

PETER BLUM

For Immediate Release:

Helmut Federle

Scratching Away at the Surface

October 29, 2009 – January 9, 2010

Peter Blum is pleased to announce the exhibition **Helmut Federle: *Scratching Away at the Surface***, opening on October 29th at 99 Wooster Street, New York. There will be an opening reception on Thursday, October 29th, from 6 to 8 p.m. This is Helmut Federle's fourth exhibition with the gallery.

Scratching Away at the Surface brings together five paintings that are part of a cycle of nine works that Helmut Federle produced between January and March 2009. These small-scale works—each measuring 23 5/8 x 19 5/8 inches (60 x 50cm)—present the first series since 2005, and mark a new direction in Federle's oeuvre. Unlike his paintings to date, the works in this exhibition have a gravitational center that is akin to a geometrically fractured spiral that resembles a tunnel. A diffused light—almost an inner light—illuminates the structure from within. The thin layers of paint, applied in a low level of saturation, create a type of transparency that allows the earlier stages of the painting to shine through. Instead of clear shapes and well-demarcated areas, these new paintings provide penetration and diffusion.

For Federle, a painting is not a self-contained field but instead points to something beyond itself. The equilibrium of the composition is precarious, or as the German art historian Gottfried Boehm states: "The viewer never feels that it has been permanently established, instead it always seems to be engaged in a circuitous search for itself." This searching for itself—or oneself—is a guiding principle in Federle's work. In fact, the works are the results of an internal unrest and a metaphysical longing. In their strong spiritual orientation, these paintings can be read in the tradition of Nordic Existentialism.

Born in 1944 in Switzerland, Federle now lives and works in Austria and Italy. In 1985 the Museum of Contemporary Art, Basel, Switzerland exhibited an extensive survey of the paintings and drawings of Federle. In 1986 The Los Angeles County Museum of Art included Federle in its thematic review exhibition entitled *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*. In 1989 Federle had his first major one-person exhibition in France at the Musée de Grenoble. This was followed in 1992 by a solo exhibit at the Kunsthalle Zürich (toured to the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden and the Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany) and in 1995 at the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris, France. This was followed by a retrospective at the Kunstmuseum Bonn, Germany, in 1995. In 1997 Federle's work represented the official Swiss contribution to the 1997 Venice Biennial. A major exhibition followed at the IVAM Centro Julio González, Valencia, Spain in 1998 and in 1999-2000 at the Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria as well as at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes in 2002.

From 1999–2007 Federle was Professor at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Germany. Most recently Federle received the prestigious Prix Aurélie-Nemours in Paris, France in 2009.

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