



For these untitled oil-on-paper works (all 2012), Fox used a spatula to spread the pigment into structured blocks of color.

**B**erlin artist Pius Fox's oil paintings have an architectural quality that typically recalls interlocking rooms, fragments of stairs, proscenium arches, or even vacant auditoriums. As with Richard Diebenkorn's "Ocean Park" series, which the 29-year-old Fox greatly admires, his works seem to shift continually between abstraction and figuration—and this dialogue between structure and color lends his compositions an intriguing inner drama.

Working primarily on paper, Fox uses spatulas to spread the pigment across the surface in a way that conceals a "signature" yet permits a kind of structuring that he feels would not be possible with a brush. Typically, he layers contrasting colors one over the other, often allowing some of the lower strata to shimmer through—so that what begin as abstract blocks of color suddenly engage with one another and create perspective depth, suggesting built spaces. "In this way," he says, "things suddenly appear that aren't expected."

Fox was born in Berlin to a linguist mother and a musician father who performed with the legendary Leipzig band Klaus Renft Combo, sometimes referred to as "the bad boys of East German rock 'n' roll." After repeated censure, the group—and Fox's family—was finally allowed to emigrate to West Germany, where Fox was raised among artists, musicians, and writers, many of whom were also refugees from the East. Fox himself is a musician, and he sometimes takes the stage as a guitarist alongside his father. He also plays the sitar, and he credits the raga—a melodic mode of Indian music whose fixed framework leaves room for improvisation—with majorly influencing his idea of pictorial structure. He is represented by Galerie Martin Mertens in Berlin and Munich, and by Galerie Vidal-Saint Phalle in Paris, and he is currently preparing solo exhibitions for those venues. His small works on paper and canvas sell for €600, and larger works measuring some six feet are priced at €4,200.

Fox's foray into painting was driven by a passionate feeling for color. As a young child, he took a painting course that engendered a love for creating pictures, though he recalls a certain bewilderment about the efforts of his classmates. "I couldn't understand why they used such ugly colors," Fox says, and during his later studies at Berlin's University of the Arts, his instinct for color ripened into a guiding principle. He is intrigued by what he terms a "color reality" that exists independent of subject or style—something he sees present in Renaissance painting as well as in works by Rothko, van Gogh, and, of course, Diebenkorn. "In the case of van Gogh, there is often something implausible in the choice of colors," he reflects, "yet one sees them as authentic." Initially, he sought his own sort of authenticity with acrylic paints, but was always disappointed by the way the colors lost their inner glow, and abandoned them for oil pigments.



**Pius Fox.**

In general, the artist says, smaller formats give him greater control, which is essential in his pursuit of what he cryptically describes as "the endlessness of painting." Not unlike classical miniatures, his works utilize gesture, material, and color in ways that assert the inexhaustible variety of his reductionist approach. "Color," he declares, "doesn't just create a particular mood—it also prompts a particular kind of perception. A picture is only finished when the sum of its colors comprises a world unto itself." —David Galloway

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