

ALBERT OEHLLEN: GRAU

November 7–December 23, 2017

NEW YORK—Nahmad Contemporary is pleased to present *Albert Oehlen: Grau*, on view from Nov. 7 through Dec. 23, 2017. The exhibition brings together a selection of twelve exceptional gray paintings by the influential German artist, Albert Oehlen. The exhibition is the first ever to offer an intimate examination of this important series by a provocateur known for challenging the boundaries of painting and embracing a remarkably wide range of styles.

Created between 1997 and 2008, in the wake of the artist's original black-and-white "computer" paintings and concurrently with the brilliantly colorful "switch" paintings—two series that utilized digital tools in their creation—the gray paintings hone in on painterly gesture and material essence. Oscillating between figuration and abstraction and made strictly by hand without the distraction of color, these large grisaille works on canvas embrace painting's conventional tools in order to expose the inadequacies of the medium itself.

Through their subversive interlacing of abstract and representational motifs, the gray paintings defy conventional categorization. Amid muddy nebulas and amorphic brushstrokes, mysterious depictions of figures, objects, environments, and landscapes emerge. In *Raucher (Smoker)* (1999) meandering strokes muted by smeared expanses are abruptly interrupted by the sharp contours of a figure. Likewise, in *Interior* (1998), a blurred background accented by formless marks and organic shapes juxtaposes with a meticulously contoured object resembling a vacuum head.

As is typical of his practice, Oehlen approached his gray paintings with systematic rules. Here he imposed chromatic limitations—rendering the series solely in lackluster, murky shades of gray. The artist explains his reasoning: "I wanted to paint even more intensely colored pictures, and I prescribed to myself the gray tones as therapy, in order to artificially heighten the lust for color." Creating art in perpetual paradox, he starved himself of a method customary to creating visually pleasing works in order to focus on the visceral and tactile application of paint.

Beyond formal investigations, the gray works engage the history of painting on a conceptual level. In an unmistakable nod to fellow German artist Gerhard Richter, Oehlen's works summon his predecessor's series executed in the same palette and given the same title. However, in contrast to the analytic precision of Richter, Oehlen achieves his style with a loose nonchalance that confounds the nature of the reference as both reverent and satirical.

Oehlen's alluring gray works defy boundaries between figuration and abstraction, beauty and homeliness, and subversion and reverence to continuously challenge the viewer. These works capture a critical moment in which the artist embarked on a voracious exploration of painting to investigate the history of the medium both formally and conceptually.

Albert Oehlen: Grau is made possible through the generous loans of numerous American and European private institutions and collections, and will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with an original text by writer and poet Raphael Rubinstein.

About the Artist

Albert Oehlen was born in 1954 in Krefeld, Germany. He was a student of Sigmar Polke and close friend of Martin Kippenberger. Oehlen's work has been featured in group exhibitions extensively throughout the United States and Europe, and has been the focus of solo exhibitions at institutions such as the Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami (2005); Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2009); Kunstmuseum Bonn, Germany (2012); New Museum, New York (2015); and Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain (2016).