

liste art fair basel | lukas heerich
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A Poetry of Disaster

by Pierre-Alexandre Mateos and Charles Teyssou

Weaving together collective history and personal narrative, Lukas Heerich creates forms that are both abrasive and vulnerable. Themes of protection, isolation, and power are staged in environments marked by an intensified material presence. At once agoraphobic and claustrophobic, his works shape psychological spaces – repositories of neurosis, phobia, and contemporary anxiety. In collaboration with curators Pierre-Alexandre Mateos and Charles Teyssou, Heerich explores a poetry of disaster, where rawness collides with intoxicating sensuality.

For the max goelitz booth, Heerich presents a spiraling fragment, encircled by a pink environment composed of “infungible” paintings. The sculpture – a kind of fallen tower, architectural ruin, skeletal or encrypted signal – and its surroundings together channel the neuroses of the metropolis: sensory overload, hyperesthesia, fragmentation, and absence. But beyond this tension lies a subtle attentiveness to space – a sensitivity that is deeply relational. Heerich doesn't just build environments; he composes conditions of encounter, where the architecture outside us meets the architecture within.

The work proposes a dual motion: how space shapes the forms inside us, and how those inner forms – fears, thresholds, affective traces – manifest spatially in return. It invites the viewer not to contemplate from a distance, but to enter, circulate, feel. The booth becomes a relational field, charged with subtle resonances and quiet demands.

The fallen tower sings a lullaby inspired by *The Night of the Hunter*, Charles Laughton's 1955 cinematic fever dream. In one of its most haunting scenes, two orphaned children drift down the Ohio River, having escaped the violent contradictions of love and hate embodied by their stepfather. Night falls. The river is calm, bathed in moonlight. John sleeps, while Pearl softly sings to her doll.

The movie primarily explores greed, set against the backdrop of the Great Depression, where every gesture feels suspended in a tense, fragile temporality. The lullaby, featuring artist Precious Oyokomon, holds the listener in a liminal state – a hazy space between waking and sleeping, between consciousness and surrender. It conjures the distant threat of the horizon, that ever-receding line where dreams offer both refuge and escape. Here, dreaming is as much about recovery as it is about denial – a bittersweet drift into evasion. Echoing the lullaby from *The Night of the Hunter*, with its almost childlike, soothingly unsettling sing-song quality, this piece embodies a deep ambivalence: a melody of containment, both enveloping and disquieting, that restrains more than it releases.

Drawing on theorists such as Georg Simmel and Anthony Vidler, Heerich explores warped, unstable architectures – psychic terrains of fear, estrangement, and disorientation. He moves fluidly between mirages, traps, and surfaces, crafting not just an installation but a constellation of tensions, at once captivating, intimately relational, and emotionally charged.

The pink setting – this site-specific “pink-out” – is created with Phos-Chek, a tinted flame retardant used by airborne firefighting teams to control wildfires. In nature, its phosphate- and sulfate-heavy compounds reduce the flammability of cellulose and later serve as fertilizer.

max goelitz

Here, in a sterile concrete context, its function is suspended, its scent contained. The gesture multiplies side effects while nullifying intent – a paradoxical act that mirrors the unstable logic of the environments it inhabits.

The booth has a smell – faintly chemical, distinctly unpleasant. This is no coincidence. Georg Simmel identified hyperesthesia as a heightened sensitivity to stimuli – objects, people, environments – which, when overwhelming or disagreeable, requires distance. The scent becomes a sensorial trigger, a subtle mechanism of repulsion that enacts the anxieties the work investigates. Yet within this discomfort lies an unexpected counterpoint.

Indeed, Heerich's work holds a remarkable tension between stress and solace. The contrast between the siren's gothic silhouette and the soft pink wall is deliberately dissonant. One follows the sculptural lineage of Anthony Pevsner or Nicolas Schöffer, while the other recalls the immersive gestures of Katharina Grosse or Pierre Huyghe. Here, pink is corrosive – a détournement of surface – but also soothing, like a balm spread across the harshness of the metal structure. It cools the sculpture – chromatically, symbolically, emotionally. Like a painkiller, the art becomes a calming force, diffusing the tension it generates, softening the brutality of the built environment.

Heerich's installations soothe through form – sculptural, spatial, compositional, painterly. They slow us down. They absorb the noise. They create a shelter within intensity. The painting becomes a warning; the sculpture, a fortress of subversion. These environments – composed of sound systems, fluids, objects, architecture – articulate a broader language of paranoia, affect, and relief.

He draws invisible threads between sound, sculpture, and architecture to construct immersive fields that are both immediate and unfathomable – spaces where perception becomes porous, disrupted, and gently reconfigured. The experience is sensory, but also meditative. It connects. It consoles. It holds us.

Should we then believe that the forms, spaces, and beings that hold us most in his work are precisely those that guard their secrets – the ones that best conceal the invisible threads of our lives, while offering the strange comfort of their presence?

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