

# GALERIE MAZZOLI

is pleased to present



## Terra Incognita

Solo show by Christian Achenbach

November 24 - January 20, 2024

Opening on **Thursday November 23, 6 pm**

The exhibition title "Terra Incognita," borrowed from Latin and literally translated as "unknown soil," refers, in its historical context from the early 15th century, to geographical territories that had not yet undergone in-depth exploration or precise cartographic documentation at the time of their naming. Although their designation explicitly pointed to the absence of concrete knowledge about them, they were always areas shrouded in mythical narratives and fantastic speculations, emerging as suitable places for individual and collective imaginations. These *terrae incognitae* functioned as places of longing.

In Christian Achenbach's (\*1978 in Siegen) new series of works, similar places of longing emerge. They are like promises of a new world: alien and unexplored. While Achenbach's earlier works are characterized by a clear departure from a central motif, where geometric forms and symbols merge into arrangements influenced by Surrealism and Cubism, his abstract landscapes offer spaces for identification without dictating an immediate narrative. Despite the new content, Achenbach remains true to his visual language and design vocabulary, continuously experimenting with various 20th-century art movements such as Expressionism, Constructivism, Pop Art, and Op Art. Achenbach's hill landscapes, with their otherworldly-sounding titles like Samora, Arencos, or Arlopaz, also reference early Chinese landscape painting of the Tang and Song dynasties, which intended not only to depict external nature but also to convey emotions and spiritual dimensions, providing viewers with a space for reflection.

Achenbach's fractal hill landscapes reveal themselves as resonant, extraterrestrial worlds in continuous formation, seemingly undergoing their current genesis. He creates a loud oscillation between spatiality and flatness, embodying the dynamic that is characteristic of his oeuvre. Also, one finds in "Terra Incognita" the auditory, rhythmic quality that is so intrinsic to his work. The towering hills recall frequencies, sound waves that accentuate the characteristic sound of Achenbach's aesthetic with their ecstatic color palette. Coming from music himself, Achenbach stages his painting as a visual and acoustic duet that can appeal to the viewer on a multisensory level. A symbiosis of image and sound: "I try to make my paintings sound. It's something intuitive. I hear the colors." – one is reminded of Kandinsky.

The use of chalk also assists Achenbach in the genesis of the loud-sounding dynamics of his works. His flowing forms are structured by fixed chalk drawings that separate the individual color planes from one another with precise clarity. It is particularly remarkable that despite its material permeability and inherent transience, chalk here assumes a certain limiting function, generating a tension between the ephemeral and the permanent. The chalk acts as a semipermeable membrane that isolates the different "cell contents" of the landscapes. Despite this separation, chalk allows, even if only in an imagined context, the possibility of exchange, movement – a fluid coexistence, which is also repeatedly suggested in the internal color mixtures of the individual fields. The hill landscapes thus reveal, in their design configuration, a fundamental organic structure: they present themselves as a metaphorical process of osmosis. Another indication of Achenbach's impressive artistic ability to breathe a dynamic breath into seemingly static structures.

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In their archetypal simplicity, Achenbach's landscapes convey an almost biblical quality by showcasing hills, trees, water, sun, moon, and color as fundamental elements. At the same time, their inherent originality opens a view into the future, posing the question of their developmental direction to the viewer. A sense of openness and a framework of possibilities that seems almost limitless, akin to a *terra incognita*, characterize Achenbach's landscapes and reflect the explorative yet future-oriented direction of his artistic work.

Achenbach's landscapes go beyond the function of a mere backdrop. He acts as a world creator, crafting places in his works that, through their triad (intended in its musical sense of basic three-note chord) – their primarily color-static, auditory, and ultimately dynamic quality – can involve the viewer in a very direct way. Indeed, only in the body of the observer do these worlds seem to synthesize in their entirety; only in the observer does the multi-sensory impact of Achenbach's pigment-explosive utopias take effect: his works produce a real activation of the viewers. "Terra Incognita" serves as an invitation to a temporal journey into the era of discoveries, illuminates the intrinsic spirit of adventure and curiosity that drove explorers of past epochs, and evokes memories of enigmatic places that could once lay claim to the mystery of the unknown. Achenbach invites you to go on a self-discovery journey within his *terrae incognitae*, to question your longings – give them a space within which they can exist, linger – and above all, to remain curious.

## **Christopher Marquez & Christian Achenbach: Terra Incognita (2023)**

An actual "incarnation" of Achenbach's triadic language occurs in the eponymous video installation "Terra Incognita" (2023), which is the result of collaboration between Christian Achenbach and musician Christopher Marquez from the band von Spar. Achenbach's creative process is revisited quasi-chronologically, with the film starting with the black-and-white acrylic base of his works, initially appearing lifeless, resembling a nebula in orbit. However, an evolution gradually unfolds, wherein Achenbach's pictorial space comes to life, gradually producing a color-experimental, animated – now also inhabited – world: an eager-to-dance population of bird-men finally permeates his landscapes. The musical accompaniment by members of the Berlin Staatskapelle (Unolf Wentig on bassclarinet and Kaspar Loyal on double bass) adds an additional dimension to the genesis of this *terra incognita*, with cryptic tonal sequences shifting between calm and challenging passages. The specific aesthetics of Achenbach's new series inspired clear melodic lines, based on sound aesthetic references from the 1970s, composed by Marquez. The use of original microphones from the 1970s, highlighting the characteristic graininess of the soundtracks, and the meticulous recording in Christian Achenbach's studio emphasize the auditory authenticity of this artistic work. The application of fast-cut stop-motion technique, which lends the film an almost analogue quality, also integrates numerous references to the 1920s, particularly in relation to Oskar Fischinger.

Hannah-Louisa Hochbaum

## **Christian Achenbach**

Christian Achenbach was born in Siegen, Germany, in 1978. He studied painting under Daniel Richter and Anselm Reyle at UdK in Berlin. His work has been exhibited in countless solo and group exhibitions in Europe, Asia, and North America, and it's part of some of the most prestigious private collections, particularly in Europe, the USA, and Asia. He lives and works in Berlin.