

GAGOSIAN



ALBERT OEHLEN

Tramonto Spaventoso

April 22–June 5, 2021

456 North Camden Drive, Beverly Hills

Albert Oehlen in his studio, Ispaster, Spain, 2020. Artwork © Albert Oehlen. Photo: Esther Freund

March 22, 2021

Gagosian is pleased to present *Tramonto Spaventoso*, an exhibition by Albert Oehlen comprising the second part of his version of the Rothko Chapel in Houston as well as other new paintings. The first part of the project—consisting of four paintings that mirror the imposing scale of the Color Field compositions in the Chapel while opposing Rothko’s contemplativeness with their frenetic energy—was exhibited at the Serpentine Galleries, London, in 2019–20. Both parts make up the work *Tramonto Spaventoso* (2019–20).

Oehlen uses abstract, figurative, and collaged elements to disrupt the histories and conventions of modern painting. By adding improvised components, he unearths ever-new possibilities for the genre. While championing self-consciously amateurish “bad” painting, Oehlen continues to infuse expressive gesture with Surrealist attitude, openly disparaging the quest for reliable form and stable meaning.

In the large-scale canvases on view at the Beverly Hills gallery, Oehlen employs acrylic, spray paint, charcoal, and patterned fabric to interpret and transform John Graham’s painting *Tramonto Spaventoso* (*Terrifying Sunset*, 1940–49), a work by the Russian-born American modernist painter

that he discovered in the 1990s and has been fascinated with ever since. Using Graham's puzzle-like painting as a vehicle for repeated interpretation, Oehlen reconfigures elements in diverse and absurdist ways across multiple compositions. The exhibition, which goes by the same title, is therefore in part an homage to the earlier, lesser-known artist.

Reworking motifs from Graham's original, including a mermaid and a man sporting a monocle and a Daliesque handlebar moustache, Oehlen improvises on his source. In explosive abstractions in acrylic and spray paint, he combines graphic brushstrokes, deliberate "painterly" drips, surprising color combinations, and textural obfuscations to test the limits of coherence and legibility. Oehlen's paintings are characteristically disparate, challenging the viewer with unexpected shifts in aesthetic and thematic direction.

To accompany *Tramonto Spaventoso*, Oehlen commissioned music by Steamboat Switzerland, the experimental jazz ensemble with whom he also collaborated at the Serpentine Galleries. Played at intervals throughout the day, the recorded composition draws connections with Oehlen's own visual strategies.

A fully illustrated catalogue, featuring a conversation between the artist and curator Mark Godfrey, will be published on the occasion of the exhibition.

Albert Oehlen was born in 1954 in Krefeld, Germany, and currently lives and works in Gais, Switzerland. Collections include the Broad, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Art Institute of Chicago; Museo Jumex, Mexico City; Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami, FL; Cleveland Museum of Art; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany; and Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Exhibitions include Museo di Capodimonte, Naples, Italy (2009); *Réalité Abstraite*, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris (2009); *Terpentin*, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Germany (2012); *Malerei*, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna (2013); 55th Biennale di Venezia (2013); *Die 5000 Finger von Dr. Ö*, Museum Wiesbaden, Germany (2014); *Home and Garden*, New Museum, New York (2015); *An Old Painting in Spirit*, Kunsthalle Zürich (2015); *Behind the Image*, Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain (2017); *TRANCE*, Aishti Foundation, Beirut (2018); *Cows by the Water*, Palazzo Grassi, Venice (2018–19); *Unfertig*, Lokremise Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland (2019), and Serpentine Galleries, London (2019–20).

#AlbertOehlen

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