

Press Release

Markus Oehlen

2 December 2023 – 13 January 2024

Opening December 1st, 6 – 8 pm

“Von hinten durch die Brust ins Auge.” This German figure of speech has been used by Markus Oehlen to describe his own practice. The point of this rather brutal and very physical description on how to get to a goal would be: to chose a tedious, painful and indirect way.

Refusal has been his modus operandi and, perhaps, a survival strategy from early childhood onward. It prevailed when Oehlen studied art at the Düsseldorfer Kunstakademie where he performed preliminary experiments with photocopying and collage. When the 1980s hit with their painting wave, he also took on the canvas. But the dominating style of Neo-Expressionism, with its anachronistic orientation, didn't jive well with Oehlen. Punk at heart and heavily inspired by Pop and Op Art, Oehlen started exploring painting using restriction rather than free expression: painting by number, using the ruler, using drawing and photos on the canvas. The motifs would be collaged and layered, often incorporating silkscreen, to create an illusion of softness, as if from a traditional painter's brush. In this manner, he attained his goal to create vividly painterly results through a process which is more cerebral than painterly.

A back injury that left him hospital bound and bedridden for a long period of time inspired Oehlen to experiment with filters on his phone. Myriads of motifs would be created and became the material for wallpapers, artist books, and also new paintings. Since the very physical act of silk screening had become unattainable, Oehlen came up with a more DIY technique of generating depth in his paintings. Using a thick layer of acrylic paint and combing it through a rake, he incorporated lines and shapes onto the canvas.

Recently, a new layer has been incorporated into Oehlen's practice: dots of thick and gooey paint, almost like leftovers from a painting process. Originally created outside of the canvas, they are left to dry on plastic and only later applied to the painting, like stickers. The dots reflect the process of painting, from pointillism to Polke, but refute the idea of the genius and his brush stroke.

His third solo show at Karma International displays a number of new paintings executed in the aforementioned described process. In line with his tongue-in-cheek humor, their titles are witty word plays. These works are combined with a wallpaper and two Wickelbilder from the learly 1990s, which were created using rope.

Markus Oehlen (b. 1956, Krefeld, Germany) lives and works in Munich. Selected exhibitions throughout his decades-long career include Museum of Modern Art, New York; Kunstsammlung Chemnitz; a two-person exhibition with Albert Oehlen at Museum Abteiburg, Mönchengladbach, Germany; Hamburger Bahnhof Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; and at the ZKM Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, Germany. His works are in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Saint Louis Art Museum, Sammlung zeitgenössischer Kunst der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Kunsthalle Weishaupt, and others. He attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Düsseldorf, Germany.