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Wilhelm Sasnal
AAAsphalt

BLUM Los Angeles
May 30–August 16, 2025
Opening Reception: Friday, May 30, 5–7pm

May 15, 2025, Los Angeles—BLUM is pleased to present Polish artist Wilhelm Sasnal’s first solo exhibition with the gallery.

Resisting a singular painting style—abstractions edging in on dreamy figuration—for his first exhibition at BLUM, Wilhelm Sasnal explores the iconography and visual lexicon of the roadways of Southern California. Painting from photographs and sketches, Sasnal captures imagery from a brief time spent living in Los Angeles as a cyclist—someone intimately familiar with the texture, palette, and imagery of the region’s thoroughfares. The resulting body of work shares themes with film noir—examining the complexities of black as a lack of color; these vignettes are all at once dramatic, brooding, and exhilarating.

After studying painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, Sasnal set out to create paintings that undid the restrictive methodology associated with formal painting. Making work that was more about drawing with paint than painting and preferring graphic novels or record covers as his guidance over the Old Masters, Sasnal built his career around this idea of flipping painting on its head. This included bringing subjects rendered in black to the forefront of his compositions, thus reversing the guiding principles of *chiaroscuro*, a painting fundamental that harks back to the Renaissance and Baroque periods.

Presently, Sasnal is an avid pupil of the art historical canon—taking inspiration from and pushing back against a wide array of sources, such as Edgar Degas and Sigmar Polke—but his enthusiasm for this discourse is still laced with a persistent contrarian spirit. Retaining a fixation on black as a pause for the eye in traditional compositions, Sasnal asserts stripes of black paint—a compositional rest—atop the busyness of landscapes rendered in pale color. In *All American* (2025), for instance, the work’s titular words float amid the desert horizon as if roads were paved in midair.

Asphalt takes a paramount position in this exhibition, both for its physical characteristics and conceptual implications. Sasnal immerses himself in the many facets of this substance, becoming absorbed in it in the intimate way that only a cyclist could. When he conveys his findings, it is with the sensibilities of an artist who is keenly attuned to semiotics, color theory, depth, and perspective. For its external implications, Sasnal notes that asphalt is made of petrol, which gestures at a wealth of global issues. Asphalt also contains a complex spectrum of black, which Sasnal expresses through a range of gestures from snaking abstract lines to solid-edged blocks of pigment. Roads are also notable for their traditional usage in perspective, requiring only two receding lines and a horizon point to express depth.

Sasnal paints in a medium-specific manner, but his mode of culling subject matter is multidisciplinary. Archiving and reflecting culture’s nuances back upon itself, in this exhibition, Sasnal took photographs, kept a sketching practice, and borrowed typeface while collecting notable moments or ideas for future

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paintings. The works *Palmdale 1* and *Palmdale 2* (both 2025), for instance, are painted from photographs that the artist took streetside while cycling. Noticing the presence of several fighter jets parked just within the parameters of a military base near Palmdale, California, the artist recorded this unexpected and ominous encounter with his camera. Later, when creating his compositions for each work, these massive weapons become abstracted, shadowy figures to convey and isolate the unique feeling imparted upon the viewer when seeing the original. With his brush to canvas acting as the lens through which these found talismans of our society are given meaning, Sasnal is not merely a documentarian but also a philosopher of the overlooked.

Wilhelm Sasnal (b. 1972, Tarnów, Poland) studied architecture at the Kraków University of Technology (1992–1994) and painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków (1994–1999). Recognized as one of Europe’s leading contemporary painters, Sasnal employs photographic imagery—from film stills and art reproductions to personal snapshots—as foundations for his paintings, subjecting them to abstraction, simplification, and distortion. His practice thoughtfully addresses historical themes such as the Holocaust, iconic pop-cultural imagery, and intimate scenes from everyday life, creating a complex reflection of post-Communist Poland amid ongoing socio-political shifts.

Sasnal’s works have been featured in major exhibitions worldwide, including solo presentations at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (2024); Longlati Foundation, Shanghai, China (2023); POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw, Poland (2021); Kistefos-Museet, Jevnaker, Norway (2018); and Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany (2012). His artwork is held in the public collections of The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Museum of Modern Art (Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie), Warsaw, Poland; Rubell Museum Miami, FL; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands; Städel Museum, Frankfurt, Germany; Tate, London, UK; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; and Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland, among many others.

About BLUM

BLUM represents more than sixty artists and estates from twenty countries worldwide, nurturing a diverse roster of artists at all stages of their practices with a range of global perspectives. Originally opened as Blum & Poe in Santa Monica in 1994, the gallery has been a pioneer in its early commitment to Los Angeles as an international arts capital.

The gallery has been acclaimed for its groundbreaking work in championing international artists of postwar and contemporary movements, such as CoBrA, Dansaekhwa, Mono-ha, and Superflat, and for organizing museum-caliber solo presentations and historical survey exhibitions across its spaces in Los Angeles, Tokyo, and New York. Often partnering with celebrated curators and scholars such as Cecilia Alemani, Alison M. Gingeras, Sofia Gotti, Joan Kee, and Mika Yoshitake, the gallery has produced large-scale exhibitions focusing on the Japanese Mono-ha school (2012); the Korean Dansaekhwa monochrome painters (2014); the European postwar movement CoBrA (2015); Japanese art of the 1980s and 1990s (2019); a rereading of Brazilian Modernism (2019); a revisionist take on the 1959 MoMA exhibition, *New Images of Man* (2020); and a survey of portraiture through a democratic and humanist lens (2023); among others.

BLUM’s wide-reaching program includes exhibitions, lectures, performance series, screenings, video series, and an annual art book fair at its base in Los Angeles. BLUM Books, the gallery’s publishing

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division, democratically circulates its program through original scholarship and accessible media ranging from academic monographs, audio series, magazines, to artists' books.

Across the three global locations, BLUM prioritizes environmental and community stewardship in all operations. In 2015, it was certified as an Arts:Earth Partnership (AEP) green art gallery in Los Angeles and consequently became one of the first green certified galleries in the United States. The gallery is also a member of the Gallery Climate Coalition, which works to facilitate a more sustainable commercial art world and reduce the industry's collective carbon footprint. BLUM is committed to fostering inclusive and equitable communities both in its physical and online spaces and believes that everybody should have equal access to creating and engaging with contemporary art.

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