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A modern-day Romantic artist finally gets his due

The German painter Markus Lüpertz steps out of the shadow of his contemporaries in his first French retrospective

Paris. Among the generation of painters who emerged in Germany in the 1960s, Markus Lüpertz is one of the least widely celebrated. While Gerard Richter and Sigmar Polke, Anselm Kiefer and Georg Baselitz are superstars of contemporary art, Lüpertz has remained a cult figure.

He is much admired by other painters – Peter Doig curated a show of his work for their shared gallery, Michael Werner, in London last year- but perhaps because he is less easily defined than some of his contemporaries, Lüpertz has not been given the same exposure in museums. This is due to change with his 140-work retrospective at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, which includes art made across six decades, from his earliest paintings to the recent “Arcadia” series.



Markus Lüpertz's Staudamm- dithyrambisch, 1966

An eclectic artist

Like many of the best artists of his generation, Lüpertz's work is profoundly ambiguous, shifting from abstraction to figuration, initially touching on the motifs of Pop art and the language of Abstract Expressionism, and then expanding out of them into a highly personalized language. He borrowed a word from Nietzsche to describe his in-between position – the “dithyramb”.

Above all, what emerges from Lüpertz's diverse work is a profound love of painting, particularly in the “Arcadia” series, which is steeped in Classical imagery. As he told Doig last year: “This is what I think when you ask me ‘what is your idea of painting?’ I think an old painter has this idea to make paintings. Not about healthy things, not social issues or politics but painting of painting. So what I am doing now. I paint the ideal, I paint the romantic.”

*Markus Lüpertz : Retrospective,
Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
17 April – 19 July*