

Wilhelm Sasnal

62 Kingly Street London W1

24 January – 16 March 2024

Private view: Wednesday 24 January, 6-8pm

Sadie Coles HQ presents a selection of paintings by Polish artist Wilhelm Sasnal made between 2021 and 2023. As is typical of Sasnal's work, there is no standardisation of size and no unifying subject matter. Yet, in their totality, the exhibition unmistakably locates the viewer – not only in a geographical environment, but also within the mediated landscape of digital technology, news cycles and the general swarm of politically charged visual media. Jumping between exterior vistas and interior spaces, personal portraits and mugshots, alongside ubiquitous screens, moving vehicles and sprawling highways, the works contend with the transitory nature of both people and information. But in its breadth, it would be remiss to assume the artist's gaze as ambiguous. Instead, it is the contemporary condition of ambivalence, exacted and expressed through the depiction of small moments, occurring within larger networks of movement and meaning that must be considered. To some extent, Sasnal continues to ask what painting *is* within the visually saturated present; painting itself is here put in the service of wrestling the contemporary condition of precarity, instability and continuous motion into view.



This is addressed in various ways. There are moments when the varying scaled paintings wilfully refuse the idea of a 'true' depiction of a scene and embrace the subjectivity and reflexive positionality of the painter's mark. Mesh fencing hovers unnaturally in front of a body of water; the heavy materiality of the chain is rendered and yet it is untethered on all sides and unrooted from the ground, suspended in mid-air obstructing our view. A physical impossibility, its affect is privileged over its depiction of reality, bringing the viewer closer to a *feeling* of the scene than a representation of it. Here, the distinction between a painterly surface as a plane of affective interactions, and the surface as a frame within which to see the world, is blurred. This introduces a separation between the viewer and the scene depicted, and yet, in doing so, the feeling of distance and isolation is foregrounded as a subject of the work.

The depiction of fences, borders and boundaries extends throughout the presentation, primarily in the paintings set in the locale of Los Angeles, continuing a wider series of Sasnal's works based around his time spent at his studio in the city. Unequivocally, the graffitied wall reading 'LA IS NOT SAFE' introduces a suggestion of violence and unrest. Elsewhere, on an otherwise realist depiction of a human interaction in the street, a single continuous, tangled line of blue oil paint, much like a scribble, considerably obstructs the scene. Two people's struggle has ended on the ground and one man is being subjugated by another. The abstract intervention takes us out of the mode of passive observer, undermining the possibility of the so called 'neutral' gaze of the documentarian.

This persists across the display. Each painting invokes clear intention whilst also allowing space to build associative connections that invite non-linear readings of the work. We see what it means to be both in and of the world; what it means to be both a consumer and producer of the visual landscape and how we contend with our complicities in such a mode of being. Sasnal's paintings do not ambivalently depict the world but invite us to consider our place within it.

Wilhelm Sasnal (b. 1972, Tarnów, Poland) studied architecture at the Krakow University of Technology (1992-1994) followed by painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow (1994-1999). Sasnal has exhibited internationally with major solo exhibitions including: *Under the Asphalt*, Longlati Foundation, Shanghai (2023); *Such a Landscape*, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw (2021); Sadie Coles HQ, London (2020); *ENGINE*, Kistefos-Museet, Jevnaker (2018); *Sleep*, Sadie Coles HQ, London (2018); *Take Me To The Other Side*, Lismore Castle Arts, Ireland (2014); Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany (2012); Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (2011); *K21*, Düsseldorf, and Centro De Arte Contemporáneo, Málaga (both 2009); *Wilhelm Sasnal - Years of Struggle*, Zacheta Narodowa Sztuki, Warsaw (2008); *Matrix*, The Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley (2005); and Kunsthalle Zürich (2003). He was included in the XXVI Bienal de Sao Paulo, 2004, and was shortlisted, with four other finalists, for the 2004 Vincent Prize at the Stedelijk Museum, 2004. With Anka Sasnal, the artist has written and directed five feature-length films, most recently *We Haven't Lost Our Way* (2022) which premiered at the 72nd International Film Festival Berlinale in February 2022; preceded by *Huba* (2013), *It looks pretty from a distance* (2011) and *Swineherd* (2009). Sasnal's major solo exhibition at Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, opens 30 March 2024.

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