th Century German Art*, New Burlington Galleries, London
- 1936 *Salon des Surindépendants*, Paris
- 1932 *Junge Malerei*, Galerie Flechtheim, Berlin
- 1931 Galerie Heinrich Kühl, Dresden