Jan Merta: Gegenraum

Opening: Thursday, 22nd October 2026, 6–8 pm
Duration: 23rd October until 28th November 2026

Galerie Martin Janda presents the fifth solo exhibition by the renowned Czech painter **Jan Merta** from October 23 to November 28, 2026.

Jan Merta's painting moves between figuration and abstraction. His works revolve around personal memories, reflections on his own position as an artist, as well as an attempt to orient himself and find his place in different spaces. From an almost enigmatic visual language, a tension emerges in which the boundaries between object and person, between concrete appearance and mental conception, become increasingly blurred.

Merta's work can't be described unequivocally as either figurative or abstract. It occupies an in-between space that extends not only to formal composition but also to a narrative potential. Starting from seemingly familiar objects, forms, and situations, the paintings develop a poetic openness that defies a single interpretation. The recognizable becomes the starting point for a train of thought in which different levels of meaning overlap and new connections emerge.

The term *Gegenraum* (counter-space) can be understood in the context of Joseph Beuys' idea of "anti-art": not as a contradiction, but as a counterpart, as a complementary relationship in the sense of symmetry. At the same time, the exhibition title *Gegenraum* refers to the central work *Protiprostor / Gegenraum* (2023–2026), in which this principle is carried forward on a painterly level. In reference to informal painting, spontaneous brushstrokes become connecting elements between two objects. Through the use of text within the image, these relationships are detached from a clear art-historical context. The painting establishes its own space in which formal, linguistic, and associative levels intertwine.

In *Promítání / Projektion* (2023–2026), the pictorial space opens up into a landscape: a wall appears to have been shifted into the outdoor space and, at the same time, transformed into a projection surface. The cinematic reference created by the expansion of the space in front of the screen explores the relationship between projection and reality, between the moving image and painting.

While works like *Promítání / Projektion* (2023–2026) or *Úzké dveře / Die schmale Tür* (The narrow door) (2026) expand the pictorial space, the space in *Jsem strážcem tvého dech II / I am the Guardian of Your Breath* (2024) remains hidden from our view, even though we know it exists.
"Everything we see in the paintings could be a dream. A dream is also a counter-space. Or is it a projection of our thoughts and memories onto a canvas? The projection is a space that does not exist, and yet we perceive it as a space—perhaps as a counter-space." (Jan Merta)

With the exhibition *Gegenraum*, Jan Merta continues his exploration of the possibilities of painting. His paintings create constellations in which the familiar loses its taken-for-granted nature and new,

indefinable relationships emerge. In this context, *Gegenraum* refers not only to a spatial contrast but also to a conceptual space beyond unambiguous categorizations—a space in which perception, memory, and imagination intertwine.

Jan Merta, born 1952 in Sumperk (CZ), lives and works in Prague and České Lhotice (CZ).