

# Albert Oehlen «An Old Painting in SPirit» 30.05.-16.08.2015

Entitled *Abräumung* [Clearance], Albert Oehlen's first major institutional solo exhibition took place in Kunsthalle Zürich in 1987. Now, almost thirty years later, Kunsthalle Zürich presents a second installment of works by this German painter, who was born in 1954 and has been living in Appenzell for over a decade. Shown in conjunction for the first time, An Old Painting in Spirit brings together important works from the 1980s, two new painting cycles and a selection of about fifty rarely shown drawings. The installation in Kunsthalle Zürich is laid out as if it were a group exhibition. The aim is to present the variety in Oehlen's painting, making it apparent how he repeatedly subjects the medium to a stress test. Only when one steps up closer and takes a second look does the consistency of the painting process reveal itself.

The early brown-grey pictures, offset with mirrors, originate in the era of the "rediscovery" of painting in the late 1970s. This renewed interest emanated from the Italian Transavanguardia, the so-called "Neue Wilde" in Germany, Austria and Switzerland and also through American artists such as Julian Schnabel. All of it amounted to a big wave of expressive, figurative painting, which was no less celebrated than attacked. A "hunger for pictures" and a booming art market turned some artists into stars. Many have now been forgotten. In the case of others it was only later that it became apparent that they were concerned with something more than "savage" painting, Neo-Expressionism and sentiment. On the surface Oehlen seemed to be one of many, but it gradually became clear that he was working on a different project: His purpose was to examine painting by means of painting, to experiment with its options and to make space for it (and consequently us). Already in the 1980s this is hinted at through the pictures' titles, which are sometimes serious, sometimes ironic and sometimes cryptic. They appear to be explaining the work, but simultaneously undermine that expectation. Something similar can be said of the mirrors that are attached to the paintings. In an imaginable, simple and platitudinous way they extend the pictorial space so that everyone believes they are looking at a different picture. In this way these works precisely and laconically hook into the at the time passionately conducted debates around the question of painting and illusion.

The second group of works are large-scale collages from 2009 and 2010 in which Oehlen uses supermarket posters in lieu of brushes and paints. Is this really painting, and if so why? Or is something analogous to the manner of Photoshop being carried out? Is this Pre-Post-Internet art? Or is it about something completely different, namely the question of how much resistance found material has, to what extent it can be disempowered without it losing its potential. - And whether such potential (in this case, advertising) can be heaved into a different condition. The result is a series of large-format tableaus that lack any surreal effects (otherwise customary for collages) but are unique non-figurative forks, which—unlike the paintings from the 1980s—hardly make up any image at all, as if one could no longer see the wood for the trees.

The third group is a series of recent paintings, which are shown here for the first time. Tree-like black forms spread out on red-white or blue-white backgrounds, unromantically and harsh in style. While the early pictures and large-scale collages approach or emerge from the outer world, these latest works appear to be units enclosed within themselves and therefore independent. They are juxtaposed with wall-covering egg cartons in the upper exhibition rooms, which were brought in to improve the space acoustics for the opening night concert by the trio Wertmüller-Pliakas-Wittwer. At the same time they insulate the room so that, like the tree pictures, it has become a unit cut off from the outside world. That has something calming, but also disturbing about it.

Kunsthalle  
Zürich

Limmatstrasse 270  
CH-8005 Zürich

# Concert / LP

With Michael Wertmüller (drums), Marino Pliakas (e-bass), Stephan Wittwer (e-guitar)

- 29.05., 8:30–9:30 pm

The exhibition will be documented on [www.kunsthallezurich.ch](http://www.kunsthallezurich.ch). Accompanying the exhibition, the opening concert will be released on LP.

## TheorY & Education

### Tours

The art of Albert Oehlen challenges the medium of painting, and our understanding of it. The theory and education program of his exhibition *An Old Painting in Spirit* seeks to challenge the format of the guided tour, which has been declared dead and undying at once in a similar way to painting. Thus we will talk while taking a walk with the artist, a number of special guests, our education team and—last but not least—our visitors:

With Albert Oehlen (Artist)

- 31.05., 2:00–3:00 pm

With Arthur Fink (Independent Curator) & Emil Klein (Artist)

- 04.06., 6:30–7:30 pm

With Arthur Fink & Urban Zellweger (Artist)

- 11.06., 6:30–7:30 pm

With Thomas Grötz (Author and Artist)

- 14.06., 4:30–5:30 pm (Contemporary Art Day)

With Arthur Fink & Fatuma Osman (Art Historian)

- 18.06., 6:30–7:30 pm

With Niels Olsen & Fredi Fischli (Co-Directors Exhibition-Department ETH Zürich)

- 21.06., 2:00–3:00 pm

With Albert Oehlen (Artist)

- 25.06., 6:30–7:30 pm

- 28.06., 2:00–3:00 pm

With Yannic Joray (Artist and Curator) & Petra Gibler (Painting Restorer)

- 02.07., 6.30–7:30 pm

With Yannic Joray & Benjamin Saurer (Artist)

- 05.07., 2:00–3:00 pm

With Daniel Baumann (Director) & Special guest

- 16.08., 2:00–3:00 pm

### Book TV #06 / #07

Books' presentation and public TV-recording (English), a project by Géraldine Beck

- 09.07., 6:00–7:30 pm. Free entry. In English

Book TV is a series of publicly recorded online episodes that present various publications.

Selected by the individual speakers a range of thematic printed matter will be introduced to the audience. The speakers are seated at a table while the material spread out in front of them is recorded from above and projected in real-time on a screen. Spoken word and visual impression merge into an experience of the publications that approximates a TV format.

The individual episodes of about 30 minutes can be viewed later on our webpage.

Programs for kids, schools, and families: Paint your idea!

Albert Oehlen paints pictures; they are fairly different; as if he wasn't just one painter but many. We could say: This is because he paints ideas. Those are also really different. But how does an idea look like? Does it have a form even? Does it have color? Is it a drawing? Or an image? Is an idea a figure, or just a long line that never ends? Is it pretty? Ugly? Or both? Does an idea have perspective, or is it flat? What is that for you, "an idea"? How does it look for you? How would you paint it?

Do-it-yourself Folder:

By Carmen Tobler (book designer). To take along or download.

This summer we offer a small but special folding card with images from the exhibition for kids, teens, and anybody to take home. On the back of the card is a blank space for your own ideas. So get yourself some paint and brush, paint your own ideas and send them to us!

Kids Vernissage:

Exhibition of children's artwork (see folder)

- 28.06., 3:00 pm. Deadline: 25.06.

Address: Kunsthalle Zürich, Limmatstrasse 270, 8005 Zürich.

Elegibility: Younger than 18 years, contact information, submissions no larger than A3.

All submissions of your own new art works will be shown in the education space of Kunsthalle Zürich. All participants, your friends and families are invited to your own opening on Sunday, June 28, at 3 pm. Before, at 2 pm, Albert Oehlen will give a tour through his exhibition (free entry).

Family Afternoon:

With Brigit Meier (Art Educator)

- 07.06., 2:00–3:30 pm

No registration, entry fee 20.- CHF / family.

Together with kids, teens and families we explore the exhibition in a playful way.

Workshops for school classes:

With Brigit Meier (Art Educator)

- 90 min., Mon. or Fri., 9:30 am–5:00 pm, free entry

Reservation on request: [meier@kunsthallezurich.ch](mailto:meier@kunsthallezurich.ch)

We visit the exhibition together and explore it creatively in our education workshop.

Please list 2–3 preferred dates, the name of your school, size of the class, and your mobile number.

Opening Hours

Tue / Wed / Fri 11 am–6 pm, Thu 11 am–8 pm, Sat / Sun 10 am–5 pm, Mon closed

Please also consult the up-to-date information on our website [www.kunsthallezurich.ch](http://www.kunsthallezurich.ch)

Kunsthalle Zürich receives generous funding from:

