

Jan Zöller Conversation With the Others

27 NOVEMBER–29 DECEMBER 2024

DIRIMART PERA



Discussion with the others, 2024
acrylic, oil, stain, pastel, ink and charcoal
on canvas
250 x 200 cm

Dirimart is pleased to announce German painter Jan Zöller's first solo exhibition at the gallery titled *Conversation With the Others*. This is also Zöller's debut show in Istanbul where he aims to create an inviting space for wandering encounters at gallery's Pera location. The show will be curated by German curator Martin Engler.

Jan Zöller's work is marked by his versatility and unorthodox approach to the possibilities of painting. His no longer quite so young body of work never decisively sides with either abstraction or figuration, standing out through his immense freedom in playing with them. Zöller himself describes the non-objective yet meaningful forms as tools – tools that, in the best case, assist us in deciphering his paintings. For nothing in Zöller's paintings is unequivocal or conclusive: the longer one observes and attempts to decode them, the greater the insights and discoveries to uncover. Reading the painting evolves into a dialogue between the artwork and the viewer.

Since his first gallery exhibitions in Karlsruhe and Berlin in 2019, Jan Zöller's art has undergone rapid development, with this current exhibition further demonstrating his distinctive practice. The exhibition spans from the airy, light twin paintings *Aufenthalt (am Morgen)* (Stay (in the morning)) and *Aufenthalt (im Regen)* (Stay (in the rain)) to the darker realms of *Das Leben* (Life) and *Fragments of Learning Processes*, bridging pictorial abysses that Zöller deliberately opens up to fill the void with meaning instantly. Landscape allusions, such as the loosely dripped grassland in *It's Very Early and a Lot of Things Happened*, seamlessly blend with the abstract *Aimlessly Wandering*, where individual visual elements like the shoe motif or colourful circular forms emerge meaningfully in various contexts.

Aimlessly Wandering is the title of one of the smaller works in Jan Zöller's, which the viewer might only discover upon a second glance. Despite its almost complete abstraction, in contrast to his other paintings, the title perfectly encapsulates the manner of painting and reading this artwork, which abounds with objects, narratives, entities, and particularly enigmas. The exhibition's title, *Conversation With the Others*, complements this wandering exploration. Those with whom the painter engages here are birds – or rather, humanlike entities lacking arms yet equipped with trousers and shoes and distinct beaks. These beaks, which like to fly through the paintings without heads or bodies, are always open, always transmitting, always communicating; truly 'in conversation'. But what language do these entities, half-human half-bird, speak? Who are 'the Others'? With whom are these entities conversing? For instance, in the titular painting, *Conversation With the Others*? Above all, who is speaking to whom? What at first glance appears to be a dialogue soon reveals itself as a chaotic polyphony of overlapping voices: not just two, but at least five or six beaked entities chatter in all directions at once. Even fluent speakers of their language would find this multi-layered cacophony indecipherable. Similarly, with their painterly qualities, these individual entities merge into the multi-layeredness of the painting. Or submerge? They blend into a single entity that speaks with many beaks. The painting contains many beaks, including some without bodies, which seem to emerge directly from the painting: the painter as Goethe's *Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1797), who could no longer dispel the spirits he had summoned...

The exhibition's second large-format painting, bearing the significant title *Das Leben* (The Life), sees the narrative, the 'visual narrative' retreating into or hiding within the painting. Here, two birdlike entities observe us, struggling against



an abstract, gestural, darkly opaque 'dripping'. This 'Life' is a menacing, formless tapestry of colour that alternately protects, overwhelms, or even gives rise to both of them.

To the extent that clarity is never granted, remaining ever in the realm of aimlessly wandering and searching, all elements in Zöllner's paintings are carefully balanced. This delicate balancing of contrasts is vividly illustrated throughout the artwork, especially where the menacing 'dripping', which entraps the birdlike entities, is counterbalanced by a playful construction of stones and two-coloured sticks at the bottom of the painting. An excess of legibility is immediately countered, and even becomes the title, as in 'fragments of learning processes', where the individual parts of a previously painted canvas are cut into pieces and then sewn together by the artist.

Central to these paintings, and perhaps to Zöllner's broader body of work is an invitation to dialogue. The conversation – with the birds, the others, ourselves, and the paintings – is meant in earnest, even as Zöllner and his art refuse to provide definitive answers. To enhance this experience, large, specially designed seats on wheels by the artist himself are placed in the gallery, inviting visitors to take a seat, converse with the paintings and others, and physically and mentally wander through Jan Zöllner's image worlds.

Conversation With the Others will be on view at Dirimart Pera from 27 November to 29 December 2024.

Jan Zöllner (b. 1992, Haslach im Kinzigtal) studied under the supervision of Leni Hoffmann and Marijke van Warmerdam at the Academy of Fine Arts, Karlsruhe, and of under Jean Marc Bustamante at the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris. His solo exhibitions include *Nothing else changes it just rearranges*, Robert Grunenberg, Berlin (2024); *For every thing that is shown, some thing is hidden* at Kunstverein Friedrichshafen, Friedrichshafen (2022); *Will ich nichts verpassen, schließe ich die Augen* at Galerie Heinrich Ehrhardt, Madrid (2022); *Keine Zeit zum Baden* at Städtische Galerie, Ostfildern (2021); *It's better to experience things, than to talk about them*, Meyer Riegger, Karlsruhe (2020) and *Possibly there's a possibility that everything is possible*, Robert Grunenberg, Berlin (2019). Among his selected group exhibitions are *die Welt ist noch auf einen Abend mein*, Galeria Ehrhardt Florez, Madrid (2023); *There is no sea but the sea*, Meyer Riegger, Karlsruhe (2022); *Ohne Titel. Junge Malerei aus Süddeutschland und der Deutschschweiz*, Museum zu Allerheiligen, Schaffhausen (2022); *6 + 3 = 1*, Galerie Barbara Seiler, Zurich (2021); *Paranoia Strikes Deep*, Osnova, Moscow (2020) and *C'est quand demain*, Coherent, Brussels (2018). In 2017, he won the Postgraduate Award from the Academy of Fine Arts, Karlsruhe, followed by the 24th Federal Art Students Award from Bundeskunsthalle Bonn in 2018, and a working grant from Stiftung Kunstfonds in 2021. Jan Zöllner lives and works in Karlsruhe and Canale.

Dr. Martin Engler (b. 1968, Freiburg im Breisgau) has been an independent curator, author, and critic since 1996. He has lectured at various German and European institutions, including Goethe University and Städelschule, Frankfurt and the University of Bern, Switzerland since 1997. From 2002 to 2008, Engler was a curator at Kunstverein Hannover, followed by his role as Head of Contemporary Art at the Städel Museum from 2008 to 2022. Since 2023, he has been a Scientific Consultant at Villa Grisebach, Berlin. In addition to his writings on avant-garde theory, the interplay between painting and photography, figurative painting of the 1980s, and the photography of the Becher class, Dr. Engler authored monographic catalogues on artists such as John Armleder, John Baldessari, Leigh Bowery, Donald Judd, Piero Manzoni, Adrian Paci, Ursula Schulz-Dornburg, Peter Roehr, Victor Vasarely, and Corinne Wasmuht. Dr. Martin Engler lives and works in Berlin.

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