

# JASON MARTIN

## Vertex

**Galleria Christian Stein**  
Corso Monforte 23, Milano

March 4 – May 23, 2026

The Galleria Christian Stein is ushering in the sixtieth year of its activity (1966–2026) by presenting *Vertex*, the second solo exhibition in the gallery by Jason Martin (Jersey, Great Britain, 1970), a visual artist who lives and works between London and the Alentejo region of Portugal.

The exhibition turns around a group of six imposing works painted in oil on aluminum and characterized by vibrant patterns of color, created especially for the occasion. Alongside these there are two mixed media works, on aluminum and on velvet, with almost sculptural surfaces. Martin's aesthetic is distinguished by a palette of intense and extraordinarily brilliant hues, in perfect harmony with the light filling the spaces of the gallery facing onto the park of Palazzo Cicogna. The paintings are highly evocative not only for their distinctive coloring, but also for their titles, which conjure up a mythological or spiritual dimension—*Alethia*, *Tantra*, *Virgo*—and reflect the cosmological sphere referred to by the exhibition's title, *Vertex*.

### **The Journey Continues**

by Sergio Risaliti

We visited Jason Martin's first solo exhibition at the Galleria Christian Stein in 2023. Now the British artist has returned to Corso Monforte for a presentation of his new works and this has stirred two different feelings in me. The first has to do with our need for confirmation, the second with the pleasure of surprise and wonder. Let me explain. It's something we've all known for a long time: in art we expect to find a certain consistency. We need to be able to identify the way artists work, their technique, their aesthetic principles, what was once known as style. In other words the strategy with which a particular artist is making a name for him or herself in the world, that artist's own and unmistakable personality, something original and unique. Style, there's no point in denying it, assigns an artist a special place in the theater of art, a place that cannot be transferred to anyone else. And Jason Martin reassures us. His creative evolution follows a linear course, advances along a straight track, like a golden thread that doesn't lose its way in unnecessary deviations or sudden changes of direction, but has decided to insist and resist on that path because the journey embarked on, and defended with tenacity and fidelity, has not reached its end. It is this act of volition that convinces us of the value of an artistic proposal. And then this stylistic persistence persuades us of something else. Of a sort of predestination, a coherence at work from the outset, or by extension, even before it. In a world in which few things last, where even affections and loves are swiftly put aside to make room for new emotions, this stubborn dedication—fidelity imbued with renewed passion—tells us something more about what art is, about the moral force of the artist. But that's not all. It is a key to the most intimate and profound sense of a practice that cedes nothing to fashions, to the pressures of the market, that does not vacillate and does not betray our expectations. The occasional turns to the lasting, and so we are more inclined to bet on that artistic career. Jason Martin's works have these qualities and they are the values that make them significant to say the least, if not necessary. One of his works is immediately recognizable even in the chaotic setting of an art fair, when we are bombarded by a multitude of artistic proposals that are hard to tell apart, some reduced to objects of

design, to mere embellishments, decorations for the drawing rooms of the upper middle class. His paintings, including the ones that are being presented to us today in the elegant and well-lit space of the Galleria Stein, meet this desire of mine for coherence with generosity and resolution.

But there is something else we know. In any form of fidelity, when a foundation of passion persists, when that is to say the consequences of the first fatal encounter do not fade, something original also happens. There can still be many surprises. It is possible to delve deeper, to insist on unexpressed potentialities. Jason Martin is aware of this, is convinced of it and lets himself be surprised in every new work by that hidden treasure of potentiality. Each time it is like a new beginning. He is the first to be surprised by what the mine still has to offer. There is much of the mystery of love in the creative act of the painter. That inexhaustible ability to keep the promises of the first meeting alive and fruitful, to surprise and to nurture unexpressed potentialities. That Martin's painting is an act of love is evident from the photograph which has been used to announce the new exhibition. The artist standing in front of his work, turned slightly away from it, his hand reaching out to touch the surface of the painting. Like a pair of lovers holding hands, in this case long-time lovers. But there is more. That hand, extended toward the painting, looks to me like a hand stroking the fur of an animal or running through the plants in a field. A love affair with the mysterious nature of painting. Of that form of life born out of the artist's encounter with the material, the color, the intrinsic light, the geometric forms inherent in the fundamental structure of creation, in which matter-light-time-space are all one and are generated and regenerated like waves of the sea.

This is what happens in front of a new series of works by Jason Martin. Not only are we reassured about the uniqueness of his style. We have other sensations that, far from contradicting it, add value to his work. That do not take anything away, do not weaken his work, the way it has of repeating itself with surprising variations on the canon. The sensation of which I'm speaking, or rather the emotion, stems from that sense of wonder stirred by each of his works. A mixture of delight and awe roused by the forms generated by the paint, by the vibrations on the surface, by the interplay of density and variable luminescence. If I were to venture a comparison it would be to Bach and his variations. Listening to them you seem to recognize a common root to all the arias and at the same time a proliferation of melodies and tonalities, ever shifting characters.

In the past artists generally demonstrated their stylistic coherence within a mutable landscape of commissions, each of which required an effort of imagination with respect to the required iconography. When we examine a work from the 16th or 17th century in the absence of documents, we rely on recurrent formal characteristics and are not distracted by the subject, unless it is part of a series. It suffices to think of Caravaggio's many different Mary Magdalens or Artemisia Gentileschi's Judiths. Most modern artists have been left bereft of clients and iconographic repertoires. And the variations are made within a language organized according to a basic set of rules laid down a priori by the artist. In the case of abstractionists this is even more evident. Mondrian's paintings, for example, are regular and almost identical: horizontal and vertical stripes, checkerboard patterns, squares and not much else. All that changes are the chromatic relations and their formal weights. There are great masters who have made eclecticism and inconsistency their strength. Foremost among them, of course, Picasso. There are others, instead, who never deviated from their golden thread, from their style. Mondrian is a perfect example.

So let us go back to the works of Jason Martin. Today his pictures are still realized by laying on thick coats of largely monochrome paint. Their surfaces, however, are made vibrant by incisions or grooves, generating fluid landscapes and layers of formless thicknesses of material, coagulated at different points. Imagine a field of ripe wheat. At every moment of the day that field changes shape and color because of the wind sweeping across the surface of those ears. The intensity of the color,

the subtle play of shadows, of light and dark, of the shiny and the opaque alter too. Each of Jason Martin's works plays around with our perception in the same way. It is alive with changes on the surface that never seem definitive. There is life in that paint. Every work is a new discovery, concrete proof that the golden vein is not exhausted and that in his case there are still many roads to explore. The main impulse to put off bringing a process, or a series, to an end stems from his unfulfilled search for something even more novel and different from his earlier works, while remaining within a basic canon. In this new exhibition too the endless desire to broaden the horizons of the language of abstraction prevails, driving him to go beyond any previous achievement, accepting the possibility of failing and falling if it means being able to surprise us with unexpected and convincing variations on his painting.

We go on looking. Viewed from a distance each of his pictures appears to have a shiny or velvety surface, furrowed by more or less subtle streaks or ripples. We have the impression they are just superficial effects. Approaching the work, however, we find that surface has a texture, that the paint with which the image is made has an evident thickness. So thick and dense indeed that it makes the paintings look very like sculptures. To be accurate we ought to speak of high-reliefs. The paint spills over the edge of the picture, looking as if it is going to slide down to the ground. You have the sensation that the whole surface can still move and alter its appearance. We're not able to settle on a definitive form, even when the image seems to be supported by an underlying geometric structure. The paint is never flat, smooth like an inert and opaque surface. That surface is never polished, and although his works are in fact abstract, that's not the end of the story. There is always something that disturbs the composure, the slickness and uniformity, something that disrupts the rigid and reassuring tactics of pure formalism. As if the nature of painting were the realm of the untamable and its denizens rebelled with all their energy against any rational scheme, against any conceptual cage. What we have here instead are amorphous surfaces structured on geometric bases, decidedly agitated, disturbed, even rippling, and in many cases the painting looks like a piece of carded fabric or a plot of land churned up by a deeper and more intense force or current coming from below and from outside. The interdependence of action and material generates an image of a nonfigurative kind, that finds expression through a formless language, in an eloquent stratification of prearranged and random gestures, of control and spontaneity. An image that is finished and at the same time dynamic, almost in the process of evolving and changing. The painting is always proof that becoming can defeat stasis and that the practice of art is always a guarantee of freedom with respect to a constrictive and repetitive reality.

One more thing. In these most recent paintings, Martin has given each work a title that springs from the inexhaustible fount of classical mythology and spiritual terminology: *Alethia*, *Tantra*, *Virgo*, *Centauri*—and they reflect the cosmological sphere referred to by the title of the exhibition, *Vertex*. As if to indicate a different horizon for our gaze, another place on which to focus our imagination. Those forms—that light, that mutable, shifting way of being and appearing—transcend the earthly dimension. Or rather, they transcend the self-referential sphere of minimalist vocabulary and abstract analysis. In today's world there is a need for us to emerge from ourselves and from the bleak universe of the social networks, with their anxieties and limited aspirations. Those titles resonate with a knowledge that has sought alternative ways to positivism in order to perceive and experience higher realities, ones that are less ephemeral, longer lasting. The materiality of the painting is not the thing in itself, it is spiritual substance. A bit like our flesh, our corporeality. There is a great deal of Renaissance humanism in this conception of painting.

These marks and folds, lines and filaments of different size or direction, give rise in many cases to images rich in temperament and personality that differ greatly from the colder and more inexpressive ones of a certain abstract or minimalist language. The heart, the corporeality, that mixture of impulse

and instinct, play a decisive role in this sense: “In my works, color is essentially structure and not decoration, the material becomes visceral, erotic, experimental,” says Martin. It is also important to a correct interpretation of these paintings to know that Jason Martin disrupts his monochromatic fields of color with what are genuine rituals, performed in front of the aluminum supports hung on the walls. Sometimes he even launches himself at the work, caressing it and sliding over it, reducing to a minimum the distance between his body, his unconscious and the surface of the painting. The paint is transformed into surface with gestures that modify the skin of the picture and create a series of geometric configurations that tend in turn to change the nature of the work into something resembling a sculpted object or natural organism. And the greatest gift that chance and repetition have to make us are once again these works that, along with the ones that preceded them, demonstrate the validity of a continual research that he has been carrying out tenaciously to expand a personalized vocabulary over the years. And this, believe me, is no small feat.

### **Short Biography**

Jason Martin (Jersey, Great Britain, 1970) lives and works between London and the Portuguese region of Alentejo. He rose to international prominence with “Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection” (London, 1997). He has since exhibited in major museums, including CAC Málaga and Es Baluard in Palma (2008), the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice (2009), the Fine Art Society in London (2010) and SCHAUWERK in Sindelfingen (2017). He has received significant recognition at events such as the Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art (1999) and the European Biennial of the Visual Arts of La Spezia (2000). His work has also been presented in major international exhibition projects, including “London Calling. British Art Today. From David Hockney to Idris Khan” (Fundación Bancaja, Valencia, 2021) and are included in numerous prestigious museum collections worldwide.

**Galleria Christian Stein | Corso Monforte 23 Milano**

From Monday to Friday: 10am – 7pm | Saturday: 10am – 1pm / 3 – 7pm

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