

Press Release

# Imi Knoebel

## *love child*

1 October—23 December 2022  
Opening Saturday 1 October 2022, 7.30—9pm

Thaddaeus Ropac  
Salzburg Villa Kast  
Mirabellplatz 2, 5020 Salzburg



Imi Knoebel, *Figura Sin*, 2021. Acryl on Aluminium. 179 x 294.6 x 4.5 cm (70.47 x 115.98 x 1.77 in).

The exhibition *love child* presents new works by German artist Imi Knoebel, bringing together a series of paintings of varying sizes that are characterised by a striking colourfulness and unique, irregular shapes. Continuing the artist's preoccupation with form and his exploration of the fundamentals of painting and sculpture, the works veer between the two artistic categories, combining aspects of both. Defined by their abstract configurations and unconventional tones, Knoebel's most recent works continue to reflect on the legacies of Suprematism, Minimal Art and Colour Field painting.

Two large-scale *Figura*-paintings will be on view alongside a group of works from his latest *Love Child* series. Irregularly and at times wildly shaped, some forms are reminiscent of squares while others feature fewer or no ridges and angles. While the majority of the works in the exhibition are hung on the wall, a series of *Standing Paintings* rest on the floor and thus inherently challenge the relationship between painting, space and the viewer – a fundamental question that runs like a golden thread through Knoebel's practice.

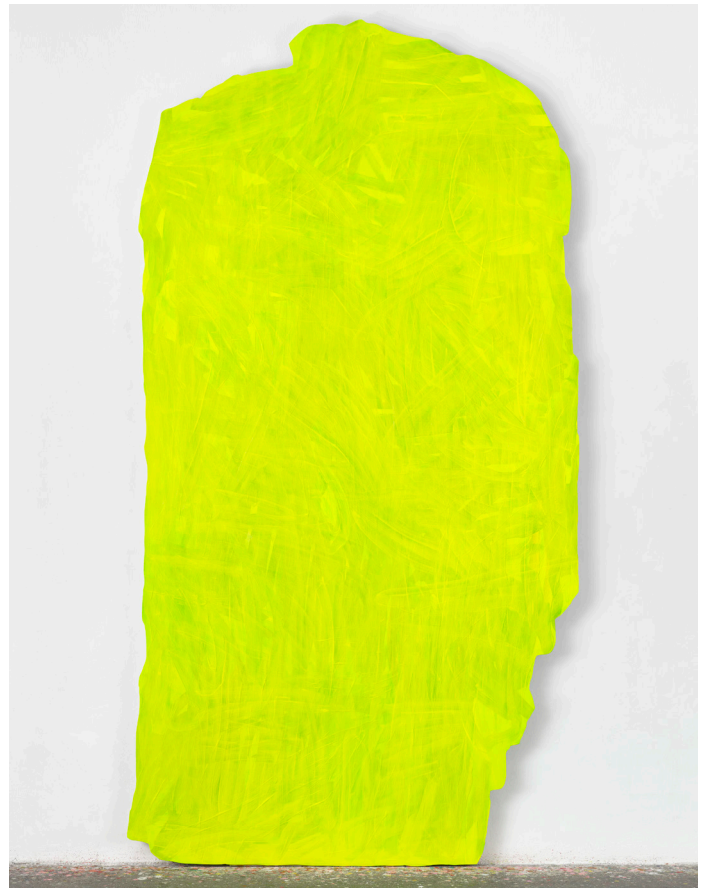
The shapes seem to oscillate with a dynamic that appears to bring them to life, but it is also their chromaticity that lends them their final form. The

darker works appear heavier and ponderous, while lighter hues give others a levitating, buoyant sensation. Following his early purist *line paintings*, *light projections* and *white paintings*, Knoebel first introduced colour into his works in the mid-seventies, partly informed by his close friend Blinky Palermo, whom Knoebel has described as 'the master of colours.' After Palermo's untimely death in 1977, Knoebel paid tribute to his former classmate in his *24 Colours for Blinky* series, for which he engaged with a full palette for the first time. Originally determined by a systematic approach, colour has since become a standard in his formal repertory and an increasing exuberance in his treatment of paint can be observed in his more recent practice.

The radiant colours appear almost detached from the picture plane, developing a life of their own. Their purpose lies not in the representation of a preconceived idea, but rather in their pure presence and the immediate effect on the viewer. These new works continue to reflect what Martin Schulz wrote about Imi Knoebel's works at the end of the 1990s: 'The viewer, who is not given any instructions, has to rely on his own sensual abilities. The viewer is confronted solely with the effects of pure form and colour, which can only be described subjectively. Knoebel's monumental pictorial objects are virtually surrounded by an archaic mysteriousness. [...] It is a poetry of vacuousness which, in line with Malevich, appeals to pure sensations.'



Imi Knoebel, *Love Child Alex*, 2021.  
Acryl on Copper. 150 x 142.3 x 0.2 cm (59.06 x 56.02 x 0.08 in).



Imi Knoebel, *Standing Painting H*, 2020.  
Acryl on Aluminium. 327 x 174 x 4.5 cm (128.74 x 68.50 x 1.77 in).

The predominantly monochrome paintings are made from aluminium or copper panels, materials the artist has increasingly used since the 1990s. The varied polygons from the *Figura* series and the *Standing Paintings* are mounted at a slight distance from the wall, reinforcing the sense of weightlessness. This expansion into the room further highlights their sculptural quality, which Knoebel counterbalances with animated surfaces that grant the works painterly characteristics, underscoring their pictorial aspects.

In contrast, each of the *Love Child* works is mounted flat on the wall with a single nail that protrudes through a small, round opening in its surface. Due to the specific placement of the nail, some of the works hang at an angle, which lends the shapes additional vibrancy. They bear titles such as *Love Child Alex* or *Love Child Lou*, with the suffixed names referring to spontaneous, light-hearted and at times intimate associations and relationships.

The artist's application of acrylic paint remains visible and varies from flat brushstrokes that he drags lightly across the metal grounds to overt scribbles, from opaque to transparent, from matte to brilliant, revealing a richness of colour while highlighting Knoebel's creative process. The distinct use of layers and textural structures creates space and vibrancy within the works, arriving at a fine balance between order and chaos, rigidity and freedom – a quality that can be traced through Knoebel's oeuvre.



Imi Knoebel in his studio

### About the artist

Imi Knoebel's resolutely abstract art investigates the fundamentals of painting and sculpture through an exploration of form, colour and material. His aim is to uncover the basic material elements of art, which he locates in the simple interactions between humans and the essential conditions of our world. He remains true to the tradition of non-representational art, following in the footsteps of artists such as Kazimir Malevich or Piet Mondrian. The artist cites his discovery of Malevich's *Black Square* (1915) as a watershed moment that liberated his conception of painting, giving him 'the overwhelming feeling that I could start at nothing.' He has developed an experimental approach and serial way of working, characterised by a haptic use of colour, geometric vocabulary of forms and material simplicity.

Born Klaus Wolf Knoebel in Dessau, Germany in 1940, Imi Knoebel grew up near Dresden until 1950, when his family moved to Mainz. From 1962–64, he studied applied arts at the Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences. Knoebel was strongly influenced

by the theories of Johannes Itten and László Moholy-Nagy, which were taught at the Bauhaus in Weimar and Dessau. Between 1964 and 1971, he studied at the Staatliche Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, where Joseph Beuys also taught. Having experimented with *line drawings*, *light projections*, and *white paintings* (1972–75), he used colour for the first time in 1974. The following year, Knoebel began his series of rectangular paintings in superposed layers of Mennige paint (industrial anti-rust paint). Thereafter, he started to juxtapose planes of vibrant and expressive colours upon different materials, predominantly working with wood and metal.

Imi Knoebel's works are in prominent public collections including the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris; Dia:Beacon and Dia Art Foundation, New York; Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht; MMK, Frankfurt; Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon; The Broad, Los Angeles; MoMA, New York; MOCA, Los Angeles; Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; Norton Museum, West Palm Beach; and Sammlung Goetz, Munich.

In addition to solo museum exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf in 1975, Kunstmuseum Winterthur and Kunstmuseum Bonn in 1983, and the Deichtorhallen Hamburg in 1992, Knoebel's work was shown at documenta 5 (1972), 6 (1977) and 7 (1982). In 1996, the Haus der Kunst in Munich organised a large retrospective and the Kestner Gesellschaft in Hanover celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2002 with an exhibition of his work. In 2008, Dia: Beacon in New York presented Knoebel's series *24 Farben – für Blinky* (1977). The following year, the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin showed some of his most important works. In 2011, he created six monumental stained-glass windows for the Reims Cathedral in France, which had been damaged by German bombing in the First World War.

Major exhibitions have followed at Museum der Bildenden Künste Leipzig, Germany (2011); Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany (2014); Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf and the Museum Haus Esters in Krefeld, Germany (both 2015); Musée Fernand Léger in Biot, France (2016); Skulpturenpark Waldfrieden, Wuppertal, Germany (2017); Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich,

Switzerland (2018); Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz, Liechtenstein (2020) and Dia Beacon, New York, USA (2021).

The exhibition in Salzburg coincides with a major institutional presentation of Knoebel's works at the Sammlung Goetz, Munich (until 29 April 2023).

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For any inquiries, please contact:

Patricia Schmiedlechner  
Thaddaeus Ropac Salzburg  
[patricia.schmiedlechner@ropac.net](mailto:patricia.schmiedlechner@ropac.net)  
Telephone +43 662 881393 0



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