

GAGOSIAN
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Work and Teamwork

Hans Ulrich Obrist



It started with fake news. Someone on a radio show claimed that the painter Albert Oehlen works on a series of new works, painted as he moved up and down on a lift platform in his studio. This wasn't true but Oehlen thought this idea was so extraordinarily ridiculous that he named his latest group of works after it: *Elevator Paintings*. He told me this story a few weeks ago in New York. Coincidentally, we stayed at the same hotel and saw each other at breakfast several days in a row. Of course, I already knew that he belongs to the most significant contemporary artists of our time. I first interviewed him last year during the Engadin Art Talks and visited him in his studio in Gais, where he has also lived for many years. I have a special relationship with Gais, where I founded the Robert Walser-Museum at the Hotel Krone, where Walser used to sit down for a meal after his hour-long walks.

When I saw Oehlen's latest works, I immediately associated them with Walser. Not because they were created in Gais, but for their organic and winding lines that reminded me of life lines that - in a very Walseresque way - stroll through the canvas. This is true of all the Tree Paintings, most of which are rendered in black and red. Forms and footsteps are unwinding also in the aforementioned Elevator Paintings, but each outline is threatened by its immediate disappearance and the whole composition strikes a perfect balance between form and formlessness.

This description of paintings is not dissimilar to the way one thinks and talks about music. Transferring composition principles and the working methods of the music world into the sphere of visual art is one of Oehlen's many achievements. He has collaborated with a number of other artists and musicians, including the techno pioneer Holger Hiller. Unlike in visual arts, it is completely normal for the Rap- and Hip-Hop music scene to erase boundaries between individual and collective creativity. The best singers and musicians come together to achieve the best results.

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