ILENIA

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Checklist

Emil Michael Klein
Outline
29 May – 05 September 2026
Private view: 28 May 2026, 6 – 8 pm

"Some of his lines seem to leave the canvas, become invisible for us, and travel to a parallel universe where the distorted echo of the question Why painting? is still audible. But space-time curvature reshapes the lines and sends them back to the terrestrial canvas, where they become paintings that can do everything."
- Peter Fischli

In *Outline*, Emil Michael Klein's second solo exhibition at Ilenia, the artist presents a new series of paintings, a curtain and a monotype, that synthesize his practice to four essential elements: line, colour, surface, and form.

Coming to abstraction from a background in folk art, sculpture and graffiti, Klein's work has long been rooted in repetition, process, and instinct. After more than two decades of making, this body of work reflects a distilled understanding of what continues to drive his practice. As Klein says, "I'm realizing that it's mostly about process and movement". In *Outline*, that realization becomes both subject and method.

The line paintings operate as maps of motion, tracing space and time across the canvas. Klein's lines loop, drift, and gather across the picture plane, emerging from the background as new layers of colour are constantly added and removed from the surface. By doing so, the works create shifting spatial relationships that feel at once instinctive and deeply intentional.

A new attentiveness to colour and composition has emerged in recent paintings. Pigments are intentionally mixed on the palette and subsequently layered, at times over a number of years, as the artist constantly reworks the paintings in his studio, keeping them in a constant state of flux. The result is both raw and meditative, with a heightened focus on rhythm and spatial tension.

These concerns extend into the curtain, where painting becomes inseparable from objecthood. The vertical fabric panels sewn onto canvas suggest both a surface and a threshold: they imply concealment and theatricality while insisting on their own material presence. Here, the curtain operates as both painting and architectural intervention.

The artist's sculptural background is crucial to this expanded understanding of painting. In sculpture, surfaces wrap around form; similarly, his paintings often seem to extend beyond their own edges, questioning where an image actually ends- at the painted mark, the edge of the canvas, or the fold around the stretcher.

Ultimately, Klein strips painting down to its most direct language. The line becomes evidence of time, movement, and attention, or perhaps a record of the body navigating space. What remains is not an image of something fixed, but an active trace of becoming. As Paul Klee put it "The line is a dot that went for a walk".

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BIOGRAPHY

Emil Michael Klein (b. 1982, Munich) obtained an MFA in visual arts from the École cantonale d'art de Lausanne (ECAL) (2013), previously having completed his studies at the Academy of Art and Design in Basel (2005).

Klein has exhibited internationally, with recent solo presentations including: Outline, Ilenia, London (2026); VORHANG, der TANK, Basel (2026); Gemälde, Galeria Federico Vavassori, Milan (2025); Paintings & Sculptures, Bridget Donahue, New York (2024); Emil Michael Klein, Galerie Francesca Pia, Zürich (2023–24); Wall Painting, Ilenia, London (2023); Cross Paintings, Galeria Federico Vavassori, Milan (2021); Mono Cross, Galerie Francesca Pia, Zürich (2020); Curtains, Galeria Federico Vavassori, Milan (2019); Darkotic, Kunsthalle Zürich (2017); Emil Michael Klein, Museum im Bellpark, Kriens (2017); Red, Blue and Black Lines, Gaudel de Stampa, Paris (2017); Blue Line Paintings, Gaudel de Stampa, Paris (2015); Art Unlimited, Art Basel (2013); Signed Abstraction, Galeria Federico Vavassori, Milan (2012); Wanda, Luis Campaña, Berlin (2010); and Art39 (Statements), Nicolas Krupp, Basel (2009). Current and recent group exhibitions include: Ganz kleine, Galeria Federico Vavassori, Milan (2024); Teil 3: Albtraum Malerei, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne (2024); The 3-second Rule Of Thumb, Galeria Federico Vavassori, Milan (2023–24); Part 1: Welcoming the Space, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne (2023); MONOTYPES, Edition VFO, Kunsthalle Zürich (2023); Recent Acquisitions and Eternal Loves – Part I, Nicoletta Fiorucci Collection, La Rose de France, Monte-Carlo (2023); Stop Painting, curated by Peter Fischli, Fondazione Prada, Venice (2021); After Bob Ross – Beauty is Everywhere, Museum im Bellpark, Kriens (2020); Sammlung Longtang, Synnika, Frankfurt (2019); Lampen, Galerie Francesca Pia, Zürich (2018); GLÜCKLICH IST DIESER ORT!, Istituto Svizzero, Milan (2016); Tell the Children, La Salle de bains, Lyon (2012); Wallpower, Claudia Gröflin, Zürich (2010); and The Line is a Lonely Hunter, New Jerseyy, Basel (2008).

Klein's work is included in the collection of Fondazione Prada, Milano, Italy; Bechtler Siftung, Uster, Switzerland; Centre National des Arts Plastiques (CNAP), Paris, France; Kunstmuseum Bern, Bern, Switzerland; Kunstmuseum Wallis, Sion, Swizterland; Museum Im Bellpark, Kriens, Switzerland.