

NINO MIER GALLERY

NEW YORK | BRUSSELS

Georg Karl Pfahler
NEW YORK | NEW YORK
New York | Soho
November 14 – December 16, 2025

A leading figure in postwar German abstraction, Georg Karl Pfahler was the first artist in Germany to dedicate himself to hard-edge painting after World War II and pioneer this groundbreaking style. His work commands attention for its graphic clarity and vibrant color, resonating with striking relevance despite being created over six decades ago. Conceived in an era when color photography was a novelty and digital technologies were unimaginable, these compositions reveal a bold, forward-thinking vision that remains compelling today. Their lasting freshness underscores Pfahler's enduring influence within contemporary art.

Born into a family of Bavarian farmers in southern Germany, Pfahler's path to becoming a distinguished abstract painter was remarkable. Initially focused on sculpture, his encounter with Willi Baumeister shifted his focus to painting, where influences from Baumeister's abstraction, inspired by Paul Klee and Fernand Léger, shaped his early work. Through careful experimentation with ink drawings and collage, Pfahler developed a refined simplicity that became a hallmark of his practice. The late-1950s *Formativ Series* marked a defining moment, introducing bold, block-like forms set against clean backgrounds. In these works, shapes served as vehicles for exploring the interplay of color, with acrylic compositions emphasizing space and hue over form. This innovative approach to hard-edge painting, action painting, and color field painting positioned Pfahler as a significant figure in European abstraction, distinguished by intellectual and aesthetic depth.

Pfahler's engagement with color field painting fostered a meaningful transatlantic exchange, leading him to the United States. While American artists used color to redefine a post-war world, European artists, including Pfahler, expressed a liberated creativity following the constraints of Nazi oppression. The 1965 Signale exhibition in Basel, Switzerland, highlighted this dialogue, presenting Pfahler's work alongside artists such as Ellsworth Kelly, Kenneth Noland, Leon Polk Smith, and Al Held. This recognition sparked interest from Barnett Newman, who curated Pfahler's first New York exhibition in 1966 at Fischbach Gallery, a prominent venue known for showcasing artists like Alex Katz, Louise Bourgeois, and Bruce Nauman. Newman encouraged Pfahler to work on larger canvases as well, moving beyond the spatial constraints of his German studio.

This exhibition, on the eve of the centennial of Pfahler's birth, brings his work back to New York, a city that significantly influenced his artistic development through its vibrant postwar art scene. Transatlantic collaboration also honors Pfahler's commitment to connecting East and West. Despite the divisions of the Iron Curtain during his lifetime, his work fostered cross-cultural collaboration, embodying a vision of artistic unity that transcended political boundaries.

Pfahler's art is characterized by an optimistic outlook, expressed through his bold and emotive use of color, setting him apart from German contemporaries focused on existential themes. His philosophy, eloquently stated, asserts: *"Color has a value of its own, color is weight, color is quality, color possesses an inherent limitation, of itself, through itself, through other colors, color creates space, color is form and space."* This principle underpins his oeuvre, infusing it with emotional depth and universal appeal.

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The exhibition features key works from two defining series. The *Tex Series*, developed over twelve years from the early 1960s, is noted for its rounded forms, which convey emotional resonance. Inspired by the tragedy of John F. Kennedy's assassination, these softened shapes balance vibrant hues and angular forms, offering a reflective perspective on historical uncertainty. The *Metro Series* builds on these rounded forms, leaving canvas edges untouched to draw focus to dynamic central compositions. These works evoke an architectural quality, using color as a structural element to explore line and space on a grand scale.

Connected by their distinctive rounded forms, these series highlight Pfahler's contribution to German hard-edge painting. The fluid shapes, appearing to extend beyond the canvas, suggest both fragments of a larger whole and self-contained realms of harmony. Pfahler's consistent focus on the interplay of space, shape, and color, often in contrast to prevailing artistic trends, establishes him as a singular figure of the past half-century. His work remains a testament to innovation, its relevance enduring and its legacy profoundly influential.

Georg Karl Pfahler (1926–2002, lived and worked in Emetzheim, DE) studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, Nuremberg, DE between 1948 and 1949, and later at the State Academy of Fine Arts in Stuttgart, DE, where he graduated in 1954. During his lifetime, he exhibited worldwide, including a 1966 exhibition curated by Barnett Newman at Fischbach Gallery, NY, US and the Venice Biennale in 1970, where he represented Germany alongside Günther Uecker and Heinz Mack. In 1981 he represented Germany again at the São Paulo Biennial in Brazil. His work is in prestigious collections around the world, most notably the Museum of Modern Art, NY, US; Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR; Museum of Contemporary Art, Buenos Aires, AR; Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, DE; Bundestag, Berlin, DE; Städel Museum, Frankfurt, DE and Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, DE.