

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



New exhibition celebrates spray paint, but without the street art

Marc Forster-Pert



Another piece by Oehlen on the left is joined by works featuring Joseph Logan, Stephen Prina and Wade Guyton. The paintings on the far right made use of two entire cans of spray painted focused on one area of the composition.

(CNN) — It's spray paint, but not as you know it.

While street art may have risen in popularity, the works on display at “Sprayed” -- a new exhibition which just opened at London's Gagosian Gallery -- are the polar opposite and haven't been celebrated in the same way. Until now.

Don't expect to see Banksy: instead, spray-painted works on canvas, walls, old car parts and just about anything else are on display here.

The exhibition features some big names, including Andy Warhol, Paul Klee, Anish Kapoor and Jeff Koons.

But for curators Jona Lueddeckins and Greg Berger, it's about championing some of the lesser known artists that have also produced great work.

“There's a David Smith, John Chamberlain, Albert Oehlen and everyone knows them but it doesn't stop there,” Lueddeckins told CNN.

“There are artists that did amazing spray work but for one reason or other aren’t known in the broader public — there are lots of discoveries to make, even for people who know a lot about art.”

The show mixes historical examples of the use of spray — as far back as Paul Klee, who is said to have used a sieve to create a spray effect in 1929 — with contemporary pieces by artists such as David Ostrowski, who instead of using an aerosol can on a building wall, have taken inspiration from early experiments and developed their own style.

The Swiss curators first started developing the show at the start of the year.

Anish Kapoor called a week before opening offering a piece and many museums have also donated works.

“There have been exhibitions focusing on various mediums — tapestries, even crayons — but spray painting has never been done before,” Lueddeckins said.

“It’s maybe the reason why all of the artists were so excited to participate.”

Berger added: “We were surprised at how enthusiastic not just the younger artists were but also the well-established older artists and their estates.

“We got asked by a few artists if they could be in the show who we didn’t think of in [a spray paint] context — it’s been full of surprises along the way.”

A long history

The use of spray can be dated back to cave painters who blew pigment through a hollow bone, using their hands as a stencil.

The aerosol can itself was invented in 1949 and within a few years, artists were using spray to experiment with a medium that didn’t have any connection to art in the past -- it was entirely new and it gave them freedom.

Lueddeckins believes it was the lack of control that caught the imagination of artists like David Smith and John Latham, who were among the first to produce aerosol-painted series.

He explained: “It was a whole new way of thinking. The artist doesn’t touch the artwork and they weren’t able to influence it to the end -- the early artists were very interested in the uncertainty; in not being in control of everything.”

You may wander round the exhibition and forget it’s a show about spray, such is the varied nature of the works on display -- from spray painted steel sculptures to urinations on metal and even art that comes with instructions on how to recreate it yourself, like Lawrence Weiner’s “Two Minutes of Spray”.

What’s for sure, neither Berger nor Lueddeckins believe this will be the last we’ll see spray in this way. “It’s going to keep on going for sure,” they said. “In the same way photography has evolved, you will see the same with spray -- it’s just another medium.”