

Günter Fruhtrunk, The Paris Years (1954-1967)

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Whether as a leading exponent of concrete painting in post-1945 Germany, professor at the Munich Academy of Fine Arts, or inventor of the iconic Aldi shopping bag: Günter Fruhtrunk's (1923–1982) place in the cultural memory of the Federal Republic of Germany is secure.

However, it was in Paris that Fruhtrunk developed his painterly style and built his career. Many young German artists of the 1950s yearned to move to the French capital. Fruhtrunk's opportunity came in 1954, thanks to the good relations of central figures of cultural transfer in the French Occupation Zone—Fruhtrunk was living in Freiburg im Breisgau. He stayed in Paris for over thirteen years, until 1967, when he was appointed to a teaching position in Munich, and always maintained a home in France. He was supported by influential veterans of the prewar avant-garde in Paris and Germany and, from 1957 on, represented by Galerie Denise René, which gathered the most uncompromising standard bearers of a new concrete art.

Working with exceptional precision and patience, he painted pictures that are devoid of personal references; simple yet sophisticated forms in subtly modulated colors captivate the eye. His most important and most spectacular painterly “in-vention,” the creation of a light-space that emerges as the beholder seeks to intuit the ultimately intangible rhythm of these colors and forms, dates to the early 1960s. This light-space amounted to a challenge and revolutionary reinterpretation of what modern abstract art can achieve.

Many of his peers in Paris were alert to opportunities in various neighboring countries. Fruhtrunk himself was tireless in his efforts to enlarge his transnational network and soon garnered recognition in Milan, Brussels, and Marseille. He slowly also gained a foothold in Germany, beginning in the affluent industrial cities of the Rhineland and the Ruhr, where audiences and collectors were receptive to abstract art.

Our exhibition brings together sixty works with which Fruhtrunk presented himself to the public at the time. They make for an engrossing visual experience.

Curated by Susanne Böller

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ARTE is media partner of the exhibition.

Concurrently, the Kunstmuseum Bonn will present a Günter Fruhtrunk retrospective that will travel to the Museum Wiesbaden.