

KSuL22svwBxgJ2Z

David Ostrowski Oliver Osborne

June 22 – September 18 2021

Forgot your password?

When we had the chance of presenting this duo show of David Ostrowski and Oliver Osborne, I thought it could be like the “chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table” that Lautréamont talks about. Something beautiful, he says. Because in fact, according to himself, Ostrowski’s paintings are about beauty. Or it could be as weird as David Bowie and Bing Crosby singing *Little Drummer* together. I’m exaggerating. And then I remembered that Fellini and Bergman were friends. Perhaps that’s what dialogue is about: talking about the same thing in different ways. From different angles.

Although, to be honest, the two artists share a certain common aesthetic in the use of the monochrome background, the ambiguity of writing, and the incorporation of images and materials from contemporary popular culture. Osborne’s monochrome and comic series - and even some from his rubber plant series (*Rubber Plant (Bar)* or *Rubber Plant (Flight)*) - echo a path towards narrative interpretation we find too in Ostrowski’s work. It is no coincidence that Ad Reinhardt is often quoted when discussing their works. There is obviously a whole heritage of what has been called “the death of painting” and a certain reflection on the “non-representative, non-subjective, non-imagistic” art that the American painter defends. But they do it with a completely antagonistic approach. Or, to be precise, in a complementary way as two travelers approaching the same conceptual territory from different borders, meeting some way in the middle. It’s the territory of image

and interpretation; the metaphysical search for an outdated *mimesis* and the game of contemporary visuality. A certain formalism that tries to respond to Greenberg with an approach that is neither merely critical nor simply carefree. A kind of way out of modernity paradox that shows that “strategic resistance against the search of meaning”, as Karin Pernegger puts it.

Because what it here at stake is language. Painting itself and that risk of the discourse in being “the only semiotic system that has the power of interpreting the other significant systems and interpreting itself”, as Roland Barthes puts it. Trying to paint in the same way as Flaubert was trying to write “a book about nothing”, about writing itself. This nothingness is what we discover in Oliver Osborne’s rubber plant series. Not that he doesn’t paint a thing. On the contrary, he creates a series of rubber plants with more than excellent resemblance and an impeccable technique, titling them with a date on which he may have completed them - even if he probably didn’t finish them in a single day. These very precise images play with some concept like photographic reproductibility, repetition as a meme or the design-like aesthetics of advertisement. But we have all these possible topics (and more) in forms that seem to saturate the frame of vision and turn out to be representations of daily and banal objects. The same thing happens with Ostrowski, whose nothingness is more on the side of an expressive and elusive abstraction. A gestural brushstroke that invites us to imagine something but without ceasing to impose itself as a deaf matter. The dialogue works precisely in that approach to the limits of the painting itself from two very different horizons.

The question raised here for both (and even more with the dialogue) is close to the “ambivalent parent/child relationship with both modernism and postmodernism” of many contemporary painters, as explained by Terry R. Myers. Metaphysics - that’s the real name of modernism - always ends up catching somehow. What are these plants and these lines? We look for what is hidden behind, that unveiled truth (*Alētheia*), and the plants that already look like still lives, or On Kawara’s work,

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they mean more than they are, just like Van Gogh's peasant shoes analyzed by Heidegger. Painting hides and restores, says Derrida, and Ostrowski's abstract canvas become a veil of the unreachable truth - a very platonic idea present in his last solo show at Sprüth Magers Berlin - when they only are [Derridian] "traces" of an impossible unique significant. But maybe they are just lines and rubber plants after all. We have to be literal. But "I can't take anything too literal seriously", Ostrowski said once. That's the exact definition of irony; that is, of a tangent meaning, a double meaning. That is to say of the slippery meaning, undecidable (Kurt Godel), uncertain (Heisenberg). This is how I see Ostrowski and Osborne's paintings. Proposals in the edge of the undecidable that plays with contemporary visual practice. Are these paintings only representations of lines and plants? I don't know. They are also time and color. They are moments - painters only paint gone moments - that perhaps no longer mean anything.

I dream of two people visiting *KSuL22svwBxgJ2Z*. One says to the other: "My child can do this" "That's 19th century still life painting", answer the other. The struggle between painting as virtuosity or transgression. As sense or technique. As representation or matter. *KSuL22svwBxgJ2Z* deactivates these two critical asymptotes. It cancels them in a way.

For me, a good criteria to know if I like a painting is that I have strictly nothing more to say about it. Nothing to hold on to. And the thing is, everything in me, as a critic, as a curator, as a writer, pulls towards language, towards explanation. I know that a particular work has something real to say when my words are tautological. Or when they only refer to the technique: here, this hidden motif in the leaves, the yellowish spray tip, the perfect blurring of green, the layer of white that hides the secret behind the curtain... Exegesis demands explanations so as not to have to accept silence.

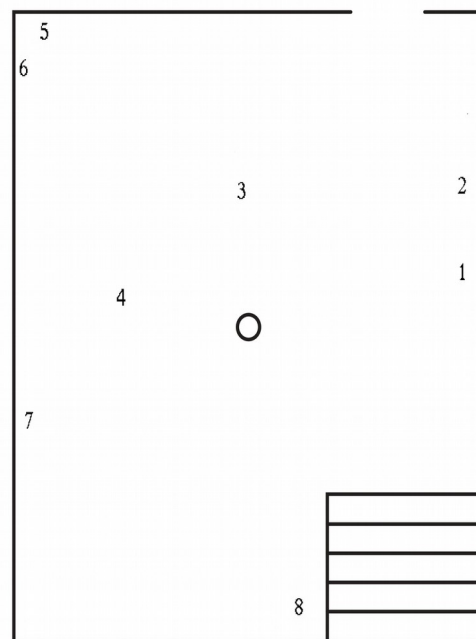
In front of numbers, I want to decipher the secret, I try to make sense of it. I start to interpret and try to find the code that allows me to unravel the password.

KSuL22svwBxgJ2Z. That's a password. But a password of what? There must be a reason. David and Oliver explained to me one day. At the beginning. Some time ago. But I forgot now. Maybe in the same exact way David claims to "remember nothing of what causes him to paint a picture". I have to keep looking to remember what the password means. If it means anything.

Now I look at those letters and numbers for what they are: letters and numbers. No signs. No messages. No hidden issues. No secret hide somewhere in the language. Just *KSuL22svwBxgJ2Z*.

And I like that idea that paintings has to be looked at as a password of which we have forgotten the meaning. Or the use.

Text: A. Le Genissel



1, 3, 4, 5- David Ostrowski. *F (Design Object)*, 2021. Acrylic and lacquer on canvas, wood

2, 6, 7, 8 - Oliver Osborne *4.3.2020, 30.5.2020, 22.2.2020, 5.5.2020* (All 2020) Oil on linen