

Waldemar Zimbelmann: Elliptical Thinking

88 Walker St ▪ Oct 5 - Nov 9, 2024



Harkawik is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition of Kazakhstan-born, Karlsruhe-based painter Waldemar Zimbelmann in the United States, and his first with the gallery. *Elliptical Thinking* is an exhibition that might be measured in two distinct timeframes. The first is the sort of time that is evident in marks on a kitchen wall, where a child has stood year after year so a parent can record their height. This is a glacial time, measured not in the birth and death of specific people but in that of entire species; a time in which colors are tied to pigments as old as the vibrant plants and minerals that produce them. On the other hand, we experience pockets of decisive action, not unlike the window of several hours in which residents of a small town wait anxiously to learn whether or not they will evacuate in the face of an oncoming tornado or hurricane, their fate sealed in the subtle shifting temperatures of the Atlantic, or the delicate pockets of air that ripple above them. This is the second—a fast, nervy, urgent and surprising sort of time.

To encounter one of Zimbelmann's swirling apparitions is to experience both the painting's gestalt and a kind of

evidence, an accumulation of marks, methodologies, and historical trajectories, not least of all, his own: the many paintings he did not make, locked inside the one he did. They live in his studio for years, through winters and birthdays, and fade occasionally into the white noise of compounding days where visual communication is subsumed by the mundane and practical. Then one day, they speak to him again. They emerge having lost a shade of innocence, their being tinted with an eloquent intensity that is understood by a father, yet difficult to explain, for these inner adjustments fall between language and color, and can only be noticed by a persistent gaze. *Elliptical Thinking* is a survey of these moments—the day a cheek becomes sharper and opens a space between the psychological and the abstract where the mind continues to see something or someone that is no longer visible.

Zimbelmann works automatically, beginning with the face. His figures embrace each other via a materials-first process of corporeal amalgamation, and they appear to haunt one another in a manner that denies the picture's first narrative. In *Eloquence of the Eyes*, a duo clad in shades of mustard and algae emerge jauntily from a corner, their heads aloft on the breeze like bowling balls tied to a billowing curtain, hands clasping in friendship or fiendish covenant. They seem to be vexed, each by a singular lingering phantasm. But why do we assume the foreground is a moment in the present? What if these are children whose adult selves are bursting forth in hypothesis? Closer inspection reveals as many as six additional visages tucked away into the spaces opened in their wake. In *Eyes of the Nightbird*, another duo are immediately legible; one saddled with a preternaturally supine ancestor whose body terminates in two heads, while another is wedged unceremoniously between a bedframe, a wall, the bounds of the picture plane, and a woman in an apron. Indeed, time spent with Zimbelmann's compositions obviates the need to trace narrative. These are works of immense articulateness and subtlety. Color, form, narrative, identity and gestural action seem to emerge organically in a kind of unfolding of increasing amplitude and intensity.

No painting demonstrates the intense refinement and focus evident in Zimbelmann's recent work more fully than *Gently Forwards Falling*. Here, a patch of wormlike green marks envelope three figures, whose ensnared limbs seem to suggest a single beast moving in an encumbered tread. Are we seeing single moments of an individual journey, overlaid and embellished? Alternate vantage points of the same incident? The painting's enigmatic qualities are heightened by several key moments of frantic reworking that emerge only after several hours in its presence. In *The Black Color, The Blue Color, The Dark Green, The Sky*, Zimbelmann references a poem by Ernst Herbeck which ends with the word "Elleno," one of Herbeck's own making. It is used to describe the sky, a thing so real as to evade rhetoric. In *Tadoma*, we see communication as feeling; its title references a procedure where the listener feels the vibrations of the speaker's throat.

Zimbelmann's beings seem to emerge like smoke rolling down a staircase, or moist fog settling on a pane of glass. These are people Zimbelmann has encountered, or sees every day, and they're immortalized in crucial moments, where gesture and facial expression become sharp but ambiguous, like the face made when an adult turns to speak to a child, only to realize they are no longer a child themselves. Zimbelmann mixes paint directly on the canvas, and white spaces are formed when excessive heat is applied to layers of dried pigments, so that the final color emerges in a manner not unlike forgetting the plot of a cherished novel. In the tectonic space of these paintings, imperceptibly small details decide everything.