



MARCH 2020

PAINTING SURPRISE AND WONDER

Is It You? | Katharina Grosse



Artist Katharina Grosse in the installation *Is It You?* (2020).
Photography by Mitro Hood.

As you enter the large gallery where Katharina Grosse's *Is It You?* is installed, you see a massive, draped fabric form. In some areas, the fabric is left unpainted, but the bursts of color—some disbursed, some densely enmeshed, and some just a light spray of droplets—hint at the possibility that there is more to this work than just the exterior. You walk around and see a narrow, vertical gap in the draped canvas. As you enter the gap, you are immediately surrounded by rich, glowing blues, oranges, yellows, greens, and reds that hang in mountain-like peaks where the work is suspended from the ceiling. Even the floor is covered in bright paint, applied over folded and crumpled fabric, adding to the sense of immersion in an entirely different world.

It's notable that you have to move around and into the work to have the full experience. The large scale, vivid colors, and inside-outside nature of the work engage your eyes, but also your body. And, importantly, you have to have a sense of curiosity; if you only glance around part of the work's outer skin, you will never see the vibrant, expressive painting inside the work.

The artist has stated that she has a special interest in provoking new ways of thinking:

I definitely want my painting to elicit questions about how the world could be different . . . I find this form of flexibility interesting. We desperately need it. Without it, our society gets stuck and can't solve its problems. Without this flexibility, we're not even in a position to recognize the kinds of questions we can ask.¹

Is It You? was created by Katharina Grosse and several preparators by sewing together pieces of fabric to create a 50,000-square-foot sheet that was then suspended from different points in the gallery ceiling. The artist then painted the canvas with acrylic paint using a spray gun with a compressor, which allows her to achieve the diverse range of painting effects present in the work.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Ask students to examine and discuss *Is It You?* and Katharina Grosse's quote in this resource. Have they ever entered a space or opened a container only to be surprised by what they find? The idea of stumbling into a magical place is a common theme in literature for children and young adults. How can they relate that to the experience visitors might have with *Is It You?* Why do they think these kinds of experiences are special? Invite students to make 3-D works with "surprise" interiors. This could be done with a variety of materials such as cardboard (shoeboxes are convenient), wire, fabric, paper, paint, and adhesives. What does the outside suggest? How does the viewer access the inside? How does the student create the element of surprise? What does the student hope the viewer will take away from the experience?

¹ Isabelle Graw, "On Painting: Katharina Grosse in Conversation with Isabelle Graw," in *Katharina Grosse* by Dan Cameron and Okwui Enwezor (New York: Gagosian, 2018), 277.



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Is It You?, 2020

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