

## Independent

# Markus Amm on his Process



Markus Amm, *Untitled*, 2019, oil on gesso board, 13 3/4 x 11 7/8 x 1 inches (35 x 30 x 2.5 cm). Photography: Annik Wetter. Courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

Markus Amm is an incredibly agile painter. He watches his colorful paintings come to life, letting the paint move and settle onto the canvas, so much so it becomes a bit like “a tennis game between me, my ideas, and the material”—with Amm as the calm opponent, sensing when to strike. The depth in his abstract work creates a kind of surface tension, time divided by patience and skill. There’s a soothing quality to all this steady calculation, and the painted result has the clarity and mystery we expect from high mathematics.

We talked to Amm about his creative process, and the work he brought to Independent.

**1. Your process for painting is so complex — a building up and bringing down of the topography of the material, between pigment and erasure — yet this work is often vibrational and chromatic. The paintings look seamless. What draws you to your rituals of making the paintings?**

Some materials already have an extremely aesthetic quality. For example, some linen on a stretcher can almost be enough. Even though I started working on boards a long time ago, I recently re-discovered these old-fashioned gesso

boards in a small art supplies shop in London called Fitzpatrick. Instead of putting the gesso directly on the board, they stretched the canvas over a massive board before priming and sanding it. Just by chance, I was visiting the shop and there were these beautiful objects. They were really heavy for their size, but with a surface softer than paper not only in terms of touch, but also to the eye.

I have always had this fascination with the mixing fields in tin watercolor cases. When these mixing fields are used they result in abstractions of the finished painting. They are accidental, but I am driven to try to accomplish this intentionally. As everyone knows, it’s pretty tough to create something as beautifully as nature and coincidence does...fortunately, I failed. At the other end of the scale, pure coincidence gets boring after a while. I think these two formal bed stones must be mentioned. I want to give the material of the paint and painting-ground as much weight as the composition, the historical references, and the contemporary discourse. I think this is the reason why I make the process so difficult for myself sometimes.

**2. When is a painting finished? How important is the duration of the process to the completion of a work?**

The way I work is intuitive, or perhaps it becomes intuitive during the process. Even though I know that my initial ideas of shape and color might fail, I still prepare the colors that I want to use and apply the paint in the forms I planned anyway. But guess what...what follows is a bit like a tennis game between me, my ideas, and the material. The longer the game goes, the better it feels and the better the result. However, the painting process is really short in comparison to the time the works spend hanging in my studio being watched and judged.

Some paintings hang in my studio for years before I know if they’re good enough to show. Actually, I think a few of my best paintings were those that I considered throwing away or repainting. My works are finished if I



Markus Amm, *Untitled*, 2019, oil on gesso board, 19 5/8 x 15 3/4 x 1 inches (50 x 40 x 2.5 cm). Photography: Annik Wetter. Courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

feel they have reached their peak. As I said, it can take a long time to reach that point, but the moment you recognize it, you have this moment of epiphany — the moment for which I make and look at paintings.

**3. Almost every article and interview you’ve participated in brings up obsession. Can you elaborate?**

I think there are different reasons for that. First of all, my process is very time-intensive, meaning a lot of mistakes can appear, which then force me to restart paintings that I had been working on for a long time. Just to withstand the frustration of your favorite painting — the one that really gave you a high at first — drying out so badly over a month that you are forced to throw it away requires a special kind of personality.

Anyway, apart from my studio practice, I’m nowadays an easygoing person, though it wasn’t always like that in the past.

**4. What interests you about color? Are the choices intuitive or pictorial?**

I see color even in a black-and-white print. What I see quite often is this interplay between abstraction and figuration in my paintings, which color helps with. The range of colors are a result of the combinations found in the finished paintings. So far, the choice of colors is pictorial, but in itself, in its own quality, the use is intuitive.

I’m saying is color is an essential quality in my work. There is quite often this interplay between abstraction and figuration in my paintings, which color helps with. The range of colors are a result of the combinations found in the finished paintings. So far, the choice of colors is pictorial, but in itself, in its own quality, the use is intuitive.

**5. Can you talk a little bit about what work you’re bringing to Independent?**

I’ve been working on this body of paintings for almost ten years now. The paintings I’m bringing to Independent were made during the last two years. They all move along a basic line that I set at the beginning. Size, material, and technique have changed slightly during these years.

Anyway, each period and each show has its own character. My last show in London, a two-person show with Nicole Wermers, for example, had in its minimalism a pretty tough and rough personality. Not friendly, but a lot of space where you could pose good questions about surface, extensions of painting into real space, painting as an object, space and illusion, etc.

Finally, I’ll know what I’ve done for Independent when the decisions of which ones I’ll show and how I’ll install them are made. I do not really believe in architectural models and prefer to make all decisions on site. Therefore, sorry, the answer cannot be given until the paintings are on the wall.



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