

ask the viewer to understand his many references. He would rather they just enjoyed and felt them. However, the viewer is allowed an insight, through layered canvases and collage that both hide and reveal his exploration.

**SOUND TOUR  
AVAILABLE FROM ARNOLFINI  
RECEPTION**

This is an 8 minute response in sound to the work of Albert Oehlen. It was made by young people attending the Whitechapel Gallery's Talent Club during Oehlen's exhibition. It is intended for listening to while looking at Oehlen's paintings. The tour collages many different kinds of sounds: spoken voice, live samples and electronic sounds. Like Albert Oehlen's work, some fragments and layers are partially hidden in the background, others leap out and surprise.

**FAMILY PACK  
AVAILABLE FROM ARNOLFINI  
RECEPTION**

For any small group of children and adults, the family pack offers a great way of exploring this exhibition.

*This guide is intended as an introduction to the exhibition. Please speak to a steward and visit the Reading Room on the Second Floor for further information.*

*A catalogue is available from the bookshop at the special exhibition price of £19.95.*

Introduction  
to the  
exhibition

Albert Oehlen  
I Will Always Champion Bad Painting

30 September - 26 November 2006

This exhibition of work by Albert Oehlen brings together major mixed-media canvases, digital poster works, grey paintings, paintings based on pixelated computer designs and small collages from the mid 1990s to 2005.

Oehlen questions and plays with rules; what does a good or bad painting look like? What is abstraction? Are there any rules for abstraction, surrealism and expressionism? He also likes the idea of bringing in parameters and conditions to make the work more complex and he is mindful that art is not always about answers but also about process. For example, making himself paint more slowly or using cheap paints on one half of the canvas and expensive on the other. This way of working can result in a deliberately ugly aesthetic and the tongue-in-cheek title of this exhibition refers to this interest of his.

**GALLERY 1  
GREY PAINTINGS AND POSTERS**

Although very different in technique and production, both the grey paintings and posters in this gallery explore Oehlen's interest in illusion of depth and space.

Anarchic humour and childish perversities are used to full effect in Oehlen's poster works. Here the aesthetic is do-it-yourself: homemade party invitations, emailed office jokes and ugly fonts. In **OHNE TITEL (UNTITLED) 2000**, Oehlen even goes so far as to feature one of his grey paintings as the object of interest for the female character that contemplates the work. The low point of view and the text used on this poster mimic the style of a computer game.

When exploring space in painting, Oehlen discovered it was easier for

him to explore multiple depths of space in grey tones. This allowed him to play around with depth, as in **ABSTEIGENDE HIESSE STRADHLEN (DESCENDING HOT RAYS)** or **STUDIO 1**, where recognisable forms such as figures or solid objects are pushed and pulled into and out of focus in a similar way to a photographer playing with depth of field.

In this series he was also referring to a well-known series of grey paintings by another 'bad' German painter Gerhard Richter. Albert Oehlen draws on many different artists and periods. Other German painters such as Jorg Immendorff, Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke and major twentieth century art movements such as Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism are a major influence on his work.

### **GALLERIES 2 AND 3 COMPUTER PAINTINGS**

The computer-generated images belong to a series that Oehlen began in the early 1990s. Image resolution was poor compared with today's technology and when the designs, lines and bright swirls of colour are blown up onto two-metre canvases using a large format inkjet printer, they reveal what Oehlen terms "pixelated stairs". His first reaction was to try and get rid of these stairs: "I had to smooth those lines. I did that and then got tired of it. I had a mess of lines, and I thought, okay, now I have a mess of lines and I have to work on it until it looks good. "

Despite progress in technology, Oehlen has carried on using these highly pixelated designs, taking pleasure from their now primitive-looking quality.

**DISCO 2100**, and the other works in Gallery 2 are almost entirely produced using digital print. In much abstract painting work, indeed in many of Oehlen's works, the viewer can be fascinated by the brushstrokes – they are a record of the gestures and movements of the artist. In these paintings, the brushstroke is replaced with a pixelated graphic. Thus, the artist has replaced the revered gestural brushstrokes of Abstract Expressionism with pixelated lines and digital graphics. The only handmade elements are Oehlen's crude attempts to correct, to smooth out the edges or add the occasional odd shape or line.

If the works in Gallery 2 point towards the hand of the artist having a minimal role to play, in Gallery 3 are works that suggest otherwise. These paintings also use computer imagery as their starting point and but Oehlen overworks the already dense images obscuring some areas, or emphasizing and revealing others. Like graffiti this obliteration can be seen as more rule bending, or even as vandalism by the artist of his own work.

The results are saturated with colour as in **DEATHOKNOCKO** or **TASCHENTUCH (HANDKERCHIEF)**. They don't seem to have a single form or subject, but encourage a journey of

exploration, through layers of collage, text, pixelation and paint. These paintings contrast with the seemingly clean graphic approach of the poster works in Gallery 1.

Some of these concerns are shared with the surrealists. Oehlen says, "I like to play around with Surrealism's typical motifs, because of their references and associations – fantasy, craziness, that anything is possible. In the 90s I tried to find the forgotten motifs of Surrealism."

### **GALLERY 4 ABSTRACT PAINTINGS**

For Oehlen, abstraction is not about the elimination of the figure from the painting, but about the transfiguration of something into the painting. By starting his work with figurative elements and adding abstract forms as he progresses, Oehlen can be thought of as repeating a history of modern art: the progress of art from figurative painting to abstraction.

In many instances, his first step in executing a painting is to create a collage on the canvas as the underlying structure. He then proceeds to negate this scaffold. He often rotates the painting as he works; we can see evidence of this in **HUMPTY DUMPTY** and **BLEO**, with their gravity defying dribbles of paint.

Oehlen aims to demystify the painterly gestures of modern art by focusing on the process of painting itself rather

than ideas of personal expression or formal presentation. For him, "a mess is a mess". He once said, 'I want an art where you see how it's made, not what the artist means but the trace or production'.

### **GALLERY 5 COLLAGE**

In contrast to the abstract work in the rest of the exhibition, the works here are fully figurative collages, cut and pasted from the pages of various life style magazines and German newspapers.

He has said of his collages, they are arrangements of contradictions: "beautiful against ugly, dark against light, smart against stupid."

In **URSPRUNG COLLAGE 2**, a non-descript domestic interior is populated by an oversized plate of food; classical sculpture in the **UNTITLED** series is juxtaposed with Heavy Metal imagery and reptilian eyes. By adopting the 'unprofessional', spontaneous qualities of collage, many dissimilar pieces are combined together to make a whole in the same way that his paintings are constructed. This seemingly quick process can be compared with the digital 'collage' used to make the posters in Gallery 1 that reveal less of the emergence of process.

Oehlen's playing with rules of Art History and process seems to challenge the very boundaries of art. He doesn't