

Artturner : 'An interview with the artist David Ostrowski' by Eugenio Re Rebaudengo, December 21, 2013



David Ostrowski (b.1981) is a Cologne based artist. Known for his reductivist approach to abstract painting, he creates pared down canvases that are purposefully voided of technical skills. Ostrowski's work will be featured in ARTUNER's forthcoming curation which opens in mid-January. Eugenio recently caught up with David at his studio.

E.R.R.: You're clearly a skilled technical painter in the traditional sense, as your earlier figurative works attest to. What made you move towards abstraction for the F series?

David Ostrowski: I quickly reached the limits of figurative painting – had nothing else to say, nothing to talk about. The process of moving away from the pictorial towards the incomprehensible seemed very natural to me. It was accompanied by a desire to try to create something new, something which I don't know yet or at least stole so successfully that it becomes my own and somehow remains surprising. For me, painting is the search for meaning in nonsense. I'm not interested in understanding; for me, it's a question of not understanding.

You've been known to use lacquer, cotton and wood on your canvases. Why did you decide to use these materials?

Simple materials are less laden with information. With lacquer, you have to work quickly; oil offers too many possibilities.

Why is this 'de-skilling' of painting so important to you?

The uncontrolled and the improbable are both something quite good. For example: I like to imagine that I have a neon sign hanging in my studio and, when the time's right – when I get it right – it lights up with the word "Surprise". Unfortunately, it doesn't light up that often; but I keep on trying anyway.

In the past you've mentioned: "As a right-hander... I try to paint with my right hand as if it was my left." Could you tell us a little bit more about why you do this?

It's a primitive trick, which supposedly leads to a loss of control.

Who did you study with and how did those individuals affect your practice?

During my studies at the Academy of Art in Düsseldorf, I always worked in my studio in Cologne –perhaps to protect myself from going to seed at the academy. Trips to Düsseldorf felt like holidays and friendships developed there which still hold strong today. As a student, you are very impressionable, which, in my opinion, is not a good thing. I never painted as poorly as when I was studying at the academy, but I sowed my wild oats there and tried my hand at many different things. During this time, I figured out what I didn't want.

What role did your former professor Albert Oehlen play in your artistic development?

It was good to take part in a discourse about contemporary art with him.

Do you listen to music when you paint? What role does it play in what you do?

Music was my first love and it will be my last. Music of the future and music of the past. To live without my music would be impossible to do. In this world of troubles, my music pulls me through. Music was my first love and it will be my last. Music of the future and music of the past and music of the past and music of the past.

When I'm in my studio, I always listen to music – and sometimes I also paint.

What made you become a painter?

The sweet smell of freedom. Eternity by Calvin Klein.

Why did you choose to live and work in Cologne?

Cologne is provincial, boring and ugly. I can work in peace here and nobody seems to care. This is great! I was born and raised in Cologne; my family and many friends live here. It's a city that you love to get away from, but also love to come back to.

Your paintings reject the notion of perfection, what does perfection look like to you?

Not exactly like Sylvester Stallone, but kind of like this.

How do your works affect your attitude towards life? Or is it the other way around for you?

My works are me, everything that I am, say, do, that I have ever painted and will paint sometime soon and is yet to be lived. My works are like French film: romantic and seemingly meaningless – and they always lead to an end.

Where's one place everyone has to travel before they die?

Palermo – you could die right away there.

What's next?

Palermo.