

Roman Ondak

Out of the Blue

June 13 – July 12, 2025

Esther Schipper, Berlin

Esther Schipper is pleased to announce Roman Ondak's **Out of the Blue**, the artist's second solo presentation with the gallery. On view will be sculptures as well as photographic works with various interventions.

The entanglement of past and present and of the personal and political have long been at the core of Roman Ondak's practice. Loosely based on the color blue and its association with melancholy, the presentation includes works that evoke moments, memories and historical contiguities—and all in some way include shades of the color. The works' poignancy draws attention to the idea that individual sights, experiences, and decisions are what shape a life, a country and history, that past and present are in a constant dialogue across time. But Ondak is not a gloomy artist, his works, blue or not, are full of reflection but also have much affection for life and his spectators. His vision of everyday life as moments from which history is made is a humanist one.

Crossword I, 2025, takes us into personal and political history. The first in a new series, it combines an archival image which Ondak reprinted and on which he then painted a crossword puzzle in light blue paint. The photo depicts a quarry. It is from the archives of a company in which the artist's father once worked. The found crossword puzzle from the post-World War II era includes imagery of socialist propaganda.

Crossword I becomes a historical palimpsest, interweaving the artist's family's and his home country's life. Characteristic of Ondak's general practice, the work has a slow burn: the enigmatic combination of the industrial site with a harmless pleasure of doing crossword puzzles invaded by propaganda affects us even before the multi-layered associations are unpacked.

Maja in Blue, 2025, another biographical work, is based on a photo taken in 1998 of the artist's wife. It depicts a woman in a bathtub, the scene bathed in luminous blue. Her head appears large—the bathtub was very small—and disembodied, the body hidden below the surface of the water. Tightly cropped, the blue environment around her keeps her contained, perhaps even imprisoned as the dark grid of the tiles suggests. The intensity of her upward-turned gaze transports us into the past, or, it is her gaze that travels to our present.

Memoirs, 2023, consists of a glass container with liters of dark blue liquid sealed inside. Identified as pen ink, the familiar color and material evoke both writing and the ephemeral quality of memory and lived experience. What are we looking at? The tools for an account of a life yet unwritten or the accumulation of what has been written, now dissolved again; that is, something that remains to be given shape and meaning, or its dissolution?

His Eyes Peer into the Gloom II, 1994, and **Sea in my Room**, 1997, two early works, are more literally about perception and misrecognition. The former is a wall-mounted construction of a blue sheet of Plexiglas with perforations that form a triangular shape.

When seen from the front, the outline of a yellow area behind the transparent pane makes it appear as a light cone emanating from a lamp. **Sea in my Room** also plays with the associations everyday-life perceptions it can elicit: the picture of a dimpled glass surface is lit in such a way as to resemble a view of a shimmering expanse of water.

Melancholia, 2025, watching over this group of works, is a sculpture that resembles an abstracted seated figure, formed from a sphere and linear elements that read as torso and limbs. Conceptually, the new work is linked to the artist's series of sculptures related to the first satellite Sputnik 1, assemblages from found materials that vaguely recalled the satellites circular shape and antennas. In another comment on past promises that have not been fulfilled, the satellite sent by man to explore space has turned into the image of a thoughtful, perhaps as the title suggests, melancholy human, similar to its namesake by Albrecht Dürer who sits and contemplates the nature of beauty and the course of history.

Roman Ondak was born 1966 in Zilina, Slovakia. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava and Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania. The artist lives and works in Bratislava.

Roman Ondak represented Slovakia at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009. In 2012, he participated in dOCUMENTA (13) and was named Artist of the Year by Deutsche Bank in Berlin. Ondak is recipient of the Lovis-Corinth Prize 2018.

The artist has had numerous solo exhibitions, among them: **Roman Ondak. Infinitum**, Tapies Foundation, Barcelona (2023); **Roman Ondak – Measuring the Universe**, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2022); **SK Parking**, Kunsthalle Bratislava (2021); **#12 Roman Ondak**, mezzaterra 11, Belluno (2018–19); **Based on True Events**, Lovis-Corinth-Preis, Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie, Regensburg (2018); **Objects in the Mirror**, BASE Progetti per l'arte Arte, Florence (2018); **Man Walking Toward a Fata Morgana**, The Arts Club of Chicago, Chicago (2017); **History Repeats Itself**, KUNSTEN Museum of Modern Art, Aalborg (2017); **The Source of Art is in the Life of a People**, South London Gallery, London (2016); **Storyboard**, Times Museum, Guangzhou (2015); **Roman Ondak**, Kaldor Art Projects, Sydney (2014); **Some Thing**, The Common Guild, Glasgow (2013); **Escena**, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (2013); **Roman Ondak**, Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris/ARC, Paris (2012); **do not walk outside this area**, Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin (2012); **Within Reach of Hand or Eye**, K21, Düsseldorf (2012); **Time Capsule**, Modern Art Oxford, Oxford (2011); **Before Waiting Becomes Part of Your Life**, Salzburg Kunstverein (2010); **Shaking Horizon**, Villa Arson, Nice (2010); and **Measuring the Universe**, DAAD Galerie, Berlin, Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2008–10).

His work is held in multiple public collections including the Centre Pompidou, Paris; Kunsthaus Zürich; Tate Modern, London; Neue Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Guggenheim Museum, New York and the Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava.