

Bernd Koberling

29 March – 28 April 2023

Bernard Jacobson Gallery presents a selection of paintings by the German artist Bernd Koberling (b. 1938). This occasion marks the artist's first exhibition in the UK since the 1980s, when the Royal Academy of Arts organised *A New Spirit in Painting* (1981) and *German Art in the 20th Century* (1985). Spanning 1999 to the present, the paintings and watercolours featured in this exhibition reflect Koberling's fascination with nature and its landscapes. As colours sweep across his abstract compositions, Koberling expresses the sights, experiences, and emotions that arise through his encounters with the natural world.

Born in Berlin, Koberling enrolled in the West Berlin Academy of Fine Arts in 1958 and began his painting career in the early 1960s. With the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the increasingly tense Cold War, art too found itself at the centre of an ideological conflict, wherein Abstract Expressionism was framed as the style of freedom. In this context, Koberling searched for his own personal form of art and gravitated toward landscape paintings early in his career. Koberling's paintings are informed by the memories and experiences from his annual visits to the Arctic Circle between 1959 and 1972, as well as his trips to Iceland, where he has spent several months each year since 1977.

This exhibition examines Koberling's oeuvre since 1999, when he started painting on aluminium and wooden boards. He used these materials extensively until 2011, with the works from this period forming his *Board Paintings* series. Through both their titles and media, paintings such as *Memories of Water I* and *Memories of Water II* from 2008 highlight the central role that nature plays in Koberling's practice. Made by applying acrylic to gesso on wood, these works acquire a liquid quality that evokes watercolours. Fittingly, Koberling developed his first *Board Paintings* shortly after he began experimenting with watercolours: his practice controlling this delicate, runny medium enhanced his ability to create fluid, interconnected forms with acrylics.

By 2012, Koberling moved away from his *Board Paintings* and returned to oil paints on canvas. In these works, Koberling fills his canvases with vibrant colours, resulting in compositions that are far denser than those of his *Board Paintings*. *Deep to the Roots II* exemplifies Koberling's highly layered approach to oil painting. As he builds his radiant compositions, Koberling responds to nature's beauty in an abstract manner rather than by painting a visible landscape.

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Since 1998, Koberling has also used watercolours on numerous occasions. In these works, the artist incorporates varying degrees of dimension and layering, as seen in a comparison of *Autumn-sphere* from 2022 and *Untitled* from 2019. Koberling created many of his watercolour compositions while outdoors in Iceland. When he works outdoors, he intends to be in touch with nature rather than precisely replicate it. His watercolours made in Iceland have served as reference points for his work in the highly industrial setting of Berlin, where his art expresses what he feels instead of what he sees – but nonetheless remains linked to nature.

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