

BERND RIBBECK

(project space)

March 21 – May 10, 2025

Opening: Thursday, March 20, 2025, 6 - 8 pm

11-13 rue des Arquebusiers, 75003 Paris

Galerie Peter Kilchmann is delighted to announce the very first solo exhibition of works by Bernd Ribbeck (born in 1974) in France, hosted in our Project Space in Paris. For this presentation, the artist has created works specifically tailored to the space, including an illusionistic wall installation and several small-scale paintings.

These pieces are intricately designed rhythmic and geometric sequences of forms and colors, which spread across the entire surface of the substrates and beyond, following an expansive all-over principle. Ribbeck employs a variety of techniques (acrylic, pigmented markers on MDF) and layers of color, sanding them down during the process to create translucent layers that evoke an enigmatic energetic interplay of elements, which seem to emerge and recede in an almost magical way. Despite their almost rigid compositions, his works transcend pure abstraction and veer into the realm of narrative, encouraging the viewer to delve into unexpected interpretive spaces shaped by the contrasting forces of compression and expansion. Despite the outward-tending 'melody,' the very small formats also possess a magnetic pull, drawing the viewer in like rare and complex pieces of jewelry, inviting a profound and intimate engagement through careful observation.

The motifs, which often recall house- and figure-like forms, are primarily inspired by an architectural site from the 1970s in Ivry-sur-Seine, a suburb of Paris. Ribbeck discovered the site during a residency in Paris in 2022. He was captivated by the interconnected and overlapping structure, which visually grows into a two-dimensional surface, blending the vertical and the horizontal in a way that resembles the hill cities of the south (a prime example being Matera). These complex, sculptural and repetitive structures support the social aspects of housing by giving residents more opportunities to move beyond the streets, meet their neighbours and interact with others, fostering a more open and democratic sense of community. The short circuit between the structure of geometric shapes and a social vision fascinated Ribbeck at this point and continues to inspire him in his latest creations.

Special insight gives the following text by art historian Marjolaine Lévy, describing the context of this body of work in detail:

At an exhibition curated by Mies van der Rohe at the Weissenhofsiedlung in Stuttgart in 1927, Bruno Taut, the leader of the secret society Die Gläserne Kette¹ and one of the guest architects, designed a pavilion with multicoloured external walls and ceiling. Naturally, this riot of colours attracted broad disapproval, in particular from the architect of the adjoining pavilion, who was none other than Mies himself. The colours were reflected excessively on the orthodox façade of the modernist's work, who expressed first his reservations and soon his anger. Taut responded to the attacks, saying: "If my project is not in accord with the others, that's a fairly good sign, it doesn't mean that the colours have been poorly used, simply that the neighbouring pavilions simply haven't been finished."²

Nearly one hundred years later, Bernd Ribbeck's small untitled paintings of the progression of a multicoloured geometric motif, representing a greatly simplified architectural feature flirting with abstraction and repeated right across the composition, seem to be a reiteration of that ancient squabble. However, it was neither Mies' rationalist designs, nor Taut's spiritualist utopias, that inspired Ribbeck's series, but a French Brutalist project, Les Étoiles, constructed in Ivry-sur-Seine in the suburbs of Paris.

¹ An essential reference for Bernd Ribbeck, Die Gläserne Kette was essentially based on correspondence between a number of architects, including Wilhelm Brückmann, Paul Gösch, Walter Gropius, Hermann Finsterlin, Jakobus Göttel, Paul Goesch, Wenzel Hablik, Carl Krayl, Hans Hansen, Wassili Luckhardt and Hans Scharoun, between November 1919 and December 1920. Their letters provided a veritable manifesto for a new form of architecture that advocated spirituality, romanticism, distortion of form, and introduced the use of coloured glass and ornamentation: a new architecture for a new man in harmony with nature and the cosmos. "The new environment created by the glass culture will transform man", proclaimed Paul Scheerbar, a German writer, who was an associate of Taut and author of the prophetic Glasarchitektur (1914).

² Quoted in Karin Kirtsch, The Weissenhofsiedlung: Experimental Housing Built for the Deutscher Werkbund, Stuttgart, 1927 (New York: Rizzoli, 1989).

Designed by the architects Renée Gailhoustet and Jean Renaudie, this set of buildings was built between 1969 and 1975, and owes its name to the sharply pointed triangular segments of raw concrete that overhang the architectural structure and are suggestive of some of Taut's drawings published in his extravagant City Crown project (1919). The monumental Brutalist lines were first transcribed by the artist in sketches on small sheets of Bristol paper, his preferred medium for his creative meanderings.

*The lattice that runs through the cardboard rectangle facilitates the elaboration of the composition, with its iterative geometric pattern. Ribbeck's sketch of the grey architecture was given more depth and colour when he superimposed MDF panels coated with several layers of differently coloured acrylic paint to resemble the tiered structure of the buildings in Ivry, then redrew the patterns in ballpoint pen, and then in marker pen, leaving the traces left by the biro on the surface of the painting. By creating a repetitive ornamental motif based on images of late Brutalist architecture, Bernd Ribbeck performs a paradoxical reversal: he transmits something of the history of modernism from what modernism banished. By reconciling these historical enemies – modernism and ornament – Ribbeck rekindles the ambivalence that is the very essence of modernism. Jacques Rancière theorised it in *Aisthesis*³: modernism is riven with the contradiction between the autonomy of art and its suppression, between art separated from life and art fully engaged with life, to the point of becoming merged with it. Ribbeck's series of paintings with motifs stemming from Brutalist architecture superlatively embodies this contradiction between modernism's two structural components.*

From the concrete geometry of Les Étoiles in Ivry-sur-Seine to the geometry of the paintings by Fra Angelico, visitors are asked to take only one step at the heart of the exhibition. Close to the paintings described, a paper cut-out is spread across the entire surface of a wall, as though to celebrate the ornamental scheme yet more. Once again, the wall is covered with architecture, created in isometric perspective, with equal importance given to the three dimensions of space. Here, using grey-painted and black paper with cut-outs, mounted on a grey painted wall Ribbeck has created the motif of an arch inspired by the architectural frames used by Italian Renaissance artists to define the field of the image. It is repeated ad infinitum, in a remarkable relationship between spatial illusionism and decorative flatness. The same pattern is given a new existence, though in more modest format, in the five brightly coloured paintings that face the mural.

[Ribbecks] pyramidal, circular or parallelepipedal geometric shapes are repeated and systematised until they become pure motifs at the heart of the lattice. Here, architecture is no longer treated as an object of function but as ornament. What could be more impudent than to transform modernist functionalism into an ornamental pattern? In a perfect hybridisation, Ribbeck's drawings establish a subtle interplay between the two contrasting aesthetics, the better to affirm that ornamentation is not a crime.

*While the theosophical works of Hilma af Klint and Emma Kunz have often been referenced in connection with Bernd Ribbeck's production, it would be interesting to consider his work in the light of Piranesi's *Imaginary Prisons*, or the paintings of the *Pattern & Decoration* group.⁴ In Ribbeck's works, it is not the crystal that – like in J.G. Ballard's novel *The Crystal World* (1966) – multiplies indefinitely, but the architectures in their desire to build *A New City Crown*.*

Bernd Ribbeck lives and works in Berlin. His works have been shown in numerous international exhibitions and are represented in several institutional collections such as Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich; Sammlung de Belvedere / 21er Haus, Vienna; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich; Kunstpalast Düsseldorf or the Wilhelm-Hack Museum Ludwigshafen. His solo exhibitions at Haus Konstruktiv in Zurich and Wilhelm-Hack Museum Ludwigshafen were accompanied by a comprehensive publication.

³ Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis. Scènes du régime esthétique de l'art*, chap. "L'art décoratif comme art social : le temple, la maison, l'usine" (Paris: Galilée, 2011), pp. 161-83.

⁴ At the start of the 1970s, under the name *Pattern & Decoration*, a number of American artists, among whom Richard Kalina, Joyce Kozloff, Robert Kushner, George Woodman and Joe Zucker, rejected the precepts of formalist abstraction, minimalism and conceptual art, and instead celebrated non-Western ornamentation, decoration, craftsmanship and patterns.