

# Anton Kern Gallery

## Wilhelm Sasnal *Sad Tropics*

January 22 – March 6, 2025

In his upcoming exhibition at Anton Kern Gallery, Polish artist and filmmaker Wilhelm Sasnal will present a body of paintings made during his current stay in Los Angeles. As a keen observer of historical contexts, the works reflect a rapidly changing political and social landscape. His work has most recently been presented in a one-person exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. His new feature film, "The Assistant," will premiere at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in February 2025.

A few years ago, Sasnal began to divide his time between his hometown Krakow and Los Angeles. This annual cycle has provided him with unique insights into the sprawling California metropolis. Neither a tourist nor a local, his gaze remains sensitive to the smallest changes and differences in his surroundings. Constantly out on the asphalt on his preferred means of transport, the bicycle, Sasnal experiences the ordinary as if seen for the first time and from an outsider's perspective.

The direct experience of seeing the large numbers of unhoused persons lying on the ground during a massive summer heatwave inspired a monumental painting entitled "Smutek Tropikow," or "Sad Tropics." Named after Claude Lévi-Strauss' anthropological travelogue from 1955, "Triste Tropique," it comments on the contradictory nature of contemporary urban life in a mild-climate megacity like Los Angeles. The stark black-and-white painting of a mobile traffic sign, augmented with oilstick rubbings made on the asphalt outside the artist's studio, stands as the programmatic work for this exhibition, a work that ties all individual images into one large narrative.

Empty cardboard boxes from a bedding store crudely put together as a temporary shelter; a Corona delivery truck underneath the California blue sky; a couple embracing in the surf of the Pacific Ocean; an anonymous suburban street with overturned garbage bins; the artist's daughter in a swimming pool looking at her phone while surrounded by an idyllic desert sunset; endless highway traffic and the recurring theme of asphalt: these are all scenes that can easily be observed and interpreted. However, what sets these motifs apart from mere observation is the way Sasnal renders them. "I know what I want to paint, but I don't know what the painting will look like," the artist remarked. Fast photographic cropping as compositional device; thin and fluid brushstrokes, contrasted with creamy highlights of thick paint; the use of artificial over local colors; the improvisational handling of light reflections; all held together by a pensive and cool atmosphere, express the autonomy of Sasnal's paintings. The dynamic intertwining of social concern and painterly autonomy is what makes Sasnal the most unique realist painter of our era.

Wilhelm Sasnal (b. 1972, Tarnów, Poland) studied architecture at the Krakow University of Technology (1992-1994) and painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow (1994-1999). Over the last two decades, Sasnal has emerged as one of Europe's preeminent painters. His work has been presented in solo exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (2024); the Longlati Foundation, Shanghai, China (2023); the the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Krakow, Poland (2021); the Kistefos-Museet, Jevnaker, Norway (2018); Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, Switzerland (2017); Lismore Castle Arts, Lismore, Ireland (2014); Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany (2012); Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK (2011); and K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany (2009). His work is included in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Carnegie Museum of Art, the Centre Pompidou, the Guggenheim Museum, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, the Museum für moderne Kunst in Frankfurt, SFMOMA, and Tate Modern among others. Sasnal's feature films, created together with his wife Anka, have been shown throughout the European festival circuit in Linz, Warsaw, Locarno, Berlin, Rotterdam, Bath, and Glasgow. His new feature film, "The Assistant," will premiere at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in February 2025. Sasnal lives and works in Krakow, Poland, and in Los Angeles, CA.



*Untitled (Highway Underpass), 2024, Oil on canvas 20 x 24 inches (50.8 x 61 cm)*