

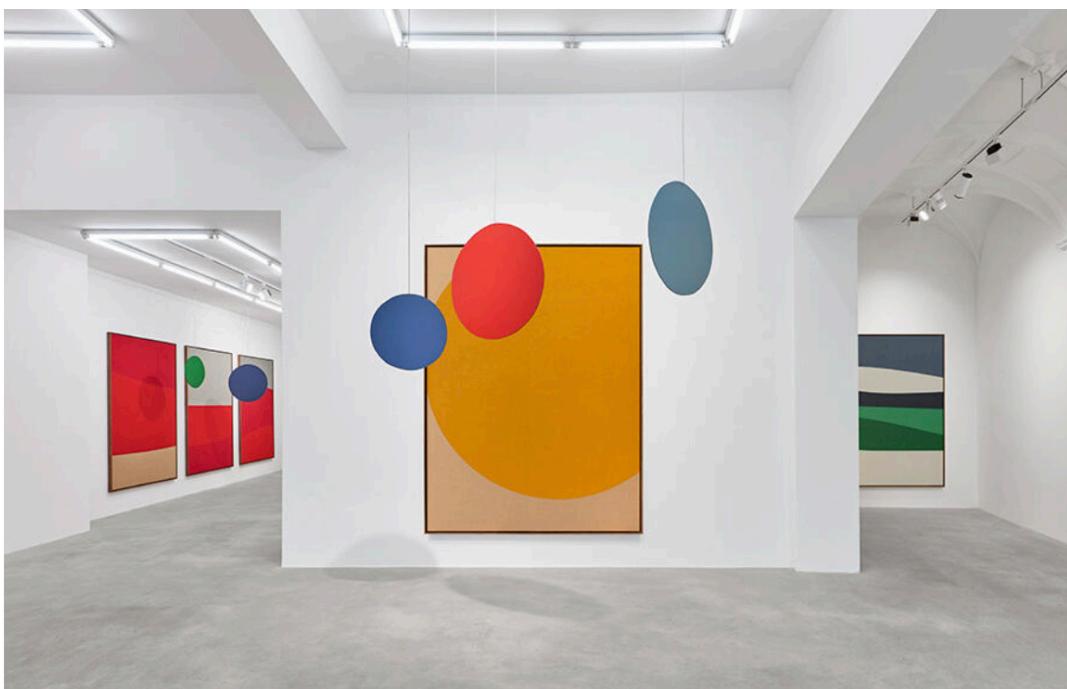
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FRIEZE

Antonio Ballester Moreno's Landscapes Bound the Expanse

At Tanya Leighton, Berlin, the painter's geometric abstractions suggest a dispersed staging of the natural

BY ARI NÍELSSON IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS | 08 AUG 24



Antonio Ballester Moreno, 'THE MOUNTAIN, THE SKY, THE WIND, THE SKY', installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Tanya Leighton, Berlin and Los Angeles; Photograph: Gunter Lepkowski

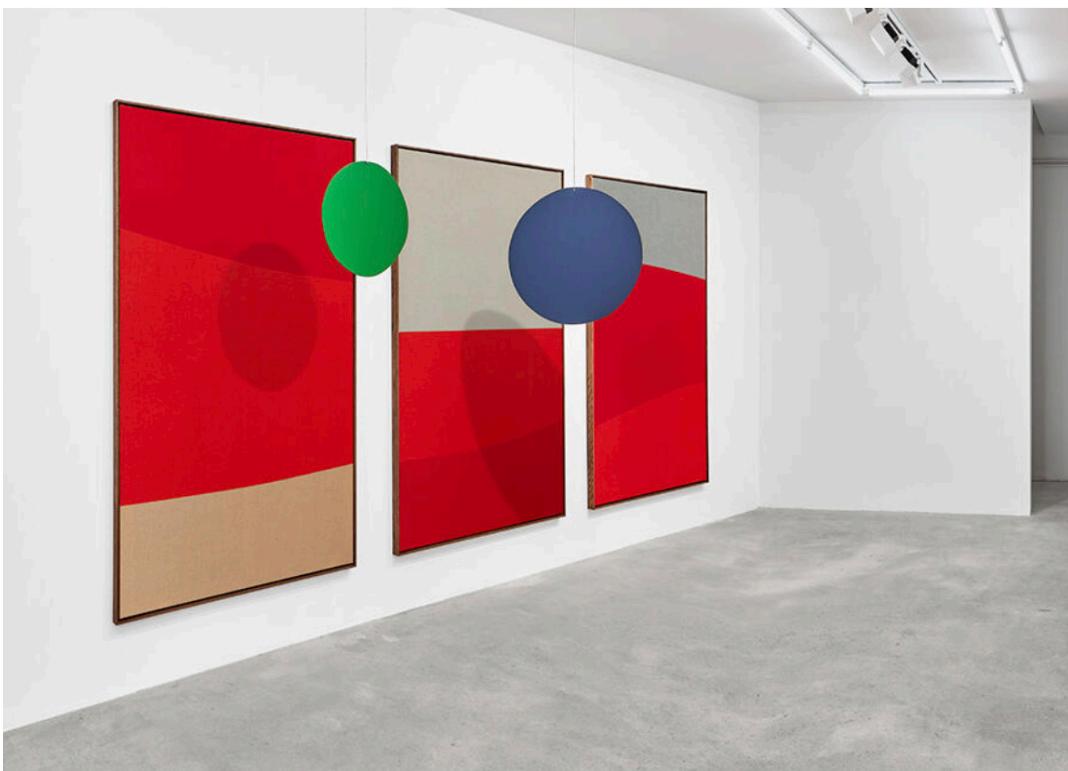
'Our most fundamental relation to the gigantic is articulated in our relation to landscape,' Susan Stewart writes in *On Longing* (1993), going on to note that the very qualities that define this relation – that we are 'enveloped by the gigantic, surrounded by it, enclosed within its shadow' – also allow us to know it 'only partially'. And isn't that the rub? Despite not being labelled landscapes *per se*, the paintings and sculptures that make up Antonio Ballester Moreno's latest exhibition at Tanya Leighton, 'THE MOUNTAIN, THE SKY, THE WIND, THE SKY', fall within the landscape tradition in as much as they constitute an attempt to bound the expanse.

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Kurfürstenstraße 156, 10785 Berlin
+49 (0)30 21 972 220, info@tanyaleighton.com, www.tanyaleighton.com

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On entering the space, the viewer is faced with a golden spheroid, titled simply *Yellow* (all works 2024). As if subject to some kind of gravity, its outline isn't fully contained within the frame. Handled with rigour, the paint is more dye than daub; it doesn't cover so much as sink into the weave of the unprimed jute support, without ever bursting the banks of its own geometry. Flanked by another eight, roughly person-sized canvases composed of precisely applied, horizontal bands of colour – russet hues to the left, cool alpine shades to the right – *Yellow*'s central, vaguely solar position among these linear vistas suggests a dispersed staging of the natural, in spite of individual forms being abstracted beyond easy identification.



Antonio Ballester Moreno, 'THE MOUNTAIN, THE SKY, THE WIND, THE SKY', installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Tanya Leighton, Berlin and Los Angeles; Photograph: Gunter Lepkowski

A clutch of colourful metal discs is suspended from the gallery ceiling like a scattered mobile (e.g. *Red*, *Blue* and *Green*). Here and there, they bisect *Yellow*'s

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perimeter or cast gradating shadows across the otherwise uniform colourfields of an adjacent triplet, *Red*, *Red White* and *Red Grey*. Two painted metal assemblages, one of which is also titled *Yellow*, are comprised of discs intersected by rectangular pieces of sheet at 90-degree angles, and stand propped up on thin, untreated iron frames. These sculptures, as well as the hanging discs were, I'm told, initially patterned in cardboard, just as the paintings were first designed in reams of coloured paper. There's a wobble to the line that's more evident in the metal works, viewed in the round, than in similar shapes transposed to canvas in flat acrylic. Flimsy as their elements may seem, these sculptures do a lot to concretize the spatial relationship between the hanging discs and the canvases they cut through as an intentional feature rather than a quirk of installation.



Antonio Ballester Moreno, 'THE MOUNTAIN, THE SKY, THE WIND, THE SKY', installation view. Courtesy: the artist and Tanya Leighton, Berlin and Los Angeles; Photograph: Gunter Lepkowski

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Per the press release, Ballester Moreno's point of departure is the emergence of the painted landscape as more than just a background to human action. There isn't a line in any of the horizontal compositions that doesn't continue, unbroken, across the width of the canvas, reading more like thumbnails of a wider horizon than a border parcelling land for ownership. But if the sweep of these paintings imparts a sense of vastness, it also carries with it a certain lack of friction that, along with the radical simplification of forms, prompts associations with the sort of graphic art primarily intended to act as interior decor. It feels at once an unfair judgement and an inevitable one, but the ease with which geometric abstraction can be mass-produced in an age of computerized vector graphics places the two in uneasy parallel.



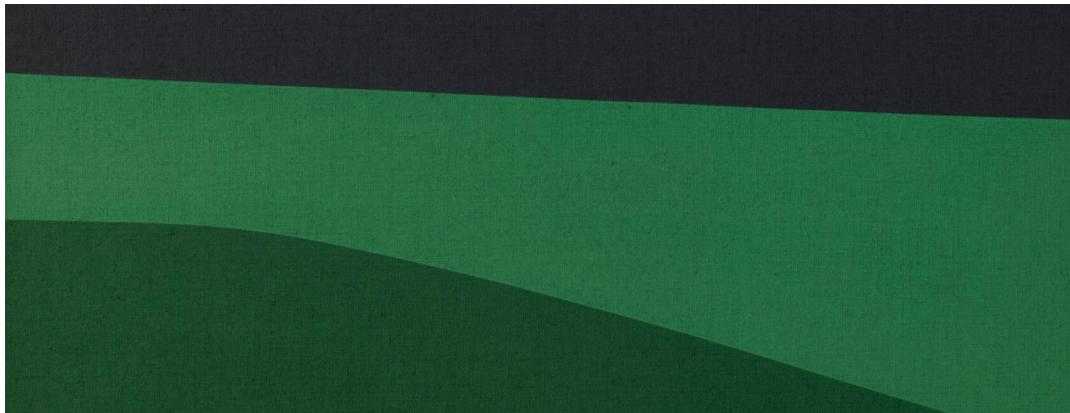
Antonio Ballester Moreno, *Green*, 2024, acrylic on jute, 2 x 1.5 m. Courtesy: the artist and Tanya Leighton, Berlin and Los Angeles; Photograph: Gunter Lepkowski

Whether through the works' stripped-down shapes or the puckish literalism of their titles, the artist has seemingly limited how far viewers are meant to get by merely deciphering individual elements. Could the sun cast a shadow across the plain? From one vantage, maybe, but not from the next. This, I suspect, is Ballester Moreno's game – one in which his formal evasions prompt us to give chase, even if

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the associations and recombinations of all these partial views leave us with no stable reading at their end, assuming there is an end to be found. 'We move through the landscape,' Stewart cautions, 'it does not move through us.'

Antonio Ballester Moreno's 'THE MOUNTAIN, THE SKY, THE WIND, THE SKY' is on view at Tanya Leighton, Berlin, until 15 September



Antonio Ballester Moreno, Blue Green (detail), 2024, acrylic on jute, 2 x 1.5 m