

Oliver Osborne

*Ooh!*

24 April - 31 May 2025

Union Pacific is delighted to present ‘Ooh!’, an exhibition of paintings by Oliver Osborne (b. 1985, Edinburgh), which forms the artist’s second solo show with the gallery. Encompassing both figuration and abstraction, Osborne uses repetition, as well as tweaks in composition and chiaroscuro, to excavate new images from sustained, often art historical fixations. In this sense he explores painting’s malleability over time, as well as its relationship to the personal—his subjects range from recognisably appropriated figures of portraiture to his own family. Spanning such variations as silk-screen, monochromatic abstraction and photorealistic oil painting, the artist’s practice is never constrained. And although he may paint a singular subject multiple times, each rendition is never the same.

This exhibition brings together seven new portrait paintings and a text painting made in the last year, alongside a large painting, *Niemetzstraße* (2014-23), which was first shown in 2015 and re-worked in 2023 with the addition of a second panel. The title for this work comes from the address of the artist’s studio in Berlin, where he has worked since relocating from London in 2014. This work is a notable example of his early practice, wherein the apparent simplicity of the image obscures the fact that it was a significant feat of technical screen-printing for the artist at the time. Stumbling out of a pub in blurry inebriation, one figure warns his comrade against driving in his compromised condition. It is both comic and pathetic, as much cliché as drama. The apparent discrepancy in style between this work and the recent portraits is not unusual in Osborne’s work. By switching between painterly languages, he opens up a space that allows his painting to carry multiple readings.

Portraits, which have become an important focus of the artist’s recent work, combine images appropriated from art history (including Filippino Lippi’s *Portrait of a Youth* (c. 1485),

Robert Campin’s *Portrait of a Fat Man* (c. 1425), and Giovannia Boltraffio’s *Francesco Sforza (il Duchetto)* (c. 1495)) alongside, and sometimes combined with, portraits of his own sons. These paintings are built up in layers, with regular revisions to their surfaces, leaving visible traces of sanding or scraping. They are finally finished with glazing techniques that allow for deft experiments in light and colour. Osborne has talked of wanting the image to “really be *in* the painting”, as if it has been buried in the surface and revealed through the making.

The title of the exhibition, ‘Ooh!’, is a word that changes meaning according to inflection - how we say alters how we mean it - but confined to text and devoid of context, as it is in the painting *Ooh!* (2025), it is rendered mute. If this work is a key to the show, then it is one that points to potential meanings without committing to a singular reading. The double O also echoes the artist’s initials, forming an oblique kind of self-portrait. Painting is a process of fixing an image, of sealing it, of stopping it. But it is also one full of doubt and indecision. Resonant with allusions to time, these works plot a course between scepticism and sincerity, which creates space for the multiple possibilities of painting.

Selected solo exhibitions include: *Comic Sans*, Francis Irv, New York (2025); Fondazione ICA Milano (upcoming, 2025); *Botticelli*, Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin (2024); *Grund und Figur*, Marc Jancou, Saanen (2024); *Manganese Blue*, Galeria Pelaires, Palma de Mallorca (2023); *Recent Painting*, Tanya Leighton, Los Angeles (2023); *Mantegna’s Dead Christ*, Union Pacific, London (2022); *Portrait of a Fat Man for Düsseldorf*, JVDW, Düsseldorf, Germany (2022); *Der Kleine Angsthase*, Braunsfelder, Cologne, Germany (2020); *Birth, Education, Leisure, Death*, Giò Marconi, Milan, Italy (2019) & *Bonnie*, Bonner Kunstverein, Germany (2018).