

Thomas Wachholz*Tempo Primo***Opening:** Friday, 28 June 2024, 6 – 8 pm**Exhibition:** 28 June – 24 August 2024

An English riddle, which gained popularity around 1900, presents a predicament: "A man walks into a dark room. He has a match in his hand. In the dim light, he can make out three objects: a candle, a fireplace, and a kerosene lamp. The question is, which should he light first?" Against all expectations, the three objects, which can provide either light or warmth, are not the primary concern. The overlooked fact is that the answer is already in his hand. Without striking the match, he cannot light anything else.

Throughout his artistic career, Thomas Wachholz has handled many matches, even entire series of them. For "Tempo Primo", these matches join brushes and other utensils that Wachholz has used in recent years for his deep exploration into the possibilities of pictorial creation. At times, the matches have served as a model, a motif, a subject matter, or even a tool in this practical relationship.

Wachholz's paintings consistently showcase his fascination with matchboxes and matchbooks. This fascination stems from their iconicity, practicality, the chemical processes of ignition, and ultimately, fire. The vibrant glow has become a recurring theme, particularly in recent years where the act of burning has evolved into a performative dialogue with audiences in galleries, exhibition spaces, and even subway stations. The match poses a call to action: to ignite or not to ignite!

In Michel de Certeau's "The Practice of Everyday Life", the French Jesuit examines those "tricks and ruses", movements and actions, that are rooted in everyday life and, from a depth psychological perspective, take place in the preconscious. These include walking, narrating, chattering et cetera. With regard to "Tempo Primo" and Thomas Wachholz's earlier works, the ignition of a match must absolutely be added. The detailed observation becomes emblematic high art when the merging of burnt matches becomes the motif and occasion for plastic work: As a duo, as kissers, or these days as a group of matches; now cast in bronze into sculptures full of inner tension and playful balancing - captured in an act of movement: The Dancers.

The title of the show, "Tempo Primo" - a term from music that means "back to the original tempo" - does not mean that someone is repeating what they have already done. "Tempo Primo" is a playing instruction to bring the new into contact with what has been: Not to turn in a circle, but to spin upwards like in a spiral. In this way, Wachholz returns to the original temperament of his oeuvre, painting in the tradition of Minimal Art. What is new is the format he has conquered as a painter: Shaped Canvases. Monochrome pictorial objects that are dyed with meticulous brush strokes into the rust red of the phosphor color already used

several times by Wachholz. It is a reminder that painting has always been an art form that is close to alchemy. Wachholz stirs and mixes the phosphor in order for it to experience activation later. Wachholz calls the processing of the phosphor color with matches activation. The result - as is known - are blackish burn-ins, and charrings, which in the new series may be read as injuries and breaches of the picture surface. It is an entry into the picture space, an opening up of the flatness - it is also a testimony to the physicality of the new series of works.

At the same time, "Tempo Primo" pays homage to the inherent rhythm of new pictorial objects. This rhythm manifests in the crackling staccato of falling matches which, once ignited, are swept across the image surfaces. This sweeping motion, reminiscent of a conductor's guidance, inscribes traces on the otherwise monochrome surfaces. Clusters and condensations emerge as nimbly placed structures that can be read like verses.

But let's take another look so that - unlike the seeker in the English riddle - we don't miss anything: Then we see flames and fractions of flames, we see the fire and its consequences, we see images, objects, monochrome - we see the obvious. We see an artist who returns to his origins but on a new level. We see "Tempo Primo".

Lars Fleischmann, 2024

Thomas Wachholz (*1984) lives and works in Cologne. He studied at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. He was subject of solo exhibitions at Kunstverein Heppenheim, DE | Wentrup, Berlin, DE | Galerie Ruttkowski;68, Cologne, DE | THK Gallery, Cape Town, ZA | Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, USA | Galerie Lange + Pult, Zürich, CH | Ung5, Köln, DE | Nymphius Projekte, Berlin, DE | RaebervonStenglin, Zürich, CH. Group exhibitions include venues such as the Centre d'art contemporain Meymac, FR | Eduardo Secci Contemporary, Florenz, IT | Kölnischer Kunstverein, DE | Krefelder Kunstverein, DE | Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles, US | Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, DE | Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn, DE | Kunst im Tunnel, Düsseldorf, DE | Yves Klein Archive, Paris, FR.

Works by Thomas Wachholz are part of the collection of the Deji Art Museum, Nanjing, CN | US Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles, US | Frost Foundation, Santa Fe, US, as well of numerous private collections worldwide.