



Peder

Isa
Genzken

Basic Research

May 15 — August 30, 2025

Lund



Peder Lund is pleased to announce *Isa Genzken: Basic Research*, an exhibition focusing on a pivotal body of work by one of the most influential figures in contemporary art. On view from May 15 through August 30, 2025, this exhibition presents a rare opportunity to engage deeply with Genzken's *Basic Research* series (1988–1992), a radical group of oil paintings that exemplifies her profound inquiries into material, surface, and space. This is the artist's second solo exhibition at the gallery.

Though best known as a sculptor whose work has redefined the possibilities of form and structure, it is through these enigmatic paintings that Isa Genzken (1948–) distills the essence of her sculptural language. With the simplest of means — oil paint, canvas, and the raw surface of her studio floor — she conducts a precise and poetic examination of the core concerns that have defined her career. In these works, the viewer encounters a dynamic interplay between imprint and image, between materiality and illusion, and between the tangible and the speculative. As Sabine Breitwieser wrote for the artist's major retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, "Genzken's oeuvre is distinguished by a constant inventiveness, a highly idiosyncratic artistic approach, and an unmistakable idiom within each of her diverse groups of work."¹

Created using the technique of frottage, Genzken's *Basic Research* paintings are anything but traditional. Laying her canvases directly on the studio floor, she squeegeed oil paint across their surfaces, capturing an abstracted impression of the textures, dust, and embedded traces beneath. After drying, the canvases were stretched, incorporating the very edges of the floor into the pictorial field. The resulting paintings — dark, tactile, and





monochromatic — evoke rich visual associations: from craggy geological strata and satellite images to dust under a microscope. These seemingly abstract compositions bear an uncanny realism that resists easy classification.

Genzken's transition from the highly technical, mathematically-derived sculptures of the 1970s to the more tactile, materially immediate works of the 1980s marks one of the most significant evolutions in her career. This shift reveals not only a transformation in form and media but also a radical rethinking of authorship, process, and the relationship between the artist and her working environment.

In the early part of her career, Genzken was known for her stereometric sculptures, as the artist responded to Russian and Soviet Constructivism and American Abstract Expressionism, however, seeking to develop a European answer to Minimalism that had international relevance. These works, including her *Ellipsoids* (begun in 1976) and *Hyperbolos* (begun in 1979), were elegant, streamlined objects generated from complex mathematical formulas. They required meticulous calculation and were often fabricated with the help of engineers and craftsmen using materials such as aluminum and wood.

Each *Ellipsoid* —long, torpedo-like forms —is defined by a singular curvature derived from a complex equation. The *Hyperbolos*, similarly, are based on double-curved surfaces with geometrical precision. These were not works that could be casually executed in a studio; they demanded outside collaboration and the precision of industrial manufacture. Genzken had to work closely with mathematicians and fabricators to bring her vision into physical form.

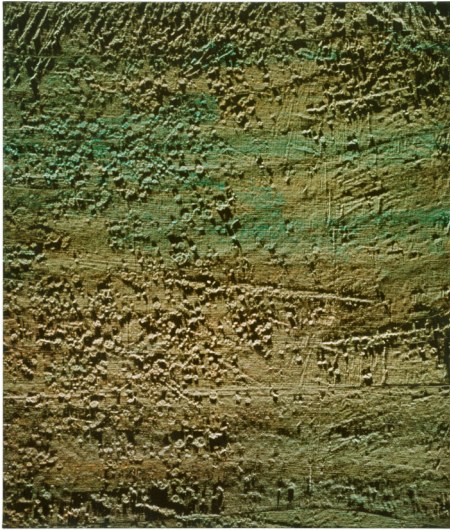


While these works are formally beautiful and intellectually rigorous, they also placed Genzken in a paradoxical position: though she was the conceptual force behind them, her role in their actual making was distanced. This increasing abstraction and separation from the object eventually led her to reconsider the nature of her artistic practice.

By the mid-1980s, Genzken began to radically shift her approach. Tired of the mediated process of fabrication, she returned to the studio with a renewed focus on immediacy, material contact, and physical engagement. This is most clearly seen in her plaster cast sculptures and the *Basic Research* paintings (1988–1992), which together marked a redefinition of her sculptural language.



In the plaster casts – rough, fragmentary, and corporeal – Genzken began using ordinary materials and techniques that she could handle herself and methods rooted in the body, in intuition, and in the space of the studio. These sculptures appear as imprints or residues of the world, often marked by the textures and imperfections of their molds. They stand in stark contrast to the mathematical elegance of the earlier, highly refined sculptures, suggesting a break from the cerebral toward the visceral. Whereas in the wood sculptures the human body was affected by its relationship to the object in space, the viewer was now confronted with the object's *absence*, represented by the negative form with traces of the modeling clay that had been scraped out. The earliest pieces in this new facet of production were made with plaster, but in 1986, Genzken turned to casting in concrete, which, unlike her earlier wood sculptures, which bear no trace of the production process, now through this material records every step in minute detail, to the point that the production becomes inseparable from the overall aesthetic.



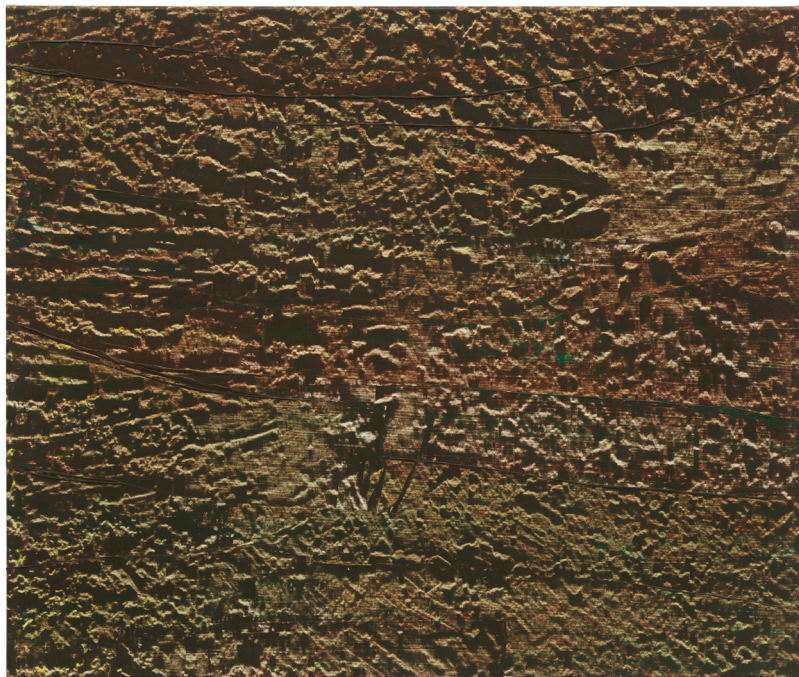
As Genzken was experimenting with the imprint of something formerly present in three-dimensional form in her sculptures, she followed this same principle in several unusual groups of works with methods that corresponded to an expansion of her viewpoint of sculpture as photography. Whereas photography had been employed to document activity in the comparable artistic genres of Conceptual and Land art, Genzken again took a somewhat different approach. The works from this period are meditations on surface as much as they are on the act of seeing, while also exploring the idea that the pictures are not merely symbolic but also are produced "on the basis of a physical connection to their referents" and are, therefore, indexical.²

The earliest series is the *Basic Research* paintings, which the artist would follow up with her *X-Ray* series (begun in 1989) and her *MLR* works (begun in 1992). The *Basic Research* paintings announce their own intent: to investigate the elemental structures underpinning art and perception. Genzken's approach is a deliberate reversal of traditional painting, where creation emerges not from brushwork but from contact, compression, and transcription. It is an approach that echoes her broader conceptual commitments, revealing the *Basic Research* paintings not as an outlier, but as a vital component of her ever-expanding artistic inquiry.

In doing so, Genzken aligns herself with the great spatial innovators of modernism, yet critiques them with a unique conceptual rigor. Her horizontal working method recalls Jackson Pollock's action painting, but without the heroic gesture. These works are not expressive splashes — they are quiet revelations. The absence of a central focus, the "all-over" field of texture and tone, positions Genzken within the lineage of postwar abstraction, while simultaneously offering a cool, almost mechanical counterpoint.

This exhibition offers an opportunity to reassess Genzken's standing not only as a sculptor of international renown but also as an artist who challenges the very definitions of painting, sculpture, architecture, and an object-based approach. In retrospect, the transformation in the mid-1980s reveals Genzken's remarkable ability to interrogate her art from multiple angles — formal, conceptual, and material. It also prefigures the highly varied, experi-





mental approach that would come to define her mature practice, in which no material is too humble, no method too provisional, and no boundary between media too fixed.

Isa Genzken: Basic Research invites a fresh view of her enduring impact on generations of artists exploring the blurred lines between media and meaning. Artists as diverse as Rachel Harrison to Danh Võ and Alex Da Corte to Torbjørn Rødland have mentioned Genzken's influence on shaping their understanding of their personal contemporary visual language.

Isa Genzken (b. 1948, Bad Oldesloe, Germany) is one of the most important and critically acclaimed artists of her generation. Genzken's work has been the subject of a number of major traveling museum surveys and includes those organized by Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2009 (traveled to Museum Ludwig, Cologne); Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, Germany, 2002 (traveled to Kunsthalle Zürich, 2003); The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1992 (traveled to Portikus, Frankfurt; Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels; Städtisches Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, both 1993); and Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn, Germany, 1988 (traveled to Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Switzerland; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, both 1989).

In 2014, *Isa Genzken: New Works* was presented at the Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Austria, and subsequently traveled later that year to the Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK), Frankfurt. In 2013, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, organized Genzken's first American museum survey, *Retrospective*, making it the most comprehensive presentation of her work to date, encompassing all media from the past forty years. The show traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and the Dallas Museum of Art in 2014. The present work was included in this major survey.

Other venues which have hosted important solo exhibitions include the Inverleith House, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (2014); Museion, Bolzano, Italy (2010); Camden Arts Center, London; Galerie im Taxispalais, Innsbruck; Secession, Vienna (all 2006); Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2002, organized by the Gesellschaft für Moderne Kunst on the occasion of the artist receiving the Wolfgang Hahn Prize); and Kunstverein Braunschweig, Germany (2000).

In 2007, the artist represented Germany at the 52nd Venice Biennale. Her work has been prominently featured in international biennials and group exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale (2015, 2003, 1993, and 1982); Skulptur Projekte Münster (2007, 1997, and 1987); and Documenta (2002, 1992, and 1982). In 2017, Genzken received the Goslarer Kaiserring (or the “Emperor’s Ring”) award from the city of Goslar. An accompanying solo exhibition was held at Mönchehaus Museum Goslar in Germany, in 2017-2018. In 2023, Genzken was honored at Neue Nationalgalerie with the major exhibition *75/75* celebrating the artist's 75th birthday, which showed a comprehensive survey of her sculptural practice, with 75 works included in all.

Work by the artist is represented in museum and public collections worldwide, including the Dallas Museum of Art; Gemeentemuseum, The Hague; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. Genzken lives and works in Berlin.



Notes:

- 1 Sabine Breitwieser, "The Characters of Isa Genzken: Between the Personal and the Constructive, 1970-1996" *Isa Genzken Retrospective*, MoMA, New York. pg. 14.
- 2 Rosalind E. Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 1," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA, The M.I.T. Press, 1986), 198.

List of illustrations:

- 1 Portrait of Isa Genzken.
- 2 Installation view, *Isa Genzken: Retrospective*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, November 23, 2013 – March 10, 2014.
- 3 Isa Genzken, *Basic Research*, 1991.
- 4 Installation view, *Isa Genzken. Skulpturen, Zeichnungen, Fotografien. Horst Schuler: Bilder*, Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, Germany.
- 5 Isa Genzken, *Birne (Pear)*, 1984. Generali Foundation Collection, Vienna.
- 6 Isa Genzken, *Basic Research*, 1989.
- 7 Isa Genzken, *Basic Research*, 1989.
- 8 Installation view, *Isa Genzken*, Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland, February 23 – April 28, 2019.
- 9 Isa Genzken, *Basic Research*, 1989.
- 10 Installation view, *Isa Genzken. Retrospective*, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX, September 14, 2014 – January 4, 2015.