



Albert Oehlen.  
*En* Paintings

Essay by David Salle

SKARSTEDT

# *The Strange Case of Albert O.*

by

David Salle

*All art constantly aspires to the condition of music.* — WALTER PATER

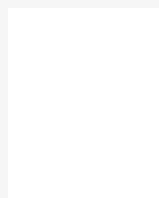
Why must everything in a painting occur simultaneously? Why can't a painting be more like a piece of modern, or even post-modern music, a piece by say, George Gershwin, or Leonard Bernstein or Thomas Ades (*Powder Her Face*) or John Zorn, in which styles, tempi, motifs, phrasing, not to mention melody and harmony, all develop, shift, thin out or accumulate, all these effects harnessed to narrate, suggest, or enact — either associatively or abstractly — a dramatic incident, a story. (*Rhapsody in Blue* begins, indelibly, with the single, attenuated clarinet line, before gradually giving way to the whole, timpani-inflected orchestra.)

Painting is static. It's a *thing*, not an acid trip. Unless scaled up to the size of architecture, it can be taken in all at once. The eye can scan a painting, running over its internal rhythms and harmonies ad infinitum, but it is a painting's indelible first, unitary impression that matters most. But *must it?* Since paintings are meant to be lived with

and experienced over time, in hundreds or thousands of repeated viewings, living with a painting will occasion the equivalence of whole weeks or months spent with eyeballs on canvas. Is it unreasonable to expect out of all that time exposed to a painted surface, that nothing change? That the painting not develop or digress, not dither, prevaricate, lose its train of thought or just plain change its mind?

On the other hand, why should we see this 'all-at-once-ness' as a limitation? As the end result of a process, the fact that it can be ingested all at once is yet another of painting's not so little miracles, like perspective, which allowed paintings for centuries to function as faux windows. The gift of painting is that it is *always* in the present tense. However, certain kinds of paintings, and certain kinds of painters, can create not just the sense of movement across pictorial space, but a feeling of intellectual sequencing as well.

# Plates



*Fn 33*

1990  
oil on canvas  
107 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 84 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches  
274 × 214 cm



*Fn 1*

1990  
oil on canvas  
84 1/4 x 107 7/8 inches  
214 x 274 cm



*Fn 15*

1990  
oil on canvas  
107<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 84<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches  
274 × 214 cm



*Fn 31*

1990  
oil on canvas  
107 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 84 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches  
274 × 214 cm















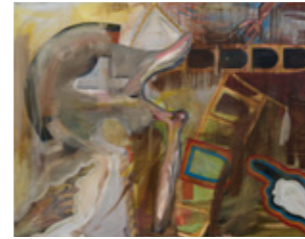




**Annotated  
catalogue**



# Exhibited works



## *Fn 1*

1990  
oil on canvas  
84 1/4 × 107 7/8 inches  
214 × 274 cm

PROVENANCE  
Courtesy of the artist

EXHIBITED  
Paris, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, *Albert Oehlen: Abstract Reality*, October 1, 2009–January 3, 2010, p. 3 (illustrated in color).

LITERATURE  
*Albert Oehlen: Gemälde II*, exh. cat., Cologne / New York, Galerie Max Hetzler and Luhring Augustine, 1992, pp. 46–47 (illustrated in color).

A. Montfort, *Albert Oehlen: Abstract Reality*, exh. cat., Cologne, König, 2009, p. 3 (illustrated in color).

H.W. Holzwarth, ed., *Albert Oehlen*, Cologne, Taschen, 2009, p. 190 (illustrated in color).

H.W. Holzwarth, ed., *Albert Oehlen*, Cologne, Taschen, 2017, p. 138 (illustrated in color).



## *Fn 2*

1990  
oil on canvas  
84 1/4 × 84 1/4 inches  
214 × 214 cm

PROVENANCE  
Private collection, NRW

EXHIBITED  
New York, Luhring Augustine, *Albert Oehlen*, February 12–March 9, 1991.

North Miami, Museum of Contemporary Art, *Albert Oehlen: I Know Whom You Showed Last Summer*, November 19, 2005–January 8, 2006, p. 24, no. 5 (illustrated in color).

LITERATURE  
*Albert Oehlen: Gemälde II*, exh. cat., Cologne / New York, Galerie Max Hetzler and Luhring Augustine, 1992, pp. 48–49 (illustrated in color).

B. Clearwater, *Albert Oehlen: I Know Whom You Showed Last Summer*, exh. cat., North Miami, Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005, p. 24, no. 5 (illustrated in color).

H.W. Holzwarth, ed., *Albert Oehlen*, Cologne, Taschen, 2009, p. 200 (illustrated in color).



## *Fn 4*

1990  
oil on canvas  
84 1/4 × 107 7/8 inches  
214 × 274 cm

PROVENANCE  
Private collection

EXHIBITED  
New York, Luhring Augustine, *Albert Oehlen*, February 12–March 9, 1991.

Berlin, Martin-Gropius-Bau, *Metropolis*, April 20–July 21, 1991, p. 213 (illustrated in color).

LITERATURE  
C.M. Joachimides and N. Rosenthal, *Metropolis*, exh. cat., Berlin, Martin-Gropius-Bau, 1991, p. 213 (illustrated in color).

*Albert Oehlen: Gemälde II*, exh. cat., Cologne / New York, Galerie Max Hetzler and Luhring Augustine, 1992, pp. 50–51 (illustrated in color).

H.W. Holzwarth, ed., *Albert Oehlen*, Cologne, Taschen, 2009, pp. 192–193 (illustrated in color).

H.W. Holzwarth, ed., *Albert Oehlen*, Cologne, Taschen, 2017, pp. 142–143 (illustrated in color).

**Credits  
&  
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