

Fig.

3-27-6 2F Kita-otsuka, Toshima-ku, Tokyo 170-0004
fig@ffiigg.org / www.ffiigg.org
+81.90.7882.4546

Fig. 7
David Ostrowski
Leeres Wasser (Anti Drawings)

April 9 – May 14, 2023

Opening reception will be held on April 9 Sunday, 14:00–17:00

For inquiries, please contact us at fig@ffiigg.org

Fig. is pleased to announce the upcoming solo exhibition *Leeres Wasser (Anti Drawings)* by Cologne-based artist David Ostrowski, on view from April 9–May 14, 2023. The show marks the first solo presentation of Ostrowski's work in Japan and features all nine paintings from the completed body of works *Anti Drawings* (2021), which have not been publicly exhibited to date.

Characterized by a reduced color palette, David Ostrowski's practice engages with gesture and imperfection and challenges the ontology of painting. In his deceptively straightforward painterly language, rich with metaphor, he tries to trigger the greatest possible emotional effects and energies with the fewest artistic means.

The displayed works, seemingly monochrome surfaces with delicate, broken lines running across them, continue Ostrowski's exploration of reduction, but are distinguished by the fact that the visible lines on the canvas are the result of recesses in the painting process: The first layer applied quickly and evenly to the unprimed canvas, is an acrylic gray from a tube. Just as quickly, a broad brush was used to overpaint with lighter tones, leaving a gray line that runs through the picture, occasionally interrupted. The coloration is somewhere between silky and creamy white. The canvases are bordered on the outside by remnants of wooden baseboards, reinforcing the fragility and open porosity of the surface and the object-like character of the works. The series was created around 2021, in a short sequence of activities, like a thought that had to be implemented immediately, like a technical drawing.

The subtitle of the exhibition *Anti Drawings*, placed in brackets, suggests a negation, an obliteration—an antidote to drawing.

But what does “anti” mean in Japan? Considering the high esteem in which emptiness, nothingness, is held—along with fire, water, earth, and wind, the fifth of the basic elements in Japanese philosophy—it could even be the idealization of a drawing as a double negation: after all, there, drawing is the art form that was given the representative function associated with painting in the West, before the latter was thrown back on its own terms by modernism. At the same time, painting became an unbreakable ruin, the undead, around which Ostrowski also creeps both cheerfully and restlessly.

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Negation is a fundamental theme in the work of David Ostrowski: Everything he paints (or, in the sense of unlearning, un-paints) balances on the borderline between elegance and impertinence; he structurally subverts obligations, protocols, and other views of painting, from spray-can drawing to imagined left-handedness. What is striking here are the many ways in which constant negation has been approached from all sides.

If Ostrowski is always trying to find new zero points in his work, and thus at the same time evading any attribution, then here too his own history remains as the final anchor: *Leeres Wasser* leads directly to his grandmother, the author and satirist Krystyna Zywulska. The resistance fighter born as Sonia Landau wrote her memoirs from the Warsaw Ghetto under this title. The paradox it contains goes back to her own mother's habit, for lack of food, of putting a pot of water on the gas cooker every day in the ghetto in order to simulate at least a vestige of normality. Even here, in this place, she found the grotesque as well as the humorous—perhaps it kept her alive. Toward the end of her life, she became a painter. Ostrowski learned from her, quite practically, in play. Perhaps play itself, like negation, is the second constant in this work. *Leeres Wasser*, silent and dark, also sounds like a *kōan*, an Eastern form of riddle—the sound of the left hand clapping would be another. Like his grandmother, Ostrowski remains a satirist, albeit under very different conditions. With this homage, he finds an open space, and moves on to the next.¹

Accompanying the exhibition, the catalog *Leeres Wasser (Anti Drawings)* with a text by Martin Germann in English, Japanese, and German has been published by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König.

David Ostrowski (*1981 in Cologne) lives and works in Cologne. From 2004-2009 Ostrowski studied at the Düsseldorf Art Academy under Albert Oehlen. Since 2022 he holds a professorship for painting at the State Academy of Fine Arts Karlsruhe. He participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions internationally. Solo exhibitions include Ramiken, New York (2023); Sprüth Magers, Berlin (2021); Lady Helen, London (2020 with Angharad Williams); Avant-Garde Institute, Warsaw (2020 with Tobias Spichtig); Jir Sandel, Copenhagen (2020); Leeahn Gallery, Seoul (2020); Sundogs, Paris (2019); Piece Unique, Cologne (2019); Sprüth Magers, London (2018); Wschód, Warsaw (2018); Halle 9 Kirowwerk, Leipzig (2017); Blueproject Foundation, Barcelona (2017); Leopold Hoesch Museum, Düren (2016 with Michail Pirgelis); Arken Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen (2015); Kunstraum Innsbruck (2015); Rubell Family Collection, Miami (2014); Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin (2014), among others. Group exhibitions include, among others, Catherine Zeta, Cologne (2022); Akademie der Künste, Berlin (2021); Fuhrwerkswaage, Cologne (2021); Triest, New York (2020); Melange, Cologne (2020); Pio Pico, Los Angeles (2020); Galerie Bernhard, Zurich (2019); Karst, Plymouth (2019); DuMont Kunsthalle, Cologne (2019); Braunsfelder, Cologne (2019); Aishti Foundation, Beirut (2018); pløt, Amsterdam (2017); Museum of Modern Art, Gunma (2017); Fondazione Carriero, Milan (2016); M Woods Museum, Beijing (2015); Halle für Kunst & Medien, Graz (2014); and Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2014).

¹ The press release consists of various excerpts from Germann, Martin: *David Ostrowski: Empty Water* in: *David Ostrowski: Empty Water (Anti Drawings)*, Fig. Tokyo, April 9–May 14, 2023 [Exhibition catalog], Cologne 2023.