

Interview

HELMUT LANG'S COLLECTIVE ARTWORKS



By Emily McDermott
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Frieze Art Fair came to New York for the first time three years ago, bringing with it artists from around the world and startling debuts. Included in this list was a small exhibition, "Helmut Lang: Sculptures," featuring more than 20 of the former fashion designer's recent artworks. For the first time since then, Lang is presenting his newest sculptures in New York at Sperone Westwater for his inaugural gallery solo show, "Helmut Lang."

Lang established his eponymous label in 1978, but retired in 2005, shifting his focus toward sculptural pursuits. The 2012 exhibit established a particular intimacy, presenting only black and white sculptures throughout the first floor of a brownstone on Washington Square North, while simultaneously highlighting what has become Lang's sculptural signature: repurposing materials to create textured, monochromatic pieces.

High ceilings and echoing galleries now replace small rooms and brick walls, the artist introduces splashes of color, and the body of work on view is 10 times larger. Despite this dramatic growth, however, each piece retains the artist's original assemblage-like technique.

"Not having formal training, I feel less concerned with traditional distinctions between sculpture and painting," Lang says. "What I'm interested in are replacement forms that break classical frames at the intersection of surface and texture, abstraction and figuration, the prosaic and the poetic, the natural and artificial, and personal memory."

Using resin and pigment, Lang transforms raw materials made of shredded remnants from his archive of runway shows—or *séance de travaux* as he referred to them—into the largest series of sculptures on view. Intricate, asymmetric details of the 10-12 feet tall sculptures juxtapose the geometric, columnar forms. In his other works, layering black, white, brown, red, green, blue, and yellow paints over distorted, yet everyday materials including cardboard, string, and tape, allows the artist to delve into the exploration of figuration and abstraction, while exuding themes of both progress and destruction.

"HELMUT LANG" OPENS AT SPERONE WESTWATER IN NEW YORK TODAY, JANUARY 8 AND RUNS THROUGH FEBRUARY 21.

All images courtesy the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York