

HUNTED PROJECTS



F (Diagramm), oil, lacquer and paper on canvas, 200 cm x 150 cm, 2011

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David Ostrowski Interview - By Steven Cox

The *F* (Fehlermalerei) paintings of David Ostrowski are a continuing series of works that explore the physical mistake or error in painting. Ostrowski's works are approached by himself using his "right hand as if it was his left" in order to allow flawed painterly actions to naturally occur without a predetermined result in mind. A sense of visual naivety is therefore evidently strived for in order to create these *failed* works, for they appear to be as far removed from the virtuosic aesthetic as possible.

Ostrowski's approach to painting therefore involves a simultaneous abandoning *and* re-inventing of historical tropes; concurrently creating what are essentially process-based abstractions. The *F* paintings are not created to please or conform; they are ballsy works that negate notions of perfection. Within this series, Ostrowski produces irreverent works that slyly mock and joke at both respected historical art figures and movements. For instance the paper ripped surface of *F (Deutscher Film In Russland)* 2013, can be interpreted as hinting at both Nouveau Realisme and Russian Constructivism, whilst such gestural Yves Klein Blue spray-painted marks within *F (Diagramm)* bring to mind elements akin to early 80's Basquiat and of course Yves Klein.

Overall, Ostrowski is a leading painter within a current ever growing field of process based gestural painters and is represented by Peres Projects, Berlin. Ostrowski recently exhibited within *The Gesture and the Sign*, at White Cube Sao Paulo, curated by Susan May.

'Im OK,' Moments later, he was shot, was the title of your most recent exhibition that took place at Peres Projects. The exhibition was very much a testament to the concept of making work about nothing. This being openly advocated through citing Seinfeld Season 4, episode 3:

Jerry: So we go into NBC and tell them we've got an idea for a show about nothing.

George: Exactly.

Jerry: They say, "What's your show about?" I say "Nothing".

George: There you go.

Jerry: I think you may have something here.

To what extent is this exhibition a progression or regression of Tried and Failed (BolteLang Gallery) and From Bad to Worse (Ltd, Los Angeles), as these exhibitions both explore your Sisyphean approach to painting? Are these exhibitions of yours really about nothing?

DO: It's always about progression. It's about the unlearning, it's about how to create something out of nothing, it's about eternity, it's about painting! Wow that sounds awesome.

Do you consider the progression of painting as being linked to forgetting all about what it is that you know? Or perhaps it would be foolish to stick to only what you think you know?

DO: In my imagination there is this big flashing neon sign hanging at the top of my studio ceiling that says "Suprise". A good painting of mine is once I asked myself who did that piece?

There is an element of self-parody within your work, for you are making humorous the idea of failure by creating your series of F paintings. Though, you simultaneously champion failure by exhibiting a series of works that represent an apparent level of failure? Which elements within your work are necessarily failed?

DO: It's a secret but let me just say this much, when my paintings fail, music speaks.

That reminds me of a quote by Eddie Van Halen "The hell with the rules, if it sounds right then it is". Do your works keep you on your toes by encouraging you to push the boundaries of what appear to be failures?

DO: ~~There are no rules and boundaries in painting and it's a great opportunity to be free as a painter as much as possible.~~ There are so many rules and boundaries in painting that I'm failing constantly being free.

I appreciate the subliminal elements within your work for the nuances are perhaps most noticeable to a trained eye. Are there elements within your work that you aim to purposefully destroy or avoid?

DO: Paint that drips down the canvas, it's so "80's".

I can't view your spray painted gestural marks without considering street graffiti or the naive first attempts of one trying to understand the gauge of pressure required to use spray paint cans effectively. Though, at the same time, I also view your marks as being similar to the spray-painted strokes visible within Basquiat's work, or a painterly equivalent of Lucio Fontana's slashes? How conscious are you of these affinities?

DO: I see some similarities within the early works of Jan Brueghel the Elder, don't ask why.

Which artists have you looked at in the past? Who were some of your early inspiration? Were they even visual artists?

DO: I would love to say Willem de Kooning and Philip Guston but they were more musicians like Adriano Celentano or the Wu Tang Clan.

Would you consider your paintings as a rejection to the act of virtuosic painting?

DO: "Here's the deal I'm the best there is. Plain and simple. I wake up in the morning and I piss excellence."

-Ricky Bobby

To what extent are you consciously testing the audiences understanding of painting?

DO: I do not test the audiences though I do test myself. My paintings are very me, but I'm not interested in self-therapy, it's more about a personal experience. It's a love hate relationship between me and my works, it's fully loaded with romance.

Are you aiming to make your audience re-evaluate their understating of virtuosity?

DO: Yes or let's say no.

If your works were to be interpreted as failures, can you expand on what in your view would be a success? What warrants success?

DO: A success would be when I wake up in the morning surrounded by beautiful girls with beautiful feet.

Can you fail successfully fail?

DO: Life itself is a beautiful failure and it has been moving on successfully for billions of years. Take the Dinosaurs for example. They became extinct and were resurrected again to star in the Steven Spielberg Blockbuster "Jurassic Park" back in 1993.

Do you have a set process as to how you begin a painting or do you aim to approach each canvas in a new manner?

DO: First I play some Barry White, so the canvas can relax. Then I please the canvas with some foreplay so it can accept the oil entering it's fabric.

What do you find is the most exploratory aspect of your own work? Are there specific elements within your work that you feel is breaking new territory within painting?

DO: The extraordinary scent.

Let's discuss your background; I am aware that Albert Oehlen was your tutor? Was he significantly influential to you?

DO: He was my professor at the Kunstakademie Duesseldorf. It was good to speak and laugh with him about my stuff but usually it was sad to look at my paintings so it was embarrassing for both of us.

Were the moments rather reflective when considering your work? Did you find his mentoring encouraging or alternatively a negative influence?

DO: I think it was important to have this conversation with Albert Oehlen about painting. He also brings his own works permanently into question.

What keeps you busy when you are not in the studio?

DO: "I'm pretty sure there's a lot more to life than being really, really, ridiculously good looking. And I plan on finding out what that is."

Derek Zoolander

You have worked with zines as a format to present your work in a different light. Can you tell me about your interest within zine culture and how this format relates to your work and how zines offer an alternative model of distributing and displaying your work?

DO: It's just good seeing the paintings in a different context sometimes. There is a new publication out now about girls feet and my paintings.

All images courtesy of David Ostrowski and Peres Projects.

<http://www.huntedprojects.com/davidostrowski>