David Ostrowski
The Critic

May 23–August 23, 2026

David Ostrowski (*1981, lives and works in Cologne) pursues a painterly practice that oscillates between restraint and poetic expression, where suggestion and elaboration enter a dynamic interplay. Ostrowski works in series, among which the “F” series is particularly seminal. At first glance, its pared-down surfaces appear minimal, yet they are interwoven with layers and densities that bear the traces of a complex painterly process.

His solo exhibition „The Critic“ at Kunstverein Heilbronn explores the notion of self-referential critique and the critical demands placed on one’s own artistic production. Borrowing its title from a 1990s American cartoon series, the exhibition invokes the figure of the relentless reviewer and directs that critical gaze inward.

At a moment in which art criticism no longer functions as a stable mediator of meaning or artistic discourse, Ostrowski integrates critique directly into the structure of his practice. Throughout the exhibition, he stages the various actors of art criticism as pictorial “characters” within the space — such as „The Critic“ or „The Artist“ — transforming painting into a site where criticism becomes an active material rather than an external judgment.

This dynamic is most evident in the painting „Starring“, in which Ostrowski replaces the name of Jay Sherman, the protagonist of the cartoon series „The Critic“, with his own and casts himself as the central figure of Coming Attractions — the fictional television program in which Sherman reviews upcoming films. Through this gesture, the artist merges the roles of painter, critic, performer, and subject, exposing artistic production as a continuous cycle of projection, expectation, and self-assessment.

Other works, such as „Die Musik“, extend this logic formally. Its empty musical staves raise the question of how a composition comes into being. Since no notes are prescribed, the viewer becomes the conductor of the image and thus an active co-creator of the work. The exhibition presents painting as an ongoing negotiation between expectation and refusal, vulnerability and resistance. Ostrowski transforms the act of critique from a judgment imposed from outside into a continuous internal dialogue, revealing the process of artistic production as both psychologically charged and fundamentally unresolved.

A catalogue featuring a text by Hans-Christian Dany will accompany the exhibition, designed by CTMS and published by Snoeck.

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