

Press Release

Franz Gertsch. Presence

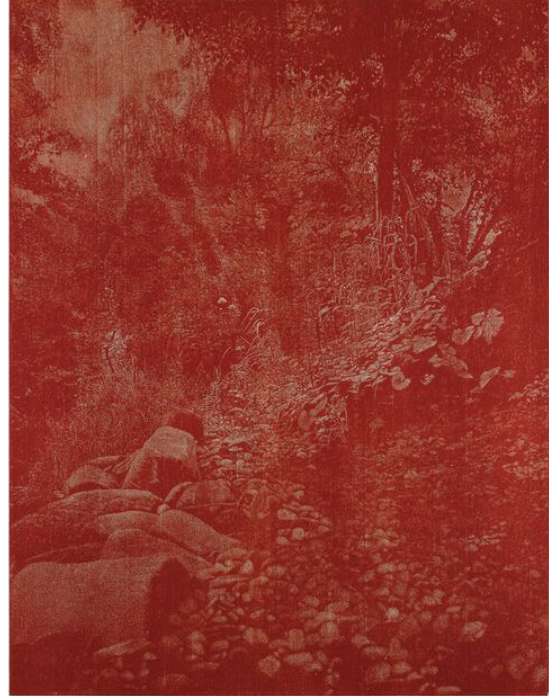
11 November 2025 – 31 January 2026

Hauser & Wirth New York, Wooster Street



New York...Hauser & Wirth is honored to present ‘Franz Gertsch. Presence,’ an exhibition devoted to the distinctive vision of late Swiss artist Franz Gertsch (1930 – 2022). Opening in November at the gallery’s Wooster Street location, this focused presentation brings together eight monumental works spanning Gertsch’s career, elucidating the ways in which he transformed photographic imagery into hyperrealist paintings and woodcuts. What appears at first glance to be a project of exacting replication emerges instead as a deeply investigative practice—one that enshrines the poetry of fugitive moments through a disciplined material language. Gertsch’s work stands as a testament to his relentless pursuit of a new way to represent reality by challenging the very boundaries of realism.

Curated by Dr. Tobia Bezzola, Director of the Museo d’arte della Svizzera italiana (MASI) in Lugano, ‘Franz Gertsch. Presence’ is the gallery’s first comprehensive presentation of the late artist’s work in New York, offering American audiences a rare opportunity to experience the full visual and emotional impact of his singular practice.



A highlight of the exhibition is a pair of large-scale canvases—‘Patti Smith III’ (1979) and ‘Patti Smith IV’ (1979)—from a series inspired by photographs Gertsch took during a live rock performance in Cologne, Germany. Painstakingly rendered by Gertsch’s own hand, every meticulous strand of Smith’s hair and subtle gesture coalesce into an image that feels alive and three dimensional, suspending the subject’s energy and charisma within the stillness of paint.

Gertsch’s exploration of landscape unfolds in the immersive triptych ‘Guadeloupe’ (2011 – 2013). Drawn from extensive photographic studies of the Caribbean forest, its dense foliage and shifting light verge on abstraction, dissolving documentary precision into a near-hallucinatory vision of nature. As with his human subjects, Gertsch approaches the landscape not merely as something to depict, but as a living presence to encounter and engage with. ‘Guadeloupe’ invites the viewer into a contemplative space where time seems to pause and invite reflection.

The works titled ‘Natascha IV’ (1987 – 88), ‘Rüschegg’ (1988 – 89) and ‘Schwarzwasser II’ (1993 – 94) exemplify Gertsch’s pioneering approach to woodcuts. Over the course of many years, he developed a personal approach to this centuries-old technique, carving raw wood with bespoke tools, mixing natural pigments and hand-printing onto delicate Japanese paper. The apparent contradiction at the heart of his method—and his quest to prove that a woodcut could capture the complexity of light and space—became the driving force behind some of the medium’s most profound reinventions. Gertsch himself remarked that, ‘There is truly nothing less suited to capturing light and three-dimensionality than a woodcut’—yet it was precisely this challenge that drove him to reimagine what the medium could achieve.



About the artist

Franz Gertsch (1930 – 2022) was a Swiss artist internationally renowned for his monumental photorealistic paintings and woodcuts. From the time of his international breakthrough in 1972 at documenta 5 in Kassel he created a wide range of paintings and graphic works, which gained acclaim for their precise, large-scale depictions of everyday life, meticulously based on photographs. His work explores the passage of time, perception and surface, blurring the line between photography and painting. In the 1980s, he developed a groundbreaking woodcut technique using hand-crafted tools and natural pigments, creating monumental, monochrome prints unlike any other in contemporary art. Gertsch represented Switzerland at the Venice Biennale in 1999, and his influence endures through the Museum Franz Gertsch in Burgdorf, Switzerland.

About Dr. Tobia Bezzola

Since 2018, Dr. Bezzola has served as Director of the Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana (MASI) in Lugano, guiding the institution through a phase of major renewal. During his tenure, MASI has realized around fifty exhibitions and undertaken a comprehensive restructuring of its organizational and curatorial framework, consolidating its position as one of Switzerland's leading art museums. Born and raised in Bern, he was familiar with Franz Gertsch and his work from childhood. A first collaboration took place in 2006 in the context of an exhibition on European Pop Art. Bezzola curated exhibitions of Gertsch's work for and with the artist at the Kunsthaus Zürich (2011), the Museum Folkwang (2015), and MASI Lugano (2019). From 2013 to 2023, he served as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Franz Gertsch Museum.



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Caption and courtesy information

All images:

Franz Gertsch

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Patti Smith IV

1979

Acrylic on unprimed cotton

285 x 420 cm / 112 1/4 x 165 3/8 in

Private Collection. Courtesy Estate of Franz Gertsch and Hauser & Wirth

Photo: Baptiste Janin

Natascha IV

1987-1988

Woodcut (3 plates) on Kumohadamashi Japanese paper

by Heizaburo Iwano

232.5 x 182 cm / 91 1/2 x 71 5/8 in

Courtesy Estate of Franz Gertsch and Hauser & Wirth

Photo: Dominique Uldry

Rüschegg

1988-1989

Woodcut on Kumohadamashi Japanese paper

by Heizaburo Iwano

234 x 181 cm / 92 1/8 x 71 1/4 in

Courtesy Estate of Franz Gertsch and Hauser & Wirth

Photo: Dominique Uldry

Guadeloupe (Triptych)

Bromelia, Maria, Soufrière

2011 – 2013

Tempera on unprimed cotton

Bromelia: 250 x 370 cm / 98 3/8 x 145 5/8 in

Maria: 250 x 380 cm / 98 3/8 x 149 5/8 in

Soufrière: 250 x 370 cm / 98 3/8 x 145 5/8 in

Courtesy Estate of Franz Gertsch and Hauser & Wirth

Photo: Dominique Uldry

Schwarzwasser II

1993-1994

Woodcut (3 plates) on Kumohadamashi Japanese paper

by Heizaburo Iwano

202 x 549 cm / 79 1/2 x 216 1/8 in

Courtesy Estate of Franz Gertsch and Hauser & Wirth

Photo: Dominique Uldry