





BODY ARMOR

BODY ARMOR is Frank Ammerlaan's fourth solo exhibition at Upstream Gallery. Since his last exhibition Particles of Dust in 2017 Ammerlaan's chief medium became the world's physical matter, excavated from the ground or fallen down from the sky.

The exhibition title borrows its name from a series of Ammerlaan's leadworks, realised in a material that is contaminated with meaning, poisonous and alchemical. Lead, used as protection from radiation in hospitals and nuclear power plants, chemically is the end result of millions of years of decay of the unstable Uranium element. According to Ammerlaan, 'physically the material is soft and seems to be as malleable as reality itself, whilst being used to protect the flesh against its former radioactive self'. The square lead tiles overlap in rudimentary landscapes to construct spherical, protective layers, akin to an armour or a roof. Through the process of alchemical transformation, which stretches over time, lead creates resistance against its own radiative movement.













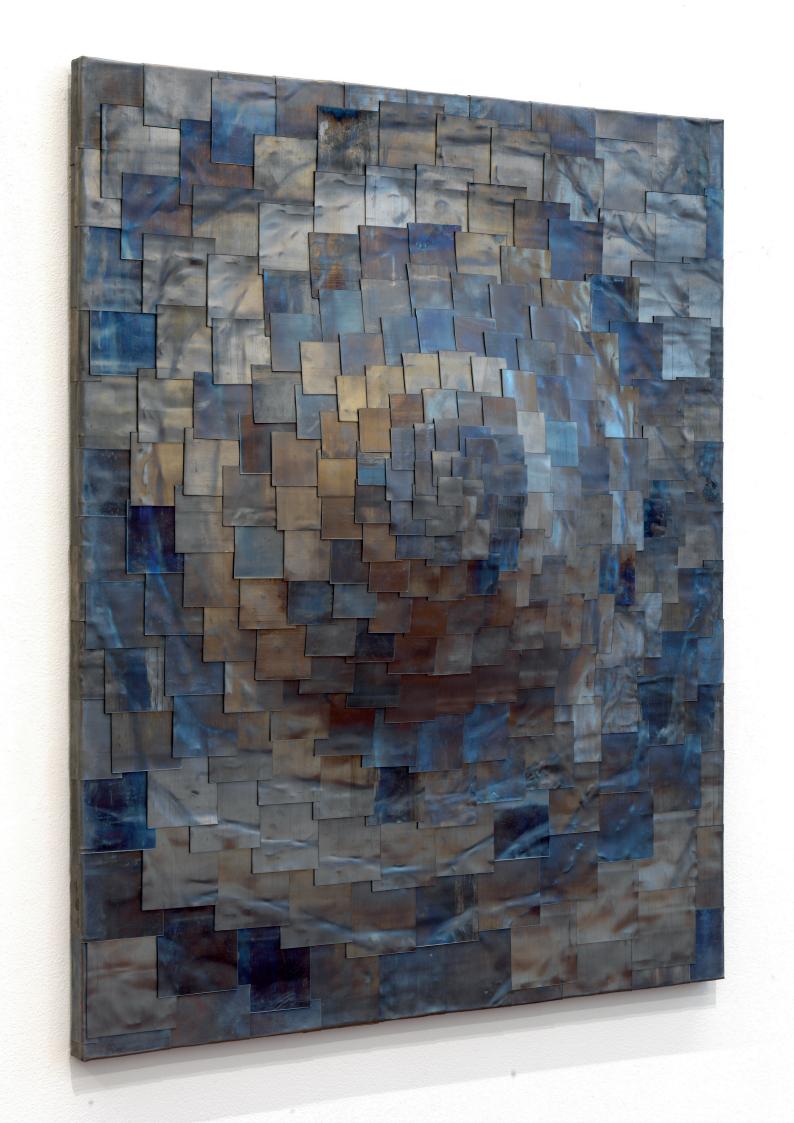


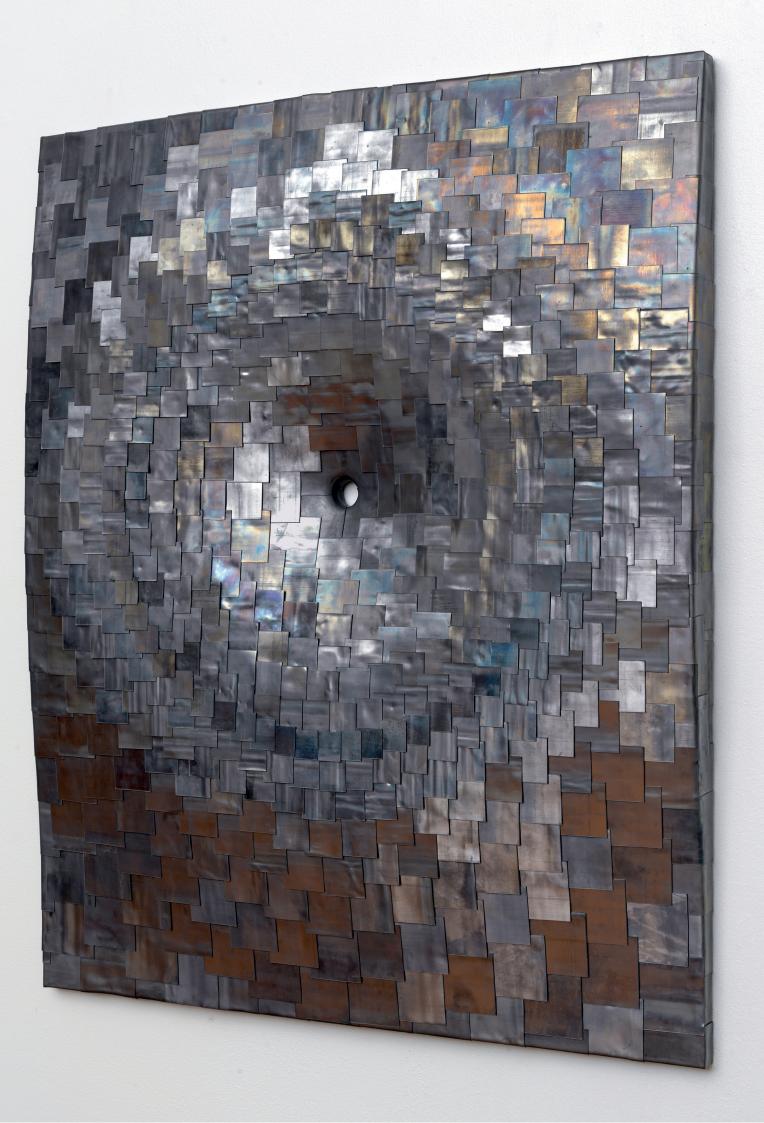


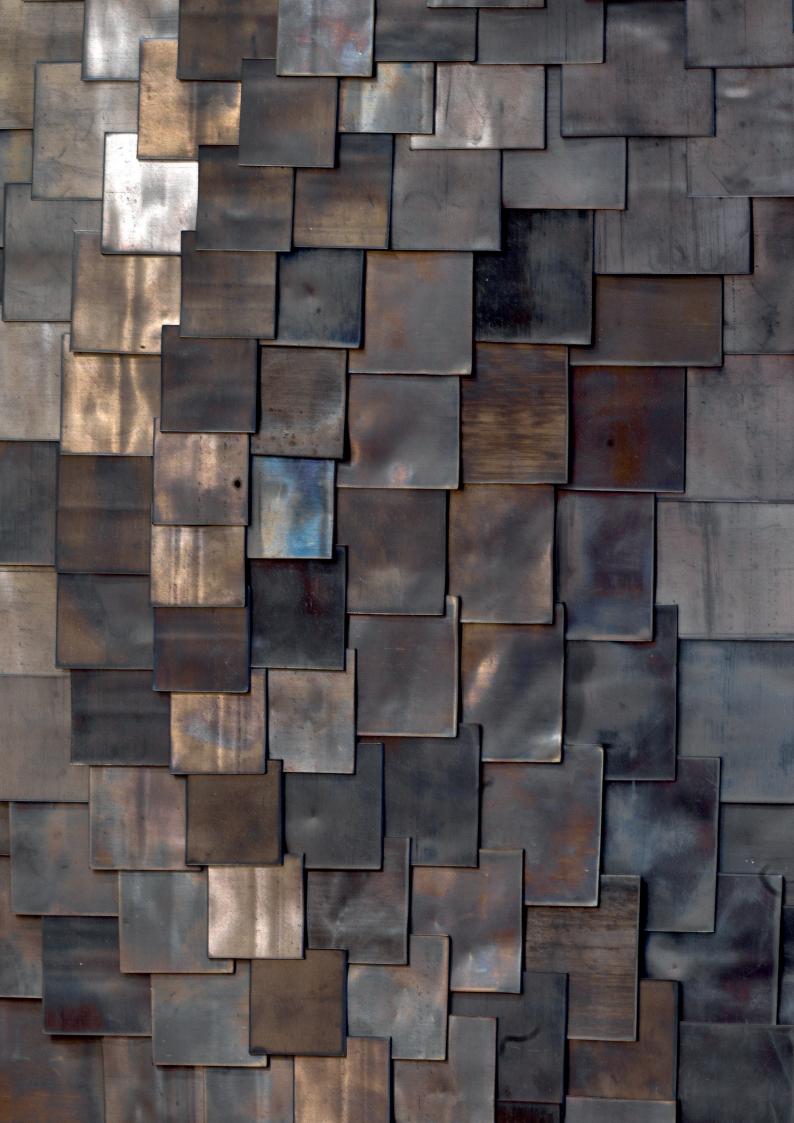
Untitled (Body Armor Series), 2020 Lead 82 x 66 cm















At the core of Ammerlaan's practice lies desire to capture the constant flux of our reality that goes beyond individual lives and knowledges and equally pertains to eternal processes on the cosmic scale. The transformations of matter and energy - such as ejection of heavy metal elements following a supernova explosion - can be traced in Ammerlaan's works not only in the raw materials he uses, but also in their complex and nuanced structures. Circulation of matter in the universe is echoed in the circular formations and gradual movements of shapes and colours that testify to interconnectedness and relativity.

'I see my works as objects of measurement where materiality is a tool to describe the world. Matter is not an anonymous bystander, nor a passive agent, but rather a dynamic and evolutionary creature that transforms, mutates and deteriorates. It creates spherical forms and circular patterns that are deeply interwoven into the fabric of our lives within the cosmos. It uncovers an overwhelming sense of geometry which in turn is shaped by the weight of all existing matter, forged and arranged in an orderly system.'

We live in spheres – be it social bubbles, circles of friends, or the Earth within the solar system – that only exist as parts of relational systems and are never autonomous. As the relativity presupposes the bending of time and space by masses, the spherical shapes and their radiative expression – as in a star or in an atom – emerge in Ammerlaan's works as organising principle and powerful vehicles of knowledge.

The grid in his empty canvas thus is a starting point structuring the thought, a due proposal of a model, an anticipated blueprint awaiting materialisation. In these apparently indexical patterns, a straight line and its potential geometry emerge as attempts of establishing descriptive tools and frameworks for understanding.

In Ammerlaan's works the cosmic extent and time - in which a planetary scale is microscopic - are deeply entangled with individual phenomenological experiences. He applies meteorite particles, the extraterrestrial matter dating back to the beginnings of our solar system, onto fabrics that were exposed to the Earth's elements and bleached by the Sun. Soil and dust, full of potentiality and void of a stable state, are always in the moment of becoming, a form of matter in everlasting flux. Allowing the natural, cyclical processes to imprint on his work is not a surrender of artistic agency, but rather a profound recognition of the inevitability of change and transformation.

Text: dr Malgorzata Misniakiewicz, art historian and curator.







Untitled, 2020 dust, dirt, meteorite particles on linen and jute 130 x 280 cm













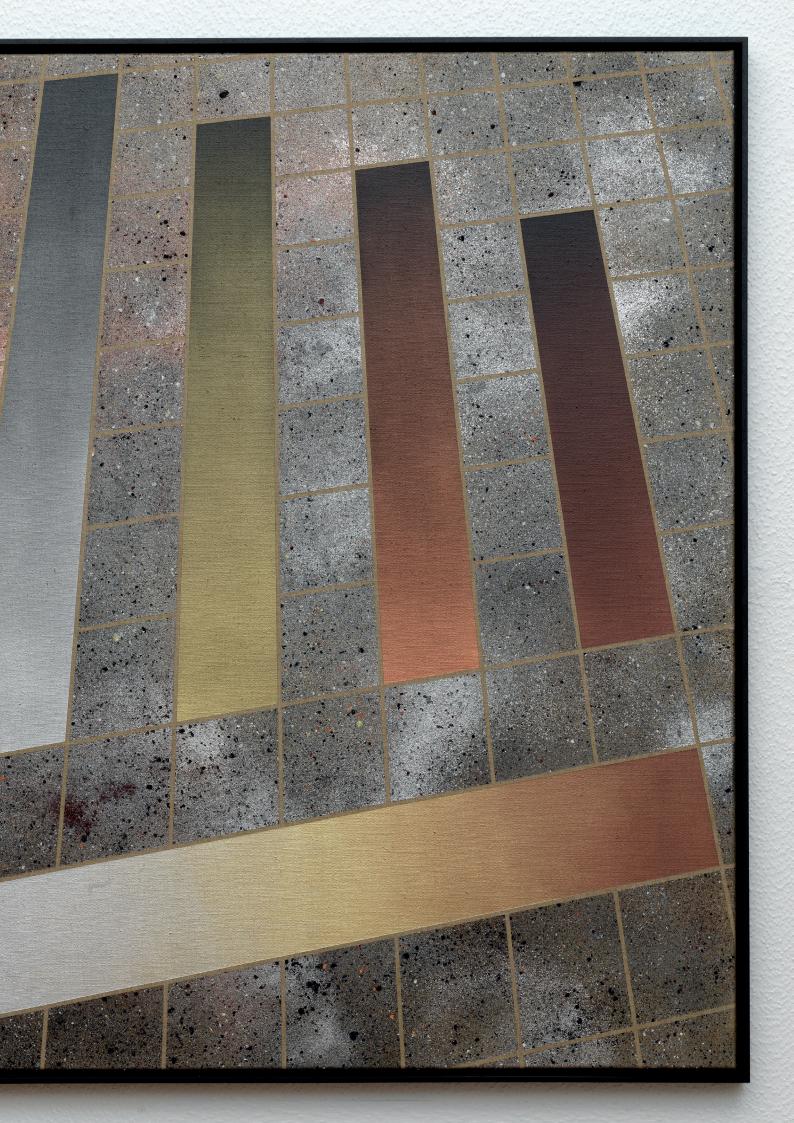






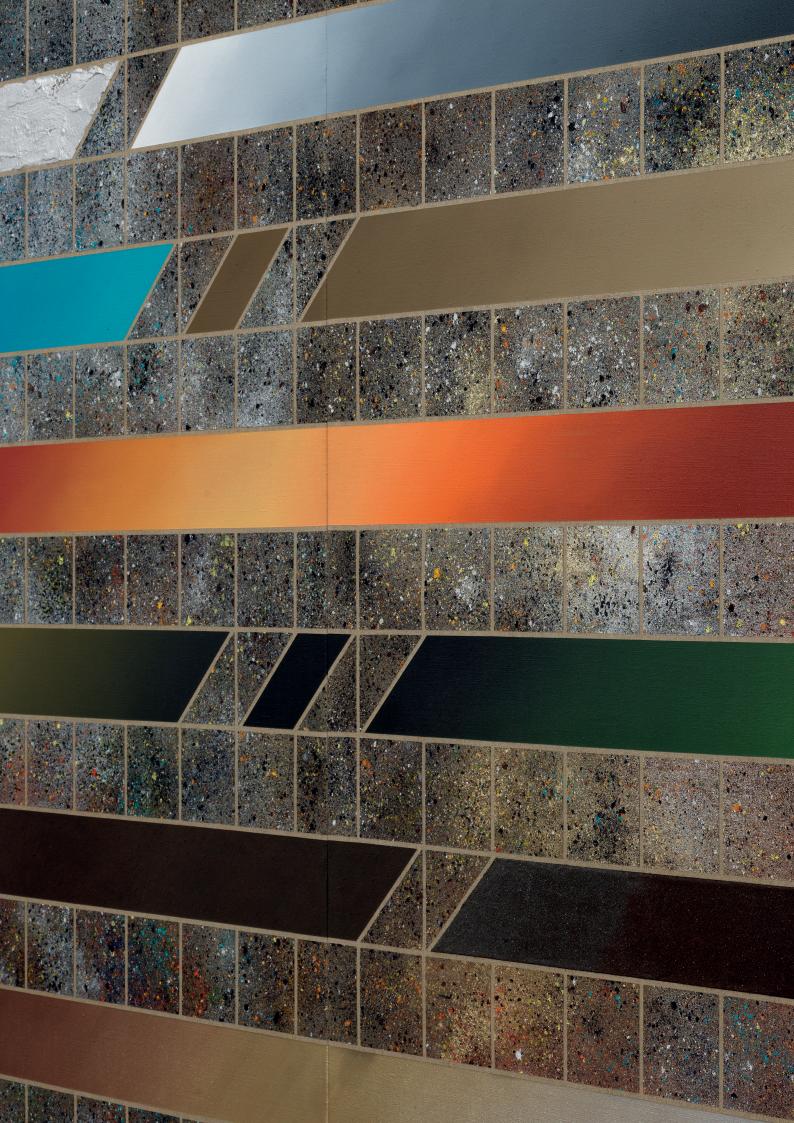
Untitled, 2020 dust, dirt, iron and iron oxide on jute 130 x 110 cm











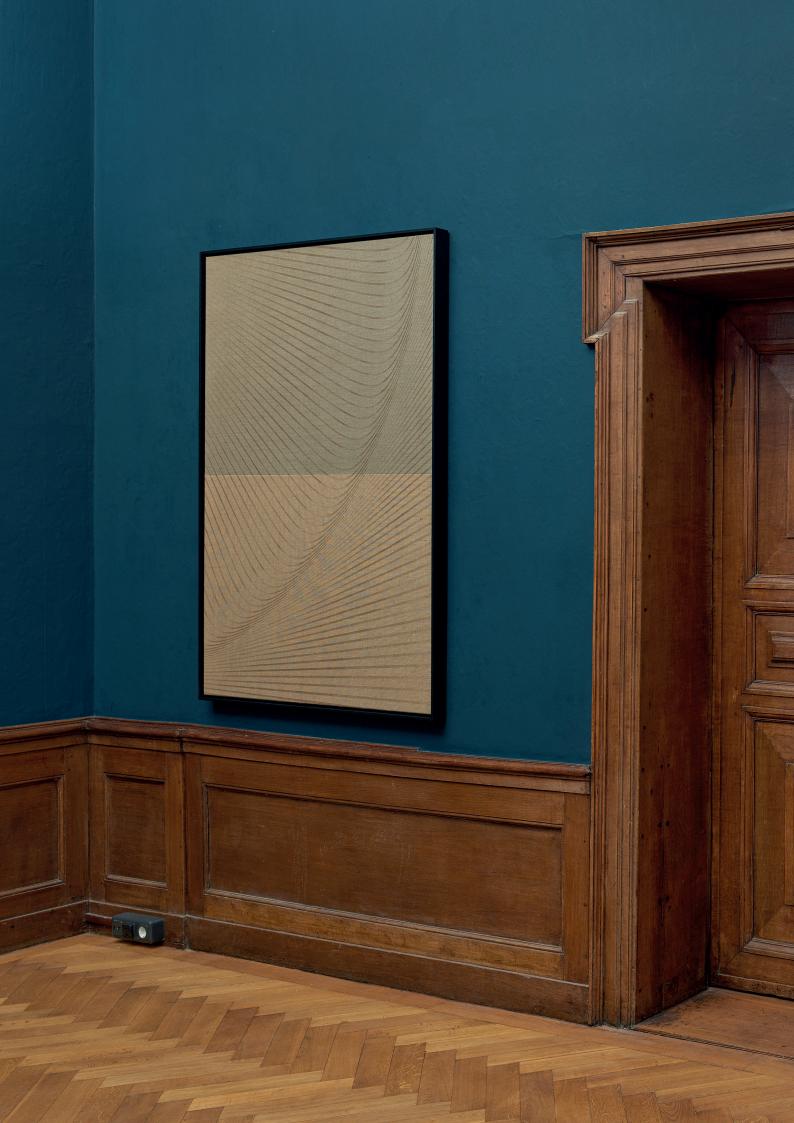






















Frank Ammerlaan (1979) is based in Berlin. He graduated from the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam in 2007 and in 2012 from his Masters at the Royal College of Art in London. Ammerlaan was awarded the Royal Award for Painting in 2012, which is handed to the most promising young Dutch painter of that year. Other prizes he won include the Scheffer Prize (2013), the Land Securities Prize Royal College of Art, the Doha Studio Art Prize (all 2012) and the Gerrit Rietveld Academy Painting Prize (2007). Ammerlaan has had solo exhibitions at the Dordrechts Museum, Museo d'Arte Conteporanea Calasetta and at several international galleries like Simões de Assis Art in Brazil. His work has been included in a number of group exhibitions in and outside of the Netherlands, at places such as White Cube Gallery London, Oscar Niemeyer Museum Brazil, The Royal Palace in Amsterdam KUMU Art Museum, in Tallinn, Museum Catharijneconvent in Utrecht, Kunsthal in Rotterdam and NEST in The Hague. Ammerlaan's work is part of leading private and corporate art collections and museums such as Centraal Museum Utrecht, Kunstmuseum Den Haag, Museum Voorlinden and Stedelijk Museum Schiedam.

Alchemist Ammerlaan werkt met meteorietpulp

Wie zonder voorkennis Upstream Gallery binnenloopt zou kunnen denken dat hier een historische tentoonstelling gaande is. Doeken met patronen van ovalen die steeds groter worden en uitwaaieren in rechte strepen: minimalisme met een knipoog naar op-art. Wandsculpturen van lood en canvas met gestippelde cirkels van ijzer en ijzeroxide: arte povera. Maar dit is niet een presentatie van decennia oude kunst van gecanoniseerde makers. Dit is kakelvers werk van Frank Ammerlaan, 41 jaar.

Is Ammerlaan een nostalgische retrokunstenaar of postmoderne citatenhusselaar? Wie alleen naar de vorm kijkt, zou dat kunnen denken. Maar hier wordt een bestaande taal omgevormd tot een nieuw verhaal. De geometrische en abstracte vormen van Ammerlaan zijn lang niet zo strak en onpersoonlijk als bij de minimalisten, die zich nooit zouden laten verleiden tot een vorm die lijkt op een dampkring. En daar waar zijn arte povera-voorgangers graniet, bijenwas, een krop sla of andere 'arme materialen' inzetten, kiest hij voor vermalen meteoriet – het oudste materiaal op aarde en bepaald niet goedkoop.

Arte povera verzette zich bovendien tegen symboliek en al te expliciete kunstzinnigheid. De heelalachtige ruimte waar Ammerlaan zijn vormen in plaatst zet de deur wagenwijd open naar Star Wars-vergelijkingen. En in het langwerpige werk met schitterend gekleurde vlakken is de tabel van het periodiek systeem te herkennen, wat niet vreemd is gezien de verschillende metaalpigmenten die deze alchemist gebruikt.

Maar meer dan over materiaal gaat Ammerlaans werk over licht. Het is onmiskenbaar schilderkunstig, vooral die werken met meteorietgruis. De patronen die hij met monnikengeduld op groot oppervlak aanbrengt, veranderen van kleur en diepte als je er langsloopt en de lichtinval verandert. De werken bestaan bovendien uit twee doeken. Naast elkaar doet de naad ertussen denken aan een zip à la Barnett Newman. Een verticale combinatie resulteert in een horizon in een abstract landschap.

Maliënkolder

Ammerlaan begon ooit conventioneel met kwasten en verf, maar 'schilderde' later ook met zuur op metaal. Dat metaal is hij daarna gaan vouwen en in deze tentoonstelling zitten een paar werken die voortborduren op die techniek, alleen veel losser. De reliëfs van lood lijken ondanks het zware materiaal zacht en doen denken aan bubbeltjesplastic.

Ook te zien zijn twee werken gemaakt van kleine plaatjes lood die als een maliënkolder over een bolling en een concave vorm zijn gelegd. Ook hier dringen associaties zich op, bijvoorbeeld met de bollen en zuigende gaten van Anish Kapoor. Maar Ammerlaan gebruikt de eigenschappen van lood om zijn reliëfs iets lichamelijks mee te geven.

Alchemist Ammerlaan works with meteorite pulp

Walking into the current show at Upstream Gallery without any prior knowledge one might think a that a historical exhibition is on display. Canvases with expanding oval patterns fanning out in straight lines: minimalism with a nod to optical art. Wall sculptures of lead and canvases with dotted circles of iron and iron oxide: arte povera. However, this is not a showcase of decades-old art from canonized creators. This is brand-new work by Frank Ammerlaan (41).

Is Ammerlaan a nostalgic retro-artist or a post-modern shapeshifter? Those who only look at the shape of his work might pose this question - but what we see here is a new story written in an old language.

Ammerlaan's geometric and abstract shapes are not nearly as sleek and impersonal as those of the minimalists, who would never allow themselves to be seduced into a shape that resembles the edge of the atmosphere. In places where his arte povera predecessors would have used granite, beeswax, a head of lettuce or other 'poor materials', Ammerlaan opts for ground meteorite particles - the oldest material on earth and most certainly not a cheap one.

Arte povera also opposed symbolism and an all too explicit artistry. The universe-like space in which Ammerlaan places his shapes makes one think of the Star Wars franchise. The elongated works with brilliantly colored surfaces hint at the periodic table, which is not surprising given the different metal pigments used by this alchemist.

Ammerlaan's work is, however, even more about light than it is about its materiality. It is undeniably pictorial art. The patterns that the artist patiently creates changes color and depth as you walk past them, further altering the way in which the work catches the sunlight. Some works also consist of two types of canvases. The seam holding them together is reminiscent of a zipper à la Barnett Newman. A vertical seam results in a horizon in an abstract landscape.

Chain mail

Ammerlaan had once produced rather conventionally using brushes and paint, but later moved on to *painting* with acid on metal, metal which he then also started folding. This exhibition contains a few works that elaborate on this technique. Despite the heavy material, the lead reliefs appear soft and are reminiscent of bubble wrap.

Also on display are two works made of small sheets of lead that have been laid over a bulge and form a concave shape as though made of chain mail. Here too comparisons can be drawn with spherical shapes and voids of Anish Kapoor, for example. But Ammerlaan uses the properties of lead to give his reliefs something physical.

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