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Peter Zimmermann On Embracing the Unexpected

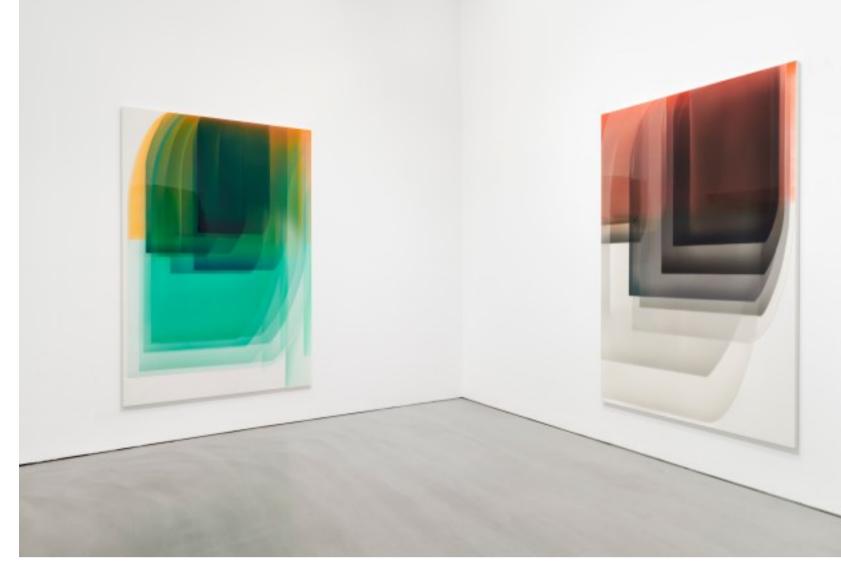
His digital-meets-analog epoxy resin paintings are currently on view in "VIRTUAL PARADIGMS" at Nunu Fine Art, New York.



By Christa Terry • 09/26/23 4:10pm

ARTS

What it means to lose oneself in an artwork differs from piece to piece and person to person. Literally *seeing* oneself in a work is not strictly necessary, but there is something to be said for the experience of engaging with pieces with both depth and reflectivity. German conceptual painter Peter Zimmermann's works in epoxy resin offer the viewer precisely this type of experience—that of being outside looking in and inside looking out.



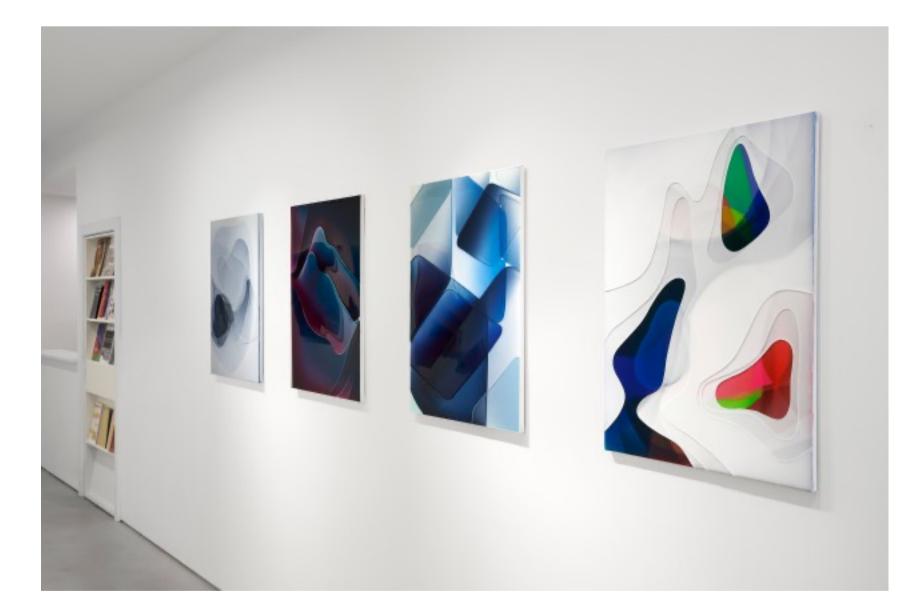
Peter Zimmerman's resin paintings invite viewers in. Photo: Martin Seck

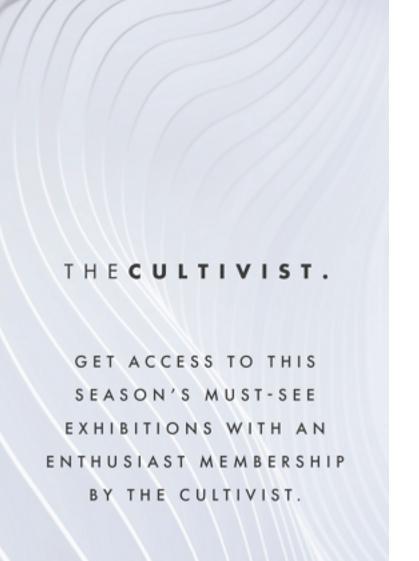
It's a feature of light's effect on the medium, which when layered on canvas, creates impressive dimensionality. 'Portal' was the word that came to mind when I stood in front of certain works on view now at Nunu Fine Art in New York. That impression, I should clarify, wasn't informed by anything other than the stories my mind invented in the depths of what I saw.



The notes for "VIRTUAL PARADIGMS," which is showing through November 4, tell a very different story. Zimmermann's works "examine the current conditions of visual representation, highlighting the impossibility of viewing an image without simultaneously engaging with the screen parameters, algorithms, and software prejudices that mediate so much of our visual experience today."

His process reinforces the theme—his epoxy creations begin as digital images, manipulated with software to reveal patterns and forms that inform how he pours the resin on his canvases, with the final products "uniting the past and present while posing questions about the future relevance of painting."



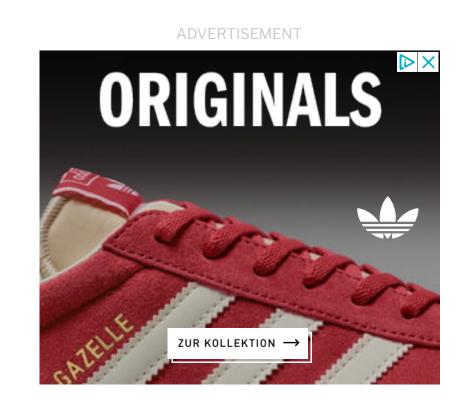


A selection of Zimmermann's smaller canvases in 'VIRTUAL PARADIGMS'. Photo: Martin Seck

After meeting Zimmermann, I had the opportunity to ask the artist some questions about his work, his current medium and what the future holds.

What drew you toward digital manipulation as a starting point for your paintings? Is there something in particular you enjoy about melding modern and traditional processes?

When I started working with the computer back in 1993, I realized quickly that it was more than a tool. It became an ideology or a view of life. Basically, it was the moment when alternative facts started. Digital images didn't have the same documentary quality or truth anymore as a photo that was done with a camera. It was possible to modify it in any direction. A digital file could be a print, but you also could turn it into a 3D object or a sound file. I was fascinated by these possibilities. It felt right and contemporary to explore those possibilities and to question the implications of representations that this technology brought up.

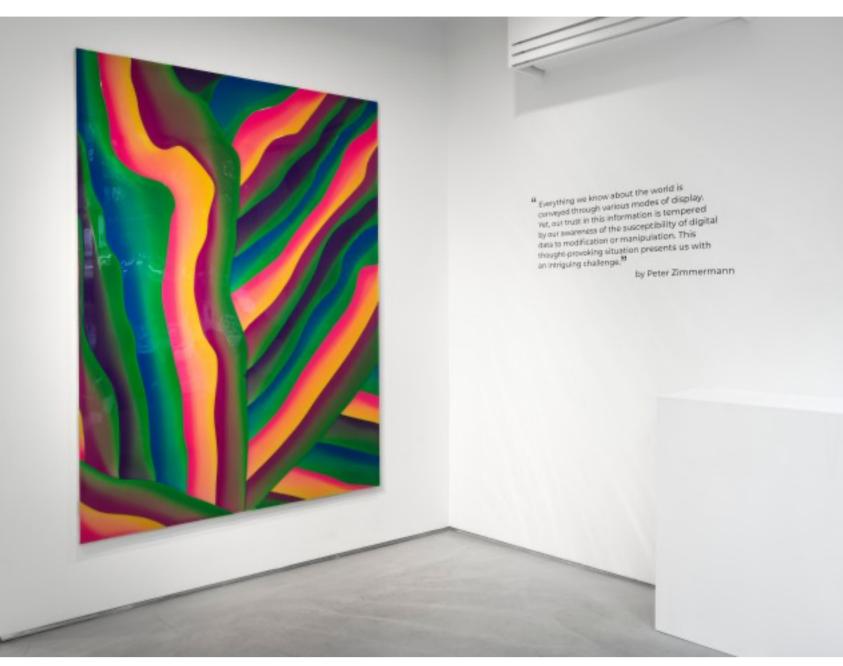


How does the unpredictability of resin as a medium impact your overall approach versus when you're working with, say, oil paints? Have you had to embrace a measure of uncertainty?

Epoxy resin is indeed much harder to control than oil paint. Probably it has to do with the fact that the material is designed for other purposes, like floors or surfboards, while oil paint is clearly fabricated to do paintings. But indeed I am very thankful when unexpected things happen during the painting process. Over the years, I have appreciated the accidents very much. That's the crucial point about painting—that it involves something beyond your will.

Some, but not all, of your work is quite large in scale—do you have a preference for larger paintings or installations versus smaller ones?

I love large-scale paintings. Somehow it is easier for me to handle it. With the resin paintings, I think that the three-dimensional aspects of the layers can become very dominant while on a large-scale painting it looks very harmonized. I also like the fact that the surface of my large paintings reflect not only the viewers but also their surroundings. When it comes to the oil paintings, my fingers just have a certain size. So in order to be a complex painting, it needs to have a big proportion.



The first piece visitors encounter in 'VIRTUAL PARADIGMS'. Photo: Martin Seck

Your work feels very active to me; there's a strong sense of motion, whether that's the implied flow of resin or implied vibration of scattered droplets or the sense of swarming or schooling in some of your oil paintings. Do you invite this kind of viewer interpretation or do you prefer the viewer have a contextual understanding of your artistic intentions?

I think there are always these two options to approach my paintings. You can just enjoy their appearance and dive into the flawless colorful glossy surfaces of the paintings, either the almost endless layerings of reflective transparent resin or the gesture-like surfaces of the oil paintings. But in any case, it makes sense to also get involved in the conceptual approach. Any of these motives are derived from digital files mostly related to the exhibition or the context of the space in which the works are presented. I am interested in making the paintings contemporary and questioning the fact of how our perception is constructed. That makes the pieces more complex and offers other approaches beyond the visual.

Your body of work is diverse yet there are visual themes that carry through from year to year. How would you describe or summarize the evolution of your pieces, and do you have any sense of how it might change in the future?

It is hard for me to predict how my paintings will look in the future. There are always a lot of accidents involved that create the changes or sometimes technical implications play an important role which I cannot predict. In any case, I try always to be aware of these things and try not to be afraid if the work wants to go in a different direction. If I feel the necessity for it [to change], that's okay.



An installation view of Zimmermann's works at Nunu Fine Art. Photo: Martin Seck

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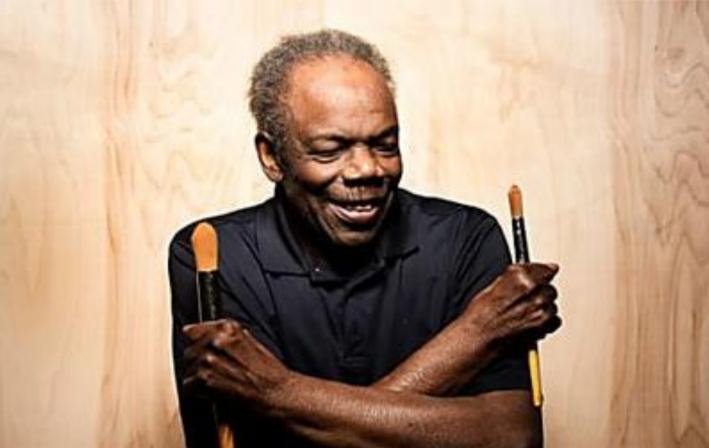


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