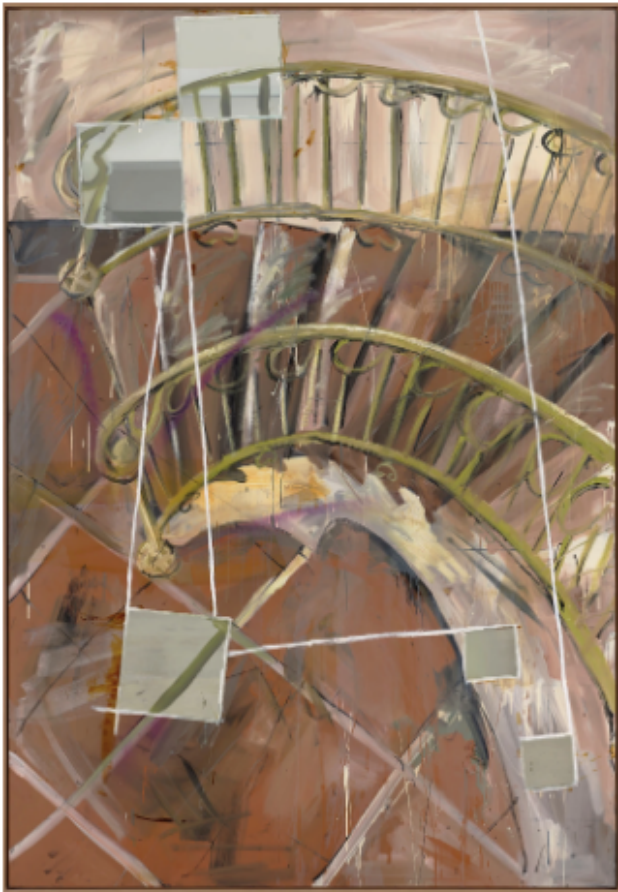


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ART REVIEWS JANUARY 15, 2020

Albert Oehlen's "mirror paintings"

Through Jan. 25. Nahmad Contemporary, 980 Madison Avenue, Manhattan, 646 449 9118, nahmadcontemporary.com.



Albert Oehlen's "Treppenhaus Alt" ("Stairwell Old"), from 1982; oil, lacquer and mirror on canvas. Albert Oehlen/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/DACS, London; Galerie Max Hetzler, and Nahmad Contemporary

The last five months have brought two solo shows of early work by the restless German painter Albert Oehlen that were previously unseen in New York. In September, 12 paintings from the artist's 1989-90 [Fn \(Footnote\) series](#) went on view at Skarstedt, full of improvisatory abstract brushwork in off-key colors infiltrated by fragments of images from popular culture. These sardonic mash-ups of Pop Art, Surrealism and Neo-Expressionism exemplify the ugly gorgeousness that is something of an Oehlen signature.

Now Nahmad is showing 13 canvases from Mr. Oehlen's "[Spiegelbilder](#)" or "Mirror Paintings" series, which began in 1982, around the time of the artist's solo shows, and extended to 1990. They are dark, dour, loosely painted interiors, consistent with his early interest in representation. Some, with titles like "Abolition of a Military Dictatorship," "Oven I," and "Hell, 'I'" or featuring depictions of bunkerlike cinder block structures conjure the Nazi period. But all the scenes whether the grand but decrepit spiral stair in "Staircase Old," or the untitled image of a slovenly library devoid of furniture — suggest messy aftermaths. Of course Mr. Oehlen's impatient brushwork contributes to the desultory mood. Countering it are a few random mirrors affixed to the surface of each canvas. These irreverently disrupt the painted images with blank

patches or glimpses of reality, depending upon where you stand, at once punching holes in the medium's spatial integrity and also implicating us in history's devastations. Ugliness has the louder voice in these works, flanked by tragedy on one side and on the other by the engaging intentional lightness of Mr. Oehlen's pictorial sensibility.

ROBERTA SMITH