

Hanns Kunitzberger



*There is no such thing as bad weather,
only different kinds of good weather. - John Ruskin*



The Possibility of Beauty.

Our first visit to Hanns Kunitzberger's Berlin studio was in late October 2018, an autumn day when the sky matched the pavement.

With time it becomes apparent that Berlin's 'Farben' hides in the diverse cultural matrix of the city rather than in the material range of its architecture. In this sense it can be initially foreboding as a city, appearing to lack the intimacy that those of us from the new world so energetically seek out on our European "Wanderjahr".

There is an emotional temperature to its architectural austerity that one can't help but feel correlates with aspects of Berlin's singular 20th century history, and roaming as extensively as we do, it is not hard to form the view that there is something deliberate about its astringency, something planned in its odd blend of neo-classicism and brutalism that feels neither strategic nor casual.

However, stepping into Hanns Kunitzberger's and Catherine Kunitzberger-Emanuel's apartment the autumn chill that had been following us towards Charlottenburg swiftly dropped away. There was warmth and chromatic ambience in abundance... and ginger tea.

Installation view. Hanns Kunitzberger,
Image Space - The Gaze Of The Image
2015 Museum Wiesbaden, Germany

Painting envelops Hanns' and Catherine's life. There is an extraordinary level of commitment and clarity given to its manifestation and I quickly felt aware of their shared focus, one that is directed towards the long arc of a painting practice. Each painting that we viewed on those first visits belonged to each other and though every work has a completeness and resolution that grows more evident each moment we spend with them, there is an overarching conceptual and aesthetic lucidity.

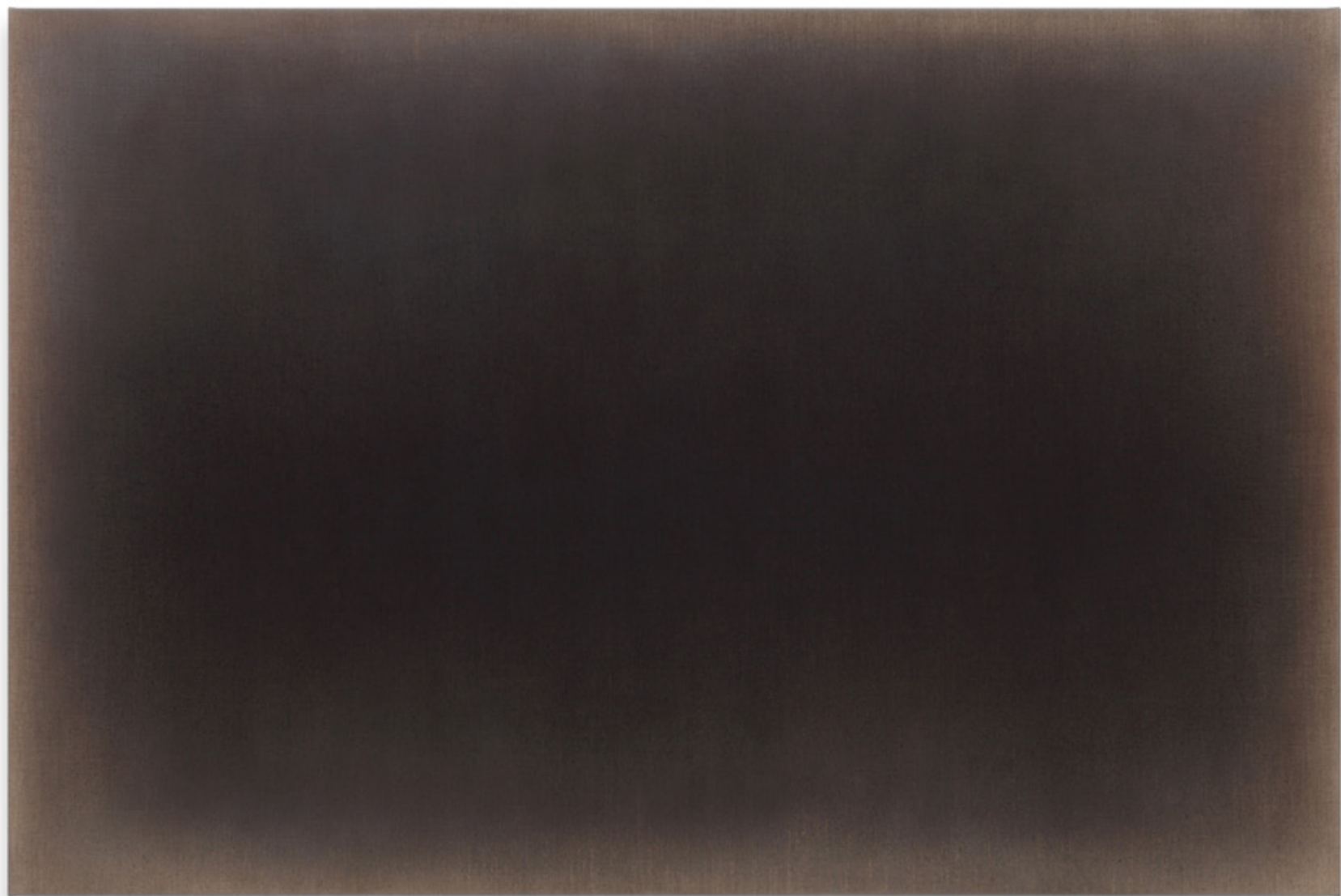
People are like stained - glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within.

- Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

Kubler-Ross's statement reveals something I'm sure Kunitzberger recognises. That beauty is more likely to be unveiled amidst diminishing light – between the veils of real loss. For Kunitzberger the pursuit of beauty as a trait in itself is a Narcissian folly, one that leads to a false seduction. For painting to head down this path, however beguiling it might appear, risks ensnaring both the painter and the audience in an unconsummated tryst.

Is the painting then completely resistant to beauty? Though Hanns may be inclined to paint a kind of lamentation to beauty's absence, there is a chance that his audience might be momentarily ambushed by its memory or their own. In this sense his refusal may not be wholly shared, but what is made available is an uncommonly sensitive manifestation of the components of remembrance.

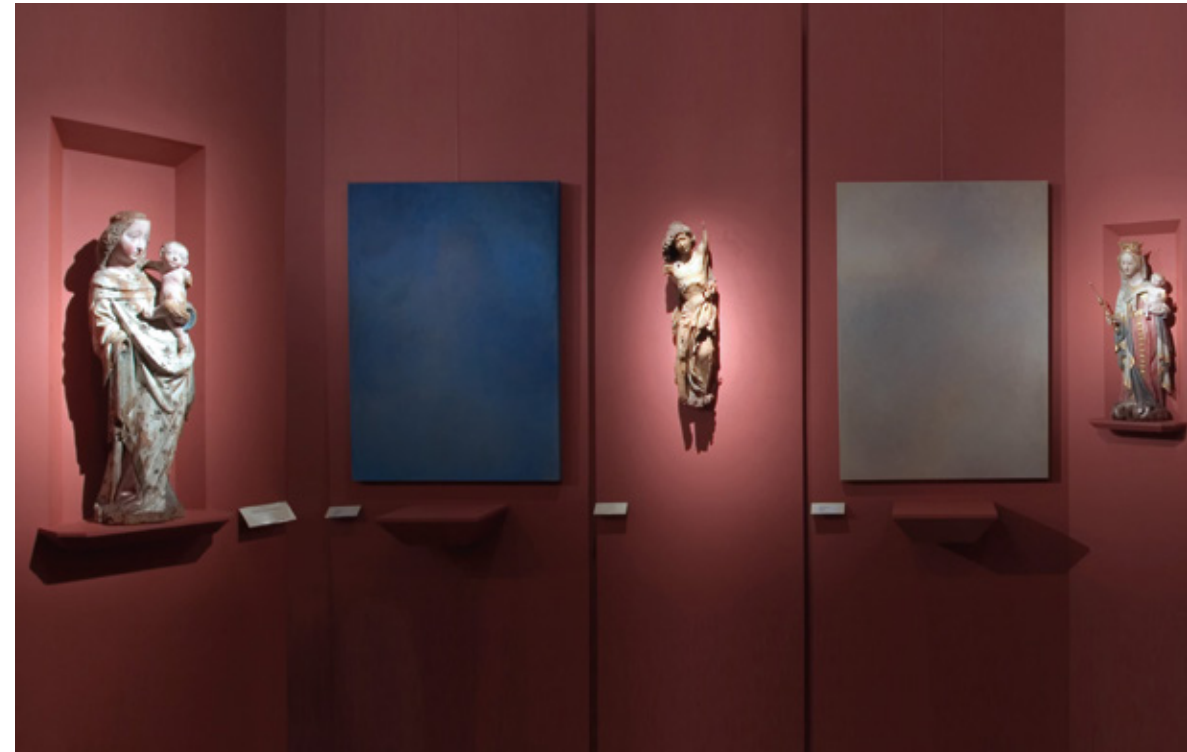




It is the case that much of the work that I respond to shares a sensibility and a pledge to making that warrants the foundation of its visual architecture. The approach that each artist takes to this is inevitably unique but there is real pleasure for me in intuiting some small aspect of this. Whilst one seldom witnesses that ceremony, feeling something of it in the objects' character is akin perhaps to hearing the fingers on the fret or the key... it doesn't technically alter the note but it reminds us how it is made.

This bracketing of a pure note with the logistics of touch... that briefest of moments when the hair of the bow first contacts the string or that initial exhalation of air that will contrive to vibrate a reed or solicit a note from a voice. These traces of making are amplified in Kunitzberger's work especially at the margins where we see the pigment assembling and dispersing in soft shrouds. There is no theatre to his gesture, no flourish that announces the performance. Rather we feel his colours emerge like a tone that rises from nothing, building layers of intensity and then softening again to emptiness. It is at this moment - when the vibration ceases that we are left regretting its absence and indeed knowing its beauty because it has gone.

The considerations that Kunitzberger makes about the support, the nature of the linen, all seem to be impacting the behaviour of the paint and contribute to the visceral quality of the objects. Some of the pigment sits within the warp and weft of the linen making its fine body part of the structure, even the composition.



Previous page. 2. *Hälfte 2016 Etwas Später*, 2016 oil / linen 120 x 180 x 4 cm

This page. Installation view, Hanns Kunitzberger

image and portrait Archbishop's Cathedral And Diocesan Museum Vienna, 2005

His gentle coaxing of colour towards the interior establishes weight and body that never quite ceases to be atmospheric rather than fully corporeal. It feels as if Kunitzberger's paintings aim to evoke memories of the somatic so that our experience of the paintings draw on a multitude of senses and a newer, unexpected awareness.



Stepping back into the autumnal brace near the atelier I was ambushed by an avalanche of feelings. These paintings justifiably carry a responsibility only to themselves and Hanns, yet their gentle conduct, their refusal to participate in the fashionable histrionics of the time gave the experience a hermetic shape that I immediately felt reluctant to leave. But as we walked back to the hotel, the evening sky opened up, the chill resumed and I understood that the paintings are happily rooted in nature and the forces of meteorology. Like Ruskin, Hanns Kunitzberger is pleased to welcome the approach of winter with its broodier horizons and its low-light solicitation of a subtler tonal register. His colours are not captive to describing these phenomena, rather they marry with the most sophisticated and tender gesture to evoke atmospheres that are as much cerebral as visceral, as much metaphysical as physical.

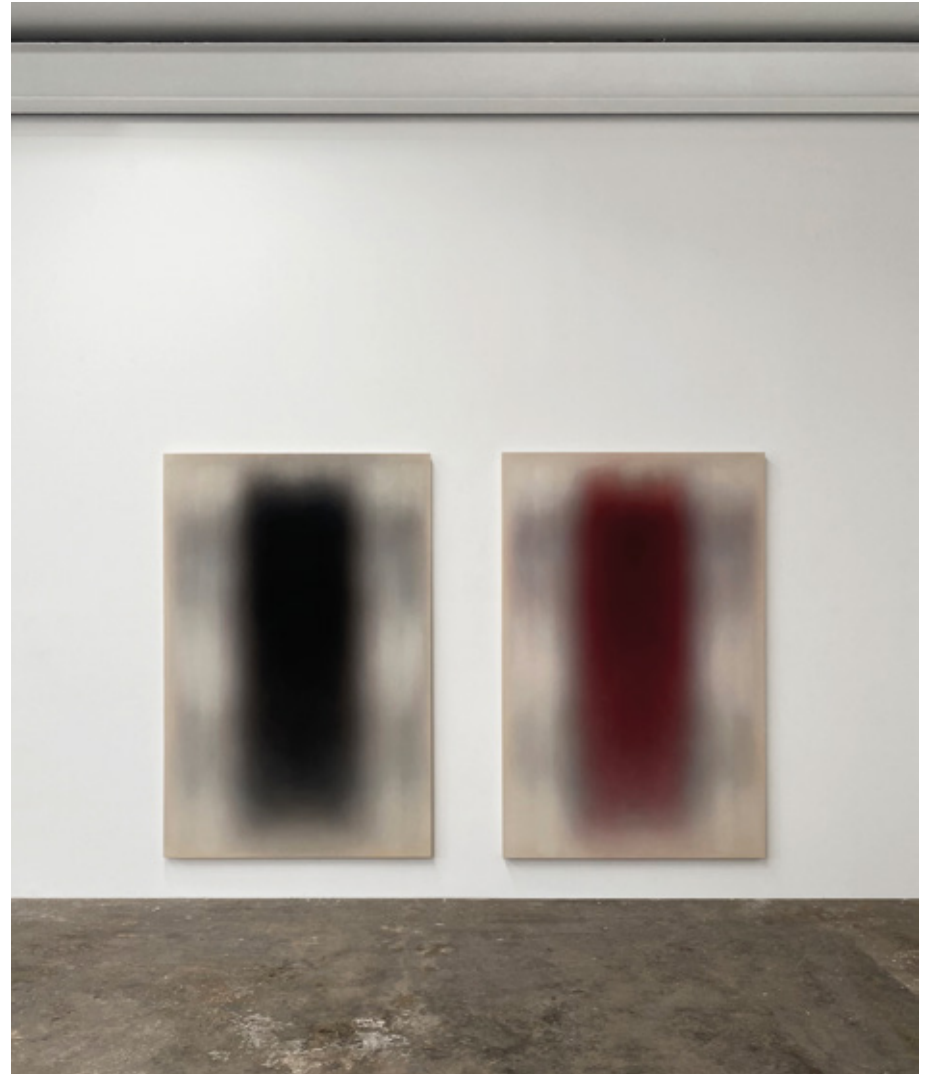
- Andrew Jensen, 2020

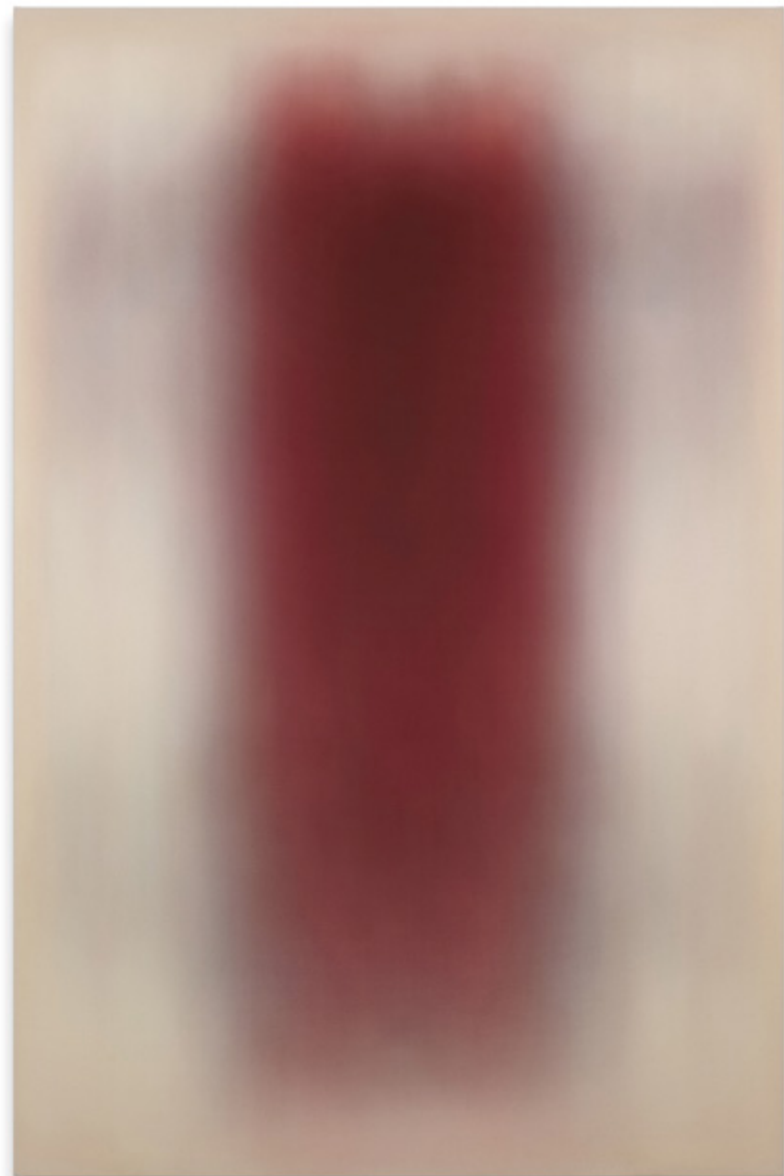
Left. Hanns Kunitzberger, Atelier Kunitzberger
Berlin, Germany 2018
Below. Michelangelo Merisi Da Caravaggio
Narcissus, 1597 – 1599
oil on canvas 110 x 92 cm





Without atmosphere a painting is nothing
- Rembrandt Harmenszoon Van Rijn







Previous page. *Mitte Spät 2019 – Anfang 2020*, 2019-2020 oil / mollino 225 x 150 x 4 cm

Mitte Früh 2019 – Anfang 2020, 2019-2020 oil / mollino 225 x 150 x 4 cm

This page. Installation view. Hamburger Kunsthalle - Gallery of Contemporary Art

Exhibition *Back then has always been now*, 2020

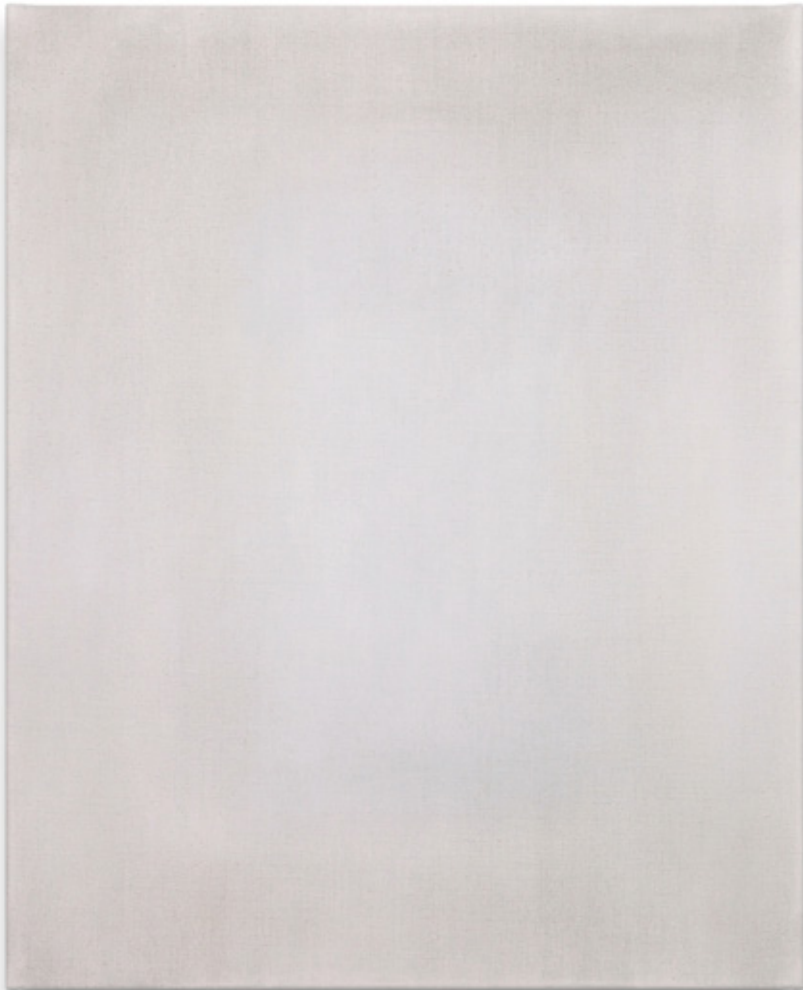
Hanns Kunitzberger *1. Hälfte 2019, I, II, III, IV*

Photo: © Atelier Kunitzberger 2020

2. Hälfte 2012 Früher, 2012
oil / mollino 80 x 65 x 4 cm



Below. Atelier Kunitzberger Berlin, Germany 2018
Right. *Anfang 2013 Später*, 2013 oil / linen 80 x 65 x 4 cm



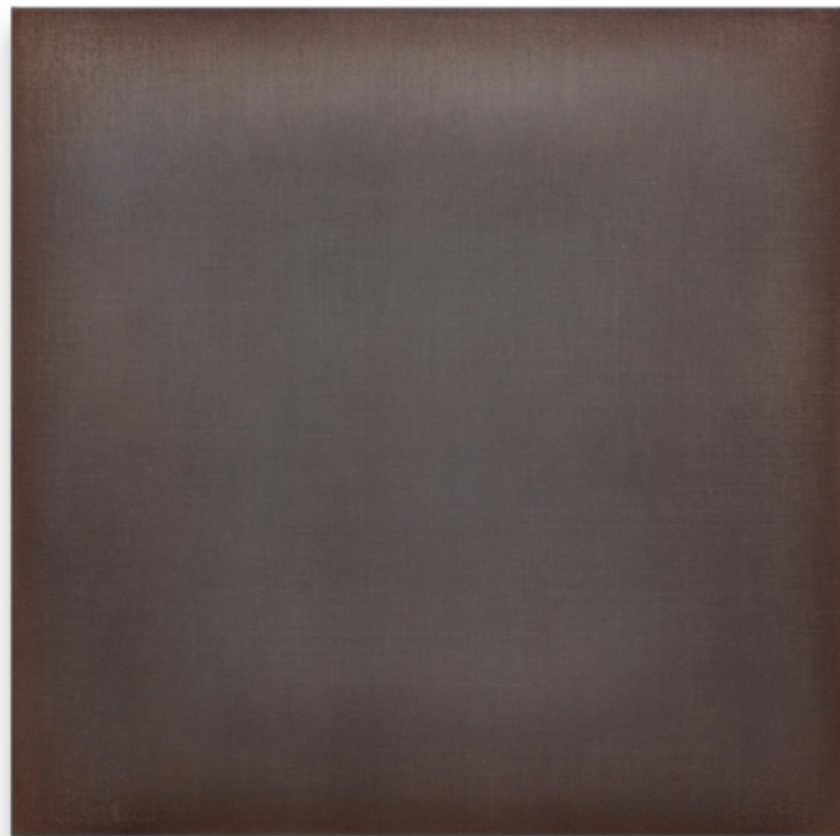
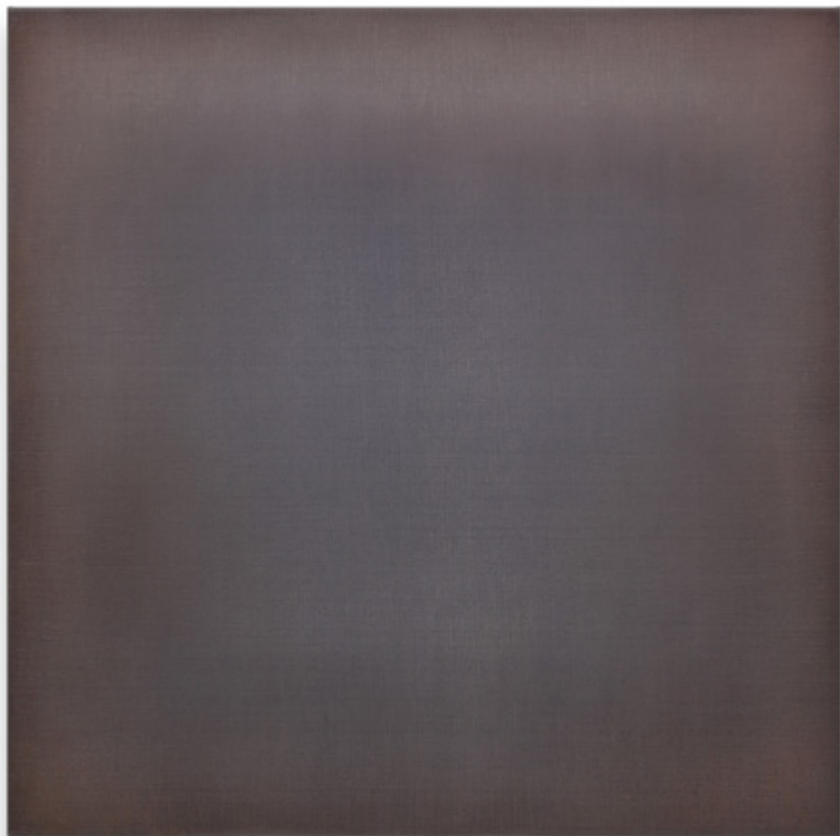
1. Hälfte 2009 Früher, 2009
oil / linen 80 x 65 x 4 cm



*Find beauty not only in the thing itself but in the pattern of the shadows,
the light and dark which that thing provides. - Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, In Praise of Shadows 1933*



*Anfang 2019 I-II-III, 2019 oil / linen, each 90 x 90 x 4 cm
Installation View. Permafrost, Fox Jensen Alexandria 2019*





Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Gemäldegalerie, *Hanns Kunitzberger as a guest at Gemäldegalerie* 2015

Room 41 - Left: Master of St. Magdalena. 1270, Mary enthroned with the child and two angels.

Middle: Ugolino di Nerio. 1325/35, parts of the polyptych from the high altar in S. Croce, Florence.

Right: Hanns Kunitzberger *Anfang 2015 Früher*

© Photo: Catherine Kunitzberger 2015

Right page. *Anfang 2015 Früher*, 2015 oil / mollino 170 x 100 x 4 cm



Mitte 2012 Früher, 2012

oil / mollino 80 x 65 x 4 cm

Next page. 2. *Hälfte 2017 - Paar*, diptych, 2017

oil / linen 180 x 65 x 4 cm each





*Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy:
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.*
- William Blake, *The Sick Rose* 1794



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