

**Dave Bopp**  
**when you left me, I left earth**  
**September 7 - October 19, 2024**

Visiting a gallery is like a voyage, a trip following your every whim. We, the visitors, decide the path, the direction, the course we take. The path from here to there, from object to object, from picture to picture discovers and explores things that are semi-familiar to us or previously unknown.

With the title of his current exhibition at Galerie Mark Müller, “when you left me, I left earth,” Swiss painter Dave Bopp (born in 1988, lives and works in Berlin) already sends us far off while at the same time bringing us very close.

Crises in a relationship are always moving. Especially when it is unclear who is leaving whom, or for what reason. The title of the exhibition is a quotation, a line said by the mega-superhero Doctor Manhattan in the 1980s comic series *Watchmen*. In the 2008 film as well, we could watch how he separates from his partner and embarks on a long journey. He teleports himself sitting cross-legged from a post-apocalyptic Earth to Mars, where he establishes a new realm with an enormous hour glass made out of Mars sand: an updated Shangri-La in the science fiction format of the period.

In addition to participating in numerous group shows, “When You Left Me” is the third solo show by the artist at the gallery on Hafnerstraße since 2018. Continuities and his further development are both striking. He remains true to his medium, acrylic lacquer on aluminum composite panels, and continues to work in dauntingly expansive formats of two and a half by four meters that approach the size of early modern historical paintings or American color field art. They demand to be noticed and also exert an irresistible pull on the beholder.

While the artist retains material and format, the forms he creates have changed drastically over the last four years. In his recent works, the restive all-over structures, concrete visual spaces, constructed non-figuratively, serially, where a circle signifies nothing more than a circle before it can be interpreted as a moon, have condensed to form figures that recall abstract landscapes, extraterritorial non-sites on distant stars and planets with their own exotic fascination between a flattering attraction and a abhorrent inhospitableness. The circle is the clearest sign of this, unwittingly generating associations of interplanetary constellations, the space of the painting as the surface of a distant arrangement of planets and moons.

In a sense as a reference to this interplanetary visual world, we are received by a work at the entrance to the gallery, *Untitled #24-01* (2024), which is formally and thematically an indication of what is yet to come. The smooth, glossy support corresponds as if intended for the purpose to Bopp’s preferred medium, lacquer, although its application is rather difficult.

With its horizontal structure of color, from black to gray, yellow, magenta, and orange, *Untitled #24-01*, despite the small format, recalls destructive forces of nature like tectonic shifts and lava flows and anticipates the comparatively peaceful post-apocalyptic dream landscapes of the subsequent two rooms.

The immense horizontal painting *Dirty Wish* (2024), 240 by 400 cm, could already be seen from the entrance; its enormity could already be felt there. Now, having entered the main gallery space, taken by the magic of its attempt to overcome us, we find ourselves fascinated, captured, or overwhelmed by the monstrosity of the work. In Bopp’s painting, there is little room left to maneuver for the beholder.

Sharp lines separate rippling color fields from one another, dark blue waves of paint flow into a richly striated green, which, with a sharp edge at the top, cuts off the lower third of the reddish-dark brown circle that we read as a moon, which appears threatening before the pastel-colored glazes of a salvation promising sky. Do the magmatic color disruptions in the color fields separated from one another result from the forces of its gravity? The gaping bright fissures in the lower middle section of the painting?

We can take that as a given. Ever since antiquity, the moon has stood on the one hand for the

cycles and transformations of nature, its chthonic and transformative forces, while at the same time influencing the character qualities and gifts. Beside astrologists, alchemists, seafarers and night workers like bakers or nightwatchmen, especially creative people: writers, actors, and painters, stand under the sign of the moon.

In *Dirty Wish*, the moon is responsible for the disruptions of the surface. Symbolically speaking, it takes the position of the creative power and thus the artist himself. On the real plane, it shapes the visual space. The moon, the artist, and its magmatic or painterly material prove to be accomplices.

Dave Bopp's paint material, lacquer, adds a clandestine layer of meaning to this complicity. Lacquers are among the oldest and most permanent pigment binders in human history. All the same, apart from tags and graffiti, they play but a marginal role in modern art. They are generally used in art, just as in industry, to apply protective layers to things like steel beams or car bodies to create smooth, shiny surfaces. The artist's signature style cannot be recognized. There are a few exceptions, such as the poured paintings by performer and artist Lynda Benglis or the lacquer skins of the Swiss conceptual artist André Tompkins, where supports, generally paper, absorb colorful streaks of lacquer on a water surface to reveal surreal structures.

Dave Bopp's works move in other dimensions. In terms of their production and reception aesthetic, they are close to the lacquer skins and pouring pictures. The flowing behavior of the lacquer, which is spilled or sprayed in the horizontal, on the floor or, in the smaller formats, on a table, is only controllable to a certain extent. Its processing, their streak-like transition moves between chance and control, impressively in the smaller formats such as *Gateway* (2024) where uses an elaborate marbling technique in several surfaces of paint.

The settling of the color fields is where the factor of control comes to bear in Bopp's visual production. In the large work *Intrusion* (2024) on the back wall of the main space, six clearly separate color fields are visible. Without transitions, sharp edges set limits. They isolate the brown-anthracite-colored surface on the left from the iridescent emerald green next to it and the surface read as sky in the upper middle. The artist achieves the striking opposition of color field and limit, aleatoricism and control by covering certain color fields with foils created using a computer and a plotter. In this way, he can construct the pictures layer for layer in a controlled fashion. He can define the outlines of a form precisely, but its inner structure only to a certain extent, by deciding to choose certain colors, whose behavior in regard to one another remains largely random.

In *Intrusion*, we are also confronted with unsettling things. While in geology the term "intrusion" is used to refer to when magma insinuates itself between solidified stone, in psychology the term refers to the triggering of traumatic experiences by certain stimuli. Both processes are referred to in Bopp's painting. The diagonal green surface at the center of the image stands both for magma and trauma. It towers like an immense boulder between the masses of paint on the right and left on a sandy path, that we unavoidably begin to take in our imagination. Above, the sharply defined circle sets a striking accent. Is it devoured by color information, chasms of color? Or does it intrude, threatening the concerned wanderer from between the rocks?

With this, painting gives us sovereignty. If we remain the beholding master of the house, we can choose one of the two possibilities. A liberating feeling, thanks to the artist.

Max Glauner, trans. Brian Currid