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Art in the Aftermath of Modernism

The must-see work in London



Günther Förg,
Untitled (1987). © Estate Günther Förg, Suisse / DACS 2019

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Galleries don't need to be mega-sized to mount a meaningful show. In [Luxembourg & Dayan's](#) small second-floor space in London, it arguably takes only one work—albeit comprising 32 panels—to get under the skin of the complicated German artist [Günter Förg](#), who died in 2013 aged 61.

Filling a gallery wall, Förg's *Untitled* (1987), which was also shown at last year's retrospective at the [Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam](#) and [Dallas Museum of Art](#) ("A Fragile Beauty"), looks at first like a trademark Modernist statement. Förg offers us equally spaced and sized panels, abstract grids and a limited palette. Then the deliberate imperfections begin to emerge. Most obviously, he arranges the perfectly divisible panels into two rows of 11 and one of 10, making it look like there is one missing on the bottom right: the grid has a faultline.



Günther Förg, *Untitled* (1987). The George Economou Collection © Estate Günther Förg, Suisse / DACS 2019

Within each panel, all is not shiny perfection either. The thin brushstrokes are uneven and the colors impure as green seeps into yellow, yellow into brown. Such effects are compounded by the fact that Förg was painting on one of his favorite materials—lead—which absorbs the acrylic paint to produce a soft, self-contained surface full of kinks.

Curator [Yuval Etgar](#) has set out to explain Förg through the artist's love-hate relationship with those who had dominated the scene. The [exhibition](#), which runs until 4 May, is called "Günther Förg: From and Against Modernism, with a Response by Fischli & Weiss" and Etgar speaks of the artist's "struggle" with the vocabulary of the movement. At the same time, as the curator and academic Jeffrey Saletnik puts it, Förg is indebted to artists including [Mark Rothko](#) and [Clyfford Still](#) and produces work that is less a reaction against them, more a "transformation" of gestures that he admired.

Into the mix, Etgar has added an extra twist by sharing his curating role with the Swiss artist [Peter Fischli](#) who, in response to the seven works by Förg on show, has chosen 24 photographs of Zürich's suburbs taken with his late collaborator [David Weiss](#). These come from their "[Siedlungen, Agglomeration](#)" series of more than 200 photos taken in 1992. It's not an obvious pairing: Fischli & Weiss were contemporaries of Förg but injected considerably more humor into their works. "We share a common problem—making art in the aftermath of Modernism—but at the same time, we found very different ways of confronting it," Fischli says of the show, referring to Förg's work as "an echo of Modernism".

We share a common problem—making art in the aftermath of Modernism

The photographs here raise a surreal eyebrow to the everyday world but have a more documentary feel than many of Fischli & Weiss's other works. The unexpected combination with Förg proves a revelation, particularly as it brings out the German artist's fascination with the history of architecture (Förg almost stopped painting between 1979 and 1984 to focus on photography and study the [Bauhaus](#) school). The 32 panels of his composite 1987 work become eerily similar to the small, repetitive windows of Fischli & Weiss's post-war, functional buildings. Together the works manage to question the ideals of a troublesome utopia. It's a small show that packs a big punch.