

Press Release

## The Dallas Museum of Art Presents Günther Förg Exhibition at Palazzo Contarini Polignac in Venice, Italy



The Dallas Museum of Art (DMA) is delighted to present an exhibition of works by Günther Förg (1952-2013) at the storied Palazzo Contarini Polignac in Venice, on the occasion of La Biennale di Venezia 2019. An official collateral event of La Biennale, 'Förg in Venice' follows the survey show, 'Günther Förg: A Fragile Beauty', which took place in Dallas in 2018.

On view from 11 May - 23 August 2019, the Venice presentation will provide an in-depth understanding of Förg's aesthetic and conceptualist concerns, not only with respect to his artistic output, but also concerning the context in which his work is displayed. Förg considered the space, the placement and the positioning of his work as inherent to the work itself. By installing Förg's artworks – broadly adhering to modernist traditions – against the ornamental interiors and Renaissance architecture of Palazzo Contarini Polignac, the exhibition will dissect and discuss the legacy of aesthetic modernism, an ideal central to Förg's practice, in a space replete with history and craftsmanship. Rather than a formal exhibition, the presentation is to be viewed as an atmospheric staging of works in an intimate, private setting, evoking a melancholy and romanticism not usually associated with Förg's oeuvre.

Realised in close collaboration with the Estate of Günther Förg, 'Förg in Venice' brings together over 30 pieces from the artist's multidisciplinary practice – focusing on his paintings and lesser known sculptural work – to reflect on the expansive and intuitive methods of this manifold, intellectual artist.

Born in 1952 in Füssen, Allgäu, Germany, Förg is one of the most significant German artists of the post-war generation, renowned for his experimental and provocative oeuvre rooted in the history of art. In his pioneering cross-disciplinary practice that challenged the limits of artistic disciplines, Förg explored the language of abstraction and expressionism, appropriating tropes borrowed from modern art and architecture.

Italy and Italian architecture played a central role in the development of Förg's career. In 1982 he made his first trip to the country, which was the catalyst for his well-known series of photographs reflecting on buildings with cultural and political significance, from monumental structures in Italy to Bauhaus buildings in Tel Aviv. Working in photography, Förg was

able to probe the relationship between art, architecture and spatial interventions, a continuous theme throughout his entire practice, and one that the staging of the Venice presentation seeks to highlight. Förg's work was exhibited as part of the Biennale Arte 1993 in 'Il Viaggio verso Citera', but 'Förg in Venice' will fulfil the artist's wish to have a solo exhibit during La Biennale di Venezia that he was not able to realize during his lifetime.

'Förg in Venice' offers a new perspective on this multifaceted artist in an unparalleled Venetian setting, where its furnishings and decorations play a central role in contextualising the art on view. Throughout the Palazzo, individual paintings, tapestries, and decorative elements in selected locations are replaced with works by the artist. On the ground floor, a large-scale minimalist painting of a window, 'Untitled' (2004) – as well as several preparatory sketches for the work shown alongside it – stands in lieu of an emblem, creating the impression of a window where there is none. Förg's 'windows', despite their stoic geometry, are provocative – they offer a frame to look through but provide no view, instead they direct and constrain our gaze, questioning the act of looking and aesthetics.

In the great hall of the Palazzo, a group of four striking Color-Field paintings in Förg's signature color combination, different tones of yellow, red, green, and blue, made in 1991 are displayed in lieu of four large wall tapestries. These complex works are a testament to the artist's interest in structural concerns and the philosophical parameters of space. The paintings are composed of monochromatic sections of acrylic paint, where color and composition reflect on the metaphysical aspirations and experiments of Modernist painters, such as Newman or Rothko. Förg, however, undermines any notions of transcendence and the sublime by embracing the tactile, sensual qualities of paint, applying it quickly in articulated and gestural strokes, resulting in a powerful, raw surface.



In the Palazzo's impressive mirror hall, a series of Förg's sculptures from 2000 are installed near the windows. These figurative sculptures, comprising bronze masks or body parts sitting on roughly hewn limestones plinths, test the possibilities and limitations of material. The gauged, rapidly-worked surfaces imply destruction. They are deliberately imperfect, highlighting Förg's interest in exploring an idea, more than in achieving an ideal of aesthetic pleasure and perfection. The palpable surfaces are smattered with Förg's fingerprints, chance circumstances and material accidents, pushing bronze far beyond its hierarchical, classical and monumental associations.

Finally, on view throughout the Palazzo's furnished side rooms, a number of Förg's abstract paintings from 2003 to 2009 replace the art usually on view. These paintings showcase the breadth of Förg's career and reveal his tendency towards experimentation, drawing together the various strands and conceptual influences that ran through his oeuvre – from

his nimble execution, tonal complexity and compositional layering, to a sensual, free handling of formal disciplines and geometric structures.

By integrating Förg's rich bodies of work throughout the internal palace rooms, the exhibition demonstrates Förg's interest in the dialogue between art, architecture and the viewer. During his lifetime Förg would deliberately paint over gallery walls and repurpose doorways and windows as integrals elements – he even manipulated the glazing of his work as a reflective play to create unexpected meditations. As an artist, Förg not only challenged the conventions of media, but included and implicated both the physical space and the viewer in the display of his artworks. Considered within the setting of the Palazzo Contarini Polignac – a classical, romantic and unabashedly beautiful location on the Grand Canal of Venice – unexpected encounters with Förg's versatile and dexterous work invite the viewer to consider this seminal artist's relationship to the history of art and architecture, both of which are critical currents within his multivalent practice. During his lifetime, the artist enjoyed installing his work in storied contexts, often doing so with sensitive yet minimal intervention, and this exhibition continues that tradition, maintaining the Palazzo's overall atmosphere while reflecting Förg's inventive and playful spirit.

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#### **Editor's Notes**

##### **About Günther Förg**

Günther Förg was born in 1952 in the region of Allgäu, Germany. From 1973 to 1979 Förg studied under Karl Fred Dahmen at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste München, during which time he worked almost exclusively in monochrome. In the 1980s he began to experiment with photography, painting and sculpture and held his first solo exhibition at Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle in Munich. In 1992 Förg was invited to take part in Documenta IX in Kassel. From 1992 he taught at the Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung Karlsruhe. In 1996 he received the prestigious Wolfgang Hahn prize, two years later he became a professor at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste München, where he taught until his death in 2013, at the age of 61. His work has been noted for its references to modernist masters such as Barnett Newman, Clyfford Still, Philip Guston, Mark Rothko, and Edvard Munch.

The Estate of Günther Förg is represented by Hauser & Wirth, exclusively worldwide.

##### **About the Curator**

Elisa Schaar is an art historian, writer, and curator, currently Lecturer at Oxford University (St Peter's College). Specialising in art since the 1960s, Schaar has written articles and catalogue essays on artists including Robert Rauschenberg, Elaine Sturtevant, Fred Sandback, Adel Abdessemed, and Ragnar Kjartansson. Her articles have appeared in journals like *Art History* and *American Art* and in catalogues by institutions such as the Pinakothek der Moderne, Tel Aviv Art Museum, and Castelli Gallery. Schaar contributes regular exhibition reviews from London to *Artforum*.

##### **About Palazzo Contarini Polignac**

Palazzo Contarini Polignac, also known as Contarini dal Zaffo, is one of the most important early Renaissance buildings in Venice. It was most likely designed by Giovanni Buora in the fifteenth century, although the older scholarship attributes it to Mauro Codussi. Alongside an impressive marble façade recalling Tuscan Classicism, the Palazzo contains remarkable details including a lateral façade with three arches bordering the garden of Palazzo Balbi-Valier Sammartini. Two friezes by Domenico Tiepolo, which once were in the Palazzo Correr a Santa Fosca, have been conserved in this building alongside stucco decorations in the second piano nobile. The Palazzo Contarini Polignac has a long and storied artistic past, since from the beginning of the twentieth century Princess Winnaretta de Polignac, nee Singer, held musical salons

there – renowned for their importance throughout the avant-garde in Europe, her salons included among their guests Ethel Smyth and Igor Stravinsky. The Palace was later purchased by the Princess of Polignac, a great connoisseur and patron of the arts, as well as a painter and musician herself. The Princess enjoyed the friendship of Sargent and Picasso, and her salon on the Grand Canal was among most celebrated European salons of the day. In recent years, the Palazzo Contarini Polignac has played host to a number of contemporary art exhibitions.

## About the Dallas Museum of Art

Established in 1903, the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA) is among the 10 largest art museums in the country and is distinguished by its commitment to research, innovation and public engagement. At the heart of the Museum and its programs is its global collection, which encompasses more than 24,000 works and spans 5,000 years of history, representing a full range of world cultures. Located in the nation's largest arts district, the Museum acts as a catalyst for community creativity, engaging people of all ages and backgrounds with a diverse spectrum of programming, from exhibitions and lectures to concerts, literary events, and dramatic and dance presentations. Since the Museum's return to free general admission in 2013, the DMA has welcomed more 3.2 million visitors.

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Günther Förg  
Untitled  
2004  
Acrylic on masonite  
86 x 200 cm / 33 7/8 x 78 3/4 in

Günther Förg  
Untitled  
2004  
Acrylic on canvas  
200 x 240 cm / 78 3/4 x 94 1/2 in

Günther Förg  
Untitled (Mask)  
2000  
Bronze, limestone plinth  
42 x 12.5 x 10 cm / 16 1/2 x 4 7/8 x 3 7/8 in

Günther Förg  
Untitled (Mask)  
2000  
Bronze, limestone plinth  
41 x 10 x 10 cm / 16 1/8 x 3 7/8 x 3 7/8 in