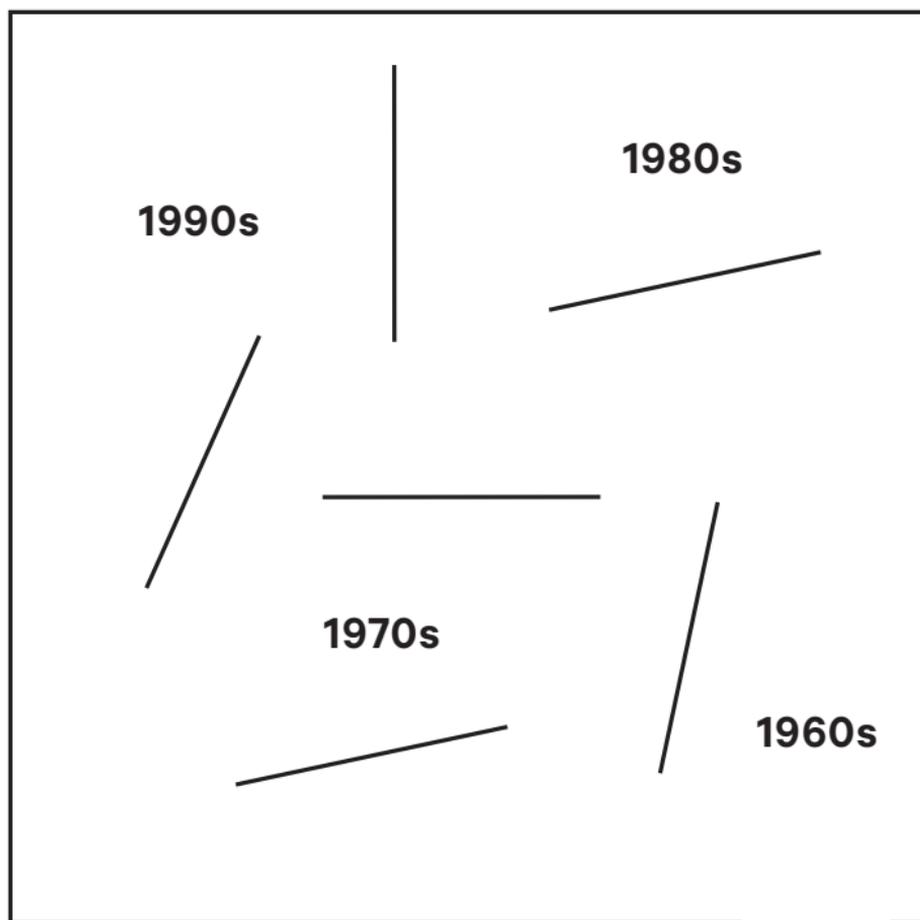


# Exhibition Booklet

**Gotthard Graubner**  
**Chroma**  
*15 July – 3 October 2016*

**NEUES MUSEUM**  
**State Museum for**  
**Art and Design Nuremberg**

# Floor Plan



# Introduction

*“I have always regarded his pictures as doors, as vistas through our obstructed world,”*<sup>1</sup> the artist Markus Lüpertz said in June 2013, paying tribute to his colleague Gotthard Graubner. Into what kind of world can Graubner’s works lead us? What insights do they provide?

Lüpertz’s reference to an “obstructed world” vividly describes what Graubner wanted to break free from throughout his life. Showing great determination and persistence, he countered immobile, static and rigid situations with pictures that visualise movement, change and transition. At the same time, however, his paintings radiate a strong sense of tranquillity and calm. Graubner spent many decades exploring this tension between movement and stillness. In the 1960s, at a time when the end of painting was being proclaimed, he forged a unique artistic path that, while rooted in the tradition of

panel painting, continued it with entirely different means. A new dimension of painting emerged: going against all prevailing artistic currents, Graubner developed a practice that gave body to colour. The resulting paintings are self-contained, autonomous entities in which viewers can immerse themselves.

Gotthard Graubner's substantial oeuvre not only presents an impressive variety in terms of the "Farbräume"<sup>2</sup> (colour spaces) he produced, but also shows remarkable aesthetic consistency: throughout his career, his primary concern was to explore and visualise the phenomenon of colour – light – nature. His "Farbräume" provide insights into a cosmos that is not directly related to the external, visible world but nevertheless leads back to this world, as well as to the viewer him- or herself.

The exhibition ***Gotthard Graubner. Chroma*** features 29 works by the artist and spans a period of four decades. In this new display, the Neues Museum is presenting a further group of works from its extensive holdings on long-term loan from the collection of Ingrid and Georg Böckmann. The first loans from this private collection coincided with the opening of the Neues Museum in 2000, and were followed by the generous loan of a substantial group of works several years ago. With a total of 69 works by Gerhard Richter, Gotthard Graubner, A.R. Penck and Isa Genzken from the Böckmann Collection, the museum has exceptional pieces by contemporary German artists of international renown at its disposal. The exhibition ***Gotthard Graubner. Chroma*** is further enhanced by paintings donated by Marianne and Hansfried Defet, along with a number of works drawn from the City of Nuremberg's collection of international contemporary art. The arrangement of exhibits is

largely chronological: works from the 1960s and 70s are presented in the front area of the exhibition space, while works from the 1980s and 90s are shown towards the rear. The individual pieces can be located with the aid of the numerical index at the back of this booklet.

*“The decisive thing is the action of the colour. In each case just one field of colour is addressed. Tension and exchange are determined by communicating cold and warm values. The colour seems to spread over the surface of its own accord. The consistency of the colour determines the flow, the path which it forges on its unconscious course. Build-ups can occur; the colour space moves in the undertow of the accumulations of pigment. The surface breathes.”<sup>6</sup>*

# Colour – Light – Nature

## Diversity and Continuity

With untiring enthusiasm and passion, Gotthard Graubner produced numerous drawings, watercolours and panel paintings, but also experimented with different kinds of picture supports and forms, ranging from the “Kissenbilder” (Cushion Paintings) of the early 1960s to the “Farbleiber” (Colour Bodies), “Nabeln” (Navels) and “Torsi” (Torsos), through to the “Farbraumkörper” (Colour-Space Bodies). Above all, his aim of lending colour a corporeal quality led him to develop new and expanded concepts of the artwork at various stages of his career. The key question for Graubner, however, was always: *“How can a painting present itself as a painting free from any literary aspect? How can it get away from simply depicting reality and become something real in itself?”*<sup>3</sup>

## The Independent Existence of Colour

Graubner’s understanding of painting as a process and of colour as an independent organism was fundamental to his thinking and his artistic practice. One of his primary concerns was therefore to respect the independent existence and autonomy of colour, which also involved using new means to explore it. *“Colour is subject enough for me,”*<sup>4</sup> he stressed. Colour nuances and transitions played a particularly important role in his painterly investigations. *“Nuance is*

*“What interests me most about traditional painting is this independent existence of colour which is to be found in all great painting, even if it is sometimes hidden. A polarity can thereby be observed between cool and warm values; as soon as these are apprehended as painting, they orient themselves towards the poles of gold and silver. This kind of polar tension exists in every good painting, even though the relative proportions may vary greatly, because a painting under the spell of gold needs silver, and vice versa.”<sup>7</sup>*

*“My interest in painting is mainly fixated on spiritual space as it appears in paintings by the Romantic artists, for example Caspar David Friedrich, and on the substance of the objects in a painting: what must one do to make it clear in a painting that a hat is made of felt and not some other material? I grappled with these fundamental questions at an early stage. Having been trained in the tradition of the great German academic schools of painting, which included the academies in Munich, Dusseldorf, Karlsruhe, and Dresden, I had the technical prerequisites. I quickly mastered the techniques for drawing nudes, painting portraits and landscapes. My interest in these was very intense – but at the same time I wanted something totally different, new forms, new materials, a different pictorial space. At the time, that was possible only in the West.”<sup>8</sup>*

*what enables colour to be experienced,*”<sup>5</sup> he maintained. Although his works may be categorised as monochromes, when you look at his paintings you do not get the impression that they are monochromatic. This is because Graubner’s work is never about just one colour; it is concerned with the different values, shades and moods that surround, accompany and contrast a colour. A blue, a red or other colour is in fact ‘generated’ through an interaction between what can be sharply contrasting hues.

The above-mentioned (metaphorical) tension between movement and stillness is therefore also related to colour polarities. For this reason, Graubner frequently used complementary colours, opposing elements such as heavy and light, warm and cool colour temperatures, or contrasts between light and dark, all of which are merged within the picture as a whole.

### **Elective Affinities**

In this sense, Graubner also adheres to the European painting tradition. Works by Titian and El Greco, but above all by Caspar David Friedrich, William Turner, Claude Monet and Paul Cézanne, come very close to his own understanding of painting, colourism and colour logic, and also to his conception of nature, and thus establish elective affinities between them.

### **Relationship to Nature**

Although Graubner’s works do not depict objective reality and are never intended to merely illustrate ‘something’, they always have an underlying reference to visible reality. His pictorial inventions

*“For me, the pictorial body is the object. The direct reference to nature in my painting is the re-creation of an organism, the breathing, the expansion and contraction; organic movement as it is found in an accumulation of clouds, in the rhythm of flowing water or in the quiet movement of a human body.”<sup>10</sup>*

*“Of course, I’m also a social being living in a particular epoch. This means that I live in a consumer society that’s becoming increasingly crude and is constantly losing its sensitivity. This is part of a permanent process of disempowering the individual. Even museums are part of this with their programmes. They are often aiming at a mass response. I try to confront this strident trend by quiet painterly means. I would like to awaken sensitivity in the broadest sense, and keep it awake. That’s what my paintings offer their viewers.”<sup>12</sup>*

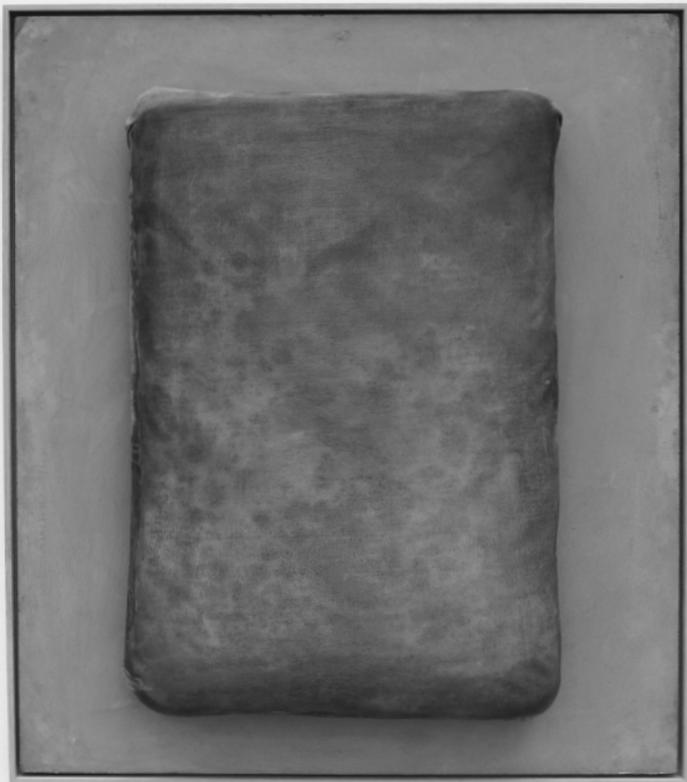
have their roots in reality, even if these are not immediately apparent to the viewer. Graubner's concept and experience of nature is of fundamental importance here. He viewed nature as processual and applied what he observed in nature – the process of growth, of becoming and passing away, as well as the development of organic structures – to his painting. He once described the relationship between nature, painting and himself as follows: ***“I pre-experienced the process of growing in nature which is later on circumscribed as a process in my painting. I myself have to become part of this process.”***<sup>9</sup>

### **Spaces of Sensation and Quiet Painterly Means**

In a similar manner, sensations that colours evoke also play a major role in Gotthard Graubner's paintings. The art historian Max Imdahl once described these images as “Empfindungsräume” (spaces of sensation), referring to a dimension of the works that can be experienced to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the individual viewer's willingness to engage with them. Viewing Graubner's paintings does not result in describable or measurable rational experiences; what matters here are the very act of contemplation, the communication of atmospheres, emotions and moods, and the distinctive *“interaction of forces.”*<sup>11</sup>

### **Correspondence Between Colours**

In the 1950s Graubner began applying several thin layers of highly diluted paint to the canvas, regarding it as a liquid, transparent medium with an inherent chromatic dynamism. In the centre of these paintings, the layers merge with one another, generating a kind of vital correspondence. Although the colour extends across the entire



surface of the painting in these early monochrome works, a more intense area of colour – emphasised either by darkness or lightness – is created from the centre outward. And while works such as *Kappa*, 1960 [1], *o.T.*, 1960 [2], *Zeta*, 1960 [3] or *xixar*, 1961 [4] do not bulge outwards, they gain depth through the slightly wavy appearance of their surface, generated by the partly translucent and frequently overlapping layers of colour.

### **Farbleib**

In his works from the early 1960s, Graubner no longer applied paint to the canvas with a brush, but instead used home-made Perlon- or linen-covered cushions and foam pads that he soaked in paint. The saturated colour sponges were then pressed onto the canvas. This method eventually led him to regard the cushions and pads not just as painterly tools, but also as pictures in their own right. He initially used the term “Farbleib” (Colour Body) to describe this new kind of painting.

Graubner’s use of this metaphor clearly shows his preoccupation with the physical dimension of colour. The “Farbleiber” (Colour Bodies) incorporate colour, as it were – they absorb and hold colour, while at the same time they present it to the outside. Graubner also made reference to how colour “breathes”, reinforcing this notion of corporeality. The work *farbleib*, 1963 [7] can be regarded as a transitional piece between the earlier, flat-surfaced images and the “Farbleiber” or “Raumkörper” (Space Bodies). Here, a bulging, polyester-covered ‘mattress’ has been mounted on the larger surface of a monochrome painted canvas, thus combining the two-dimensional panel painting with a three-dimensional object.



## Schwall

In the mid-1960s Graubner created further pictures that were lined with wadding, some of which are extremely voluminous. Although the works produced during this period have very strong objective and haptic qualities – as seen, for example, in *Weißer Torso*, 1968 [8], *o.T.*, 1969 [9], *o.T.*, 1970 [10], *Schwall*, 1971 [12] and *Schwall*, 1972 [13] – Graubner always considered them to be paintings. During this period he also developed the artistic formula that he consistently adopted in his later work: “*Colour = concentration into an organism = painting.*”<sup>13</sup>

The physical density and sagging weight are particularly evident in *o.T.*, 1969 [9] where the colour appears to have sunk down and drawn colour from the pictorial space above it. Graubner has allowed the downward pull of the flowing paint to determine the appearance of the picture.

It is a similar situation with the two works *Schwall*, 1971 [12] and *Schwall*, 1972 [13]. Here, however, the outward bulge and sagging occurs in the centre of the painting. *Weißer Torso*, 1968 [8], shows a different kind of plasticity. Light-coloured Perlon is stretched across the entire surface of the picture, covering the material body that is mounted at its centre. This kind of veiling reduces the haptic impression and lends the image an immaterial quality.

*o.T. (Haut)*, 1970-75 [11] creates the opposite impression. The canvas, which in Graubner’s other works is attached to a stretcher or pulled tightly across different kinds of wadding, has here been liberated from any kind of support and appears strangely disembodied in comparison to the more voluminous pictures.

*I then “discovered that paint – which was usually very diluted – soaked into this sponge or pad, where it generated a different kind of spatiality. [...] And this is how the dialogue was established between surface and object. At that time I called them ‘bodies’ and now I call them colour-space bodies.”<sup>15</sup>*

*“My paintings emerge with the growing light and go out with the light; beginning and end are interchangeable. They do not indicate a state, they are transitional.”<sup>16</sup>*

## Farbraumkörper

In the 1970s Graubner began to create “Farbraumkörper” (Colour-Space Bodies) – a term coined by the artist himself and described as “synthetic” by Max Imdahl, inasmuch as it unites completely contradictory concepts: ‘Farbräume’ (colour spaces), which by their very nature cannot be measured, and ‘Körper’ (bodies), which can. This inherent tension may be what constitutes the particular fascination of the “Farbraumkörper”: the scope and apparently limitless space of colour, contrasted with the clearly defined form of the painting.

Colour now fills the image to its limits – extending even over the rounded edges of the picture. In numerous works, traces of – often still unmixed – paint have been left at the edges of the pictures or flow down them, showing just how many different colours have been applied on top of one another. By now, Graubner was working with even stronger contrasts. A marked increase in chromatic polarity can be seen, for example, in the diptych *o.T.*, 1980/82 [18], where the colour quality is heightened through dialogue and exchange with its counterpart. “*Extravisual dimensions are thereby not excluded; they extend the viewer’s realm of experience, they activate sensitivity.*”<sup>14</sup>

## Dynamic Movement – Liberating Oneself

Whereas Graubner’s early works were on the whole more muted and show subtle colour distinctions, his later works are characterised by much stronger chromatic contrasts. The images have become more animated and seem less restrained. In comparison to the homogeneously rendered “Farbkörper”, paintings such as *con fuoco*,

*“Painting is a life-long process of freeing yourself, a freedom that has very little to do with physical states. If you associate a late work only with age as measured in years, you are viewing the process too objectively. What is increasingly important for me about the paintings I am doing now is that they shouldn’t just be looked at, they need to be breathed with. Each painting has its own breath, to which the viewer adapts; he has to adapt his own breath to that of the painting. That is how I see the art of the Old Masters today: as an appeal to the viewer to, so to speak, lose himself and engage with the painted work as a breathing form. Perhaps that is an insight of old age, the expression, say, of human maturity in my case, which I hope also has an impact on my paintings.”<sup>17</sup>*

1981/83 [20], *ingrid con fuoco*, 1983/84 [21], *torquere*, 1984 [22], *o.T.*, 1989 [24] and *o.T.*, 1989/90 [26], as well as other works from the 1980s, allow the viewer to trace – to a certain extent at least – the artist's movements and dynamic style of paint application.

### **Interaction of Colours and Forces**

The question remains open as to whether the interaction of colours and forces in Gotthard Graubner's artworks is a reference to a larger whole or to an individual cosmos – whether it is a movement from the inside out or from the outside in. They appear to be interconnected and have a reciprocal effect on one another.

Graubner's works provide the kind of aesthetic experience that is also offered by Claude Monet's large-format paintings of water lilies, Barnett Newman's homogeneous colour fields or the merged planes of shimmering colour in the works of Mark Rothko. The primary objectives of all of these are to elicit contemplation, encourage meditative reflection and liberate colour.

# Notes

1. Markus Lüpertz, 'Nekrolog auf Gotthard Graubner', in *Gotthard Graubner – Magier der Farbe*, exh. cat., Akademie Galerie – Die Neue Sammlung (Düsseldorf: Kunstakademie, 2013), pp. 8–14, here p. 10; translated from the German by J. Todd.
2. Max Imdahl, 'The Animating Spirit of Colour', in *Gotthard Graubner. Malerei aus den Jahren 1984 bis 1986*, trans. Stephen Reader, exh. cat. (Düsseldorf: Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1987), pp. 12–15, here p. 12.
3. Gotthard Graubner, in Peter Iden, 'A Research Into Colour and Light with Gotthard Graubner in his Studio on Museumsinsel Hombroich', in Ingrid Mössinger, Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz (ed.), *Vom Glück ein Künstler zu sein. Fortunate to be an artist*, trans. Pauline Cumbers (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2008), pp. 77–85, here p. 80.
4. Gotthard Graubner, in *Gotthard Graubner. Farbraumkörper der XL. Biennale Venedig 1982* (Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Moderne Kunst, 1991), p. 12.
5. Gotthard Graubner, 'Reflexionen über Malerei', in *Gotthard Graubner*, exh. cat. (Hanover: Kestner-Gesellschaft, 1969), p. 12; translated from the German by J. Todd.
6. Graubner, in Iden, pp. 77/8.
7. Graubner, 'Reflexionen über Malerei', p. 11.
8. Graubner, in Iden, pp. 79–80.
9. Gotthard Graubner, in Volker Kahmen, 'The Reception of Painting – Excerpts from Talks with Gotthard Graubner', in *Gotthard Graubner*, trans. Rosemary Kunisch, exh. cat. (Baden-Baden: Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, 1980), pp. 233–43, here p. 241.
10. *Ibid*, p. 235.
11. Gottfried Boehm, 'Die Sonne hinter der Leinwand', in *Gotthard Graubner: Malerei*, exh. cat. (Saarbrücken: Saarland Museum, 1995), p. 18; translated from the German by J. Todd.
12. Graubner, in Iden, p. 82.

13. Gotthard Graubner, in Werner Hofmann (ed.), *Gotthard Graubner*, exh. cat. (Hamburg: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 1975), p. 3; translated from the German by J. Todd.
14. Graubner, 'Reflexionen über Malerei', p. 11.
15. Gotthard Graubner in conversation with Hanno Reuther, in Lothar Romain and Detlef Bluemler (eds.), *Künstler. Kritisches Lexikon der Gegenwartskunst 16* (1991), p. 6; translated from the German by J. Todd.
16. Graubner, in *Ideen*, p. 77.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 81.



# Biography

- 1930** Born in Erlbach (Saxony)
- 1947** Studies at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Berlin under Arthur Degner
- 1948** Studies at the Kunstakademie Dresden under Wilhelm Rudolph
- 1952** Works independently as a painter in Erlbach
- 1954** Moves to Düsseldorf in West Germany
- 1954 – 1959** Studies at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf  
Master-class student under Georg Meistermann and Karl Otto Götz
- From 1962** Kissenbilder (Cushion Paintings)
- From 1963** Farbleiber (Colour Bodies)
- 1964** Teaches art at the Lessing-Gymnasium in Düsseldorf
- 1965** Takes up a teaching post at the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg
- 1968** Participates in documenta 4 in Kassel
- 1969 – 1995** Becomes professor of painting at the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg
- From 1970** Farbraumkörper (Colour-Space Bodies)
- 1971** Represents the Federal Republic of Germany at the 11th Biennale in São Paulo
- 1976 – 1998** Becomes professor of painting at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf
- 1977** Participates in documenta 6 in Kassel
- 1982** Represents the Federal Republic of Germany at the 40th Venice Biennale and the Fifth Triennale in New Delhi  
Plays a major role in the establishment and design of Museum Insel Hombroich, near Neuss
- From 1997** Has a studio on the grounds of Museum Insel Hombroich

Gotthard Graubner lived and worked in Düsseldorf and at Insel Hombroich. He died in 2013 in Neuss, aged 82.

# Works in the exhibition

## **1 Kappa, 1960**

Oil on canvas

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

## **2 o. T., 1960**

Oil on canvas

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

## **3 zeta, 1960**

Oil on canvas

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

## **4 xixar, 1961**

Oil on canvas

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

## **5 o. T., 1962**

Mixed media on canvas

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**6 o. T., 1963**

Oil on canvas

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**7 farbleib, 1963**

Acrylic on polyester over foam plastic, mounted on painted fibreboard

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**8 Weißer Torso, 1968**

Oil on Perlon over foam plastic

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**9 o. T., 1969**

Synthetic wadding on wood, Plexiglas cover

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**10 o. T., 1970**

Oil on Perlon over foam plastic

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**11 o. T. (Haut), 1970-75**

Oil on Perlon

*Donated by Marianne and Hansfried Defet to the Förderstiftung Neues Museum Nuremberg in 1999*

**12 Schwall, 1971**

Oil on Perlon over foam plastic

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**13 Schwall, 1972**

Oil on Perlon over foam plastic

*Donated by Marianne and Hansfried Defet to the Förderstiftung Neues Museum in Nürnberg in 1999*

**14 schala, 1972/73**

Oil on Perlon over synthetic wadding on canvas

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**15 sebchas IV, 1974/75**

Oil on Perlon over synthetic wadding on canvas

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**16 dharma V, 1977**

Oil on canvas over synthetic wadding on canvas

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**17 o. T., 1977**

Oil on canvas over synthetic wadding on canvas

*Donated by Marianne and Hansfried Defet to the Förderstiftung Neues Museum in Nürnberg in 1999*

**18 o. T., 1980/82**

Diptych; acrylic on untreated cotton cloth over foam plastic on canvas

*Bequest of Marianne and Hansfried Defet to the Förderstiftung Neues Museum in Nürnberg*

**19 oasa, 1981/83**

Acrylic on canvas over synthetic wadding on canvas  
*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**20 con fuoco, 1981/83**

Acrylic on canvas over synthetic wadding on canvas  
*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**21 ingrid con fuoco, 1983/84**

Acrylic on canvas over synthetic wadding on canvas  
*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**22 torquere, 1984**

Acrylic on canvas over synthetic wadding on canvas  
*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**23 o. T., 1988/90**

Acrylic on canvas over synthetic wadding on canvas  
*Collection of the City of Nuremberg, acquired in 1993*

**24 o. T., 1989**

Acrylic on canvas over synthetic wadding on canvas  
*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**25 o. T., 1989**

Acrylic on canvas over synthetic wadding on canvas  
*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**26 o. T., 1989/90**

Acrylic on canvas over synthetic wadding on canvas

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**27 o. T., 1990/91**

Acrylic on canvas over synthetic wadding on canvas

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**28 *Jeune jaune II*, 1996**

Acrylic on canvas over synthetic wadding on canvas

*On long-term loan from the Böckmann Collection*

**29 *Prometheisch*, 1999-2000**

Acrylic and oil on canvas over synthetic wadding on canvas

*Donated by Marianne and Hansfried Defet to the Förderstiftung*

*Neues Museum in Nürnberg in 2006*





24 o. T., 1989

## **Imprint**

**Editor:** Neues Museum

State Museum for Art and Design Nuremberg

**Texts and editing:** Claudia Marquardt

**Translation:** Jacqueline Todd

**Graphic design:** Yvonne Zmarsly, Csilla Wenczel

**Production:** Frischmann Druck und Medien GmbH & Co. KG, Amberg

This brochure was compiled by the museum education department to accompany the exhibition

*Gotthard Graubner. Chroma*

15 July – 3 October 2016

**Exhibition curator:** Thomas Heyden

### **Photographic credits**

© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2016 for the reproduction of works by Gotthard Graubner

Photographs: Neues Museum (Annette Kradisch, Claudia Marquardt), Weserburg Bremen



**NEUES MUSEUM**

**Klarissenplatz**

**Postal address: Luitpoldstraße 5, 90402 Nürnberg, Germany**

**Tel. +49 (0)911 240 20 69, Fax +49 (0)911 240 20 29**

**Guided tours/Education department:**

**Tel. +49 (0)911 240 20 36**

**Email: [museumspaedagogik@nmn.de](mailto:museumspaedagogik@nmn.de)**

**Website and newsletter:**

**[www.nmn.de](http://www.nmn.de)**

**Opening hours:**

**Tuesday – Sunday 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.**

**Thursday 10 a.m. – 8 p.m.**

**The museum is closed on Mondays.**

**3 October 2016 (German Unity Day): 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.**