

Dirk Rathke – New Horizons
November 28, 2025 – January 24, 2026

The exhibition title is bold and self-assured—as well as risky.

Dirk Rathke's painting to date has long been known as a signature work because it is both color and form. Berlin philosopher Dirk Koppelberg called this group of works *Curved Canvas* in the early 2000s. The term *Shaped Canvas*, which would also be appropriate, is occupied by his famous colleague Frank Stella. The artist himself calls them *Image Objects*, painting that extends into space.

The early works, some of which are quite large in size, are reduced to simple shapes (squares, rectangles, and tall rectangles) that sometimes protrude deep into the space at the corners, making them unmistakably sculptural. A beautiful example can be found in the collection of the National Gallery.

Over the years, the forms have become more complex, turning into polygons, and the edges of the images can sometimes be wavy. The artist has also expanded his color palette, adding pastel shades as well as gold and silver tones. The canvases, which he calls *Verspannungen* (Tensionings), could and can consist of two canvases screwed together, one edge of which defines a diagonal line of the overall image and, depending on the height and depth of the corners of the frame work, dynamically enhances the overall effect. Things become more complex with the images that Rathke calls *viergeteilt* (four-partite).

Added to this in 2016 was the *Faltungen* (Folds) series, which unfolds monochrome lacquered metal plates in diverse and idiosyncratic constellations and lifts them into space. The Curves wall objects, curved round rods that sometimes also feature a monochrome finish, form a separate series of works.

The new exhibition shows works from the last two years that clearly define a paradigm shift. Whereas the canvases were previously monochrome, even though the painter Dirk Rathke applied numerous layers of paint on top of each other to achieve the monochrome color impression, sometimes also incorporating structures through his brushwork, the monochrome is now confidently broken up, the surfaces divided into geometric color fields that form a whole. Various artistic strategies can be discerned here.

On the one hand, especially in the framed 40 x 30 cm formats, the canvas is broken up into diagonally arranged rectangular areas of different colors. The tension in the image is created by the way in which the square is divided into areas of color and the way in which these areas of color are arranged, interacting with each other in a harmonious or disharmonious way. However, the canvas surface can also be divided into acute-angled shapes (mostly triangles) or irregular quadrangles or polygons, so that the composition

alone evokes a sense of dynamism and tension.

Then there are the canvases—classic Rathke—which, with their stretcher frames rising and falling within the space, form the basis for breaking up the otherwise monochrome surface into different colored fields that assert themselves with and against the three-dimensional form, emphasizing or even counteracting it.

A special novelty is the creation of new canvas shapes that reflect the staggered juxtaposition of irregular quadrangles, which are also monochrome color fields, in the frame silhouette, turning the square into a “twelve,” for example, because it represents the outer edges of the four color fields.

A rather minimalist variant of a new series of works consists solely of a canvas primed with transparent rabbit glue, which becomes a negative space for the geometric form created by the monochrome (or so it seems) application of paint, which is pulled over the front edge of the canvas to the rear edge on the side. The canvas color thus becomes the second (or third) color of the artwork. What is astonishing is the resulting complexity, which follows a rule that is actually quite simple: the corners (and thus the edges of the image) are pulled into the space at different depths over a rectangular floor plan. The canvas stretched over it becomes the image carrier of a monochromatically painted geometric shape that is diagonally or angularly offset and has its corner points at the rear edge of the stretcher frame. This formula evokes a complex appearance that changes radically from one viewpoint to another and whose basic forms must first be grasped, traced with the eyes, so to speak, in order to be understood.

And when Dirk Rathke suddenly enters the room by painting familiar objects, in this case one or more chairs—Arne Jacobsen's classic *Series 7*—whose curved seat and backrest are clearly transformed into a canvas by the application of oil paint, becoming art and no longer defined as functional objects, he points out a paradox with a wink: the chair, which helps us to view the artwork with particular attention, rejects its assigned definition and becomes art itself. An ensemble of three entitled *Wer hat Angst vor Rot, Gelb und Blau* (Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue) playfully alludes to Barnett Newman's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue*, counteracting its original intention and thus inviting discourse on modern art history.

Dirk Rathke lives up to the confident exhibition title *New Horizons* with a fireworks display of new, previously unseen works. And yet he remains true to himself.

Semjon H. N. Semjon, November 2025

At the same time, new works by Nikola Richard from the series *Dots in the Clouds* are on display at KioskShop berlin (KSb), and in the rear exhibition rooms, XXX-20-COLLECTIVE, works by gallery and guest artists, are presented in a cabinet display.