

GALERIE OSKAR WEISS

Rafal Skoczek

Driftworks

04.04.–24.05.2025

Oskar Weiss is pleased to present Rafal Skoczek *Driftworks*, the artists first exhibition at the gallery.

Built as barracks for migrant workers in the 1960s and repurposed for asylum seekers in the 90s, Juch Areal lay forgotten on the outskirts of Zürich until it was taken over by a group of squatters, including Rafal Skoczek, in a brief occupation in 2019. In little time the artist had set up a library of anarchist literature and co-authored a documentary about the site, *Menschen in Baracken*, which, like much of his own work, maps a symbiotic relationship between a centre and its periphery to examine the means by which one contains the other, consciously or not.

Early on, the work included sculptural mockups of urban design proposals for keeping the homeless away or youth at bay. These 'Post Disciplinary Techniques' often appeared in institutional settings, as if returning the city's own exhibitionary modes of eviction to it. But in 2018, his parodic remake of an anti-loitering Mosquito Alarm, whose enervating frequency is only audible to ears under 25 years old, went seemingly unheard by the judges who awarded him the Kiefer Hablitzel Prize that year.

In the recent work, sound features less as a tool of displacement and more as a psychosocial metre. Recording projects taking place in a network of tunnels running beneath the city, imagined as a concrete horn, have produced an acoustic cartography of city limits. It's also through sound that his graphic work, which first surfaced in the form of event flyers, has become more prominent. The jammed-xerox aesthetic he is well-known for evolved from his intuitive misuse of a 1970s Opterla Optesomat, a portable wax coating machine which has been fed all manner of UV reacting pigments, lacquers and tar, and physically manipulated in the process of printing.

When these prints started to form the basis of paper-on-panel paintings in 2022, the names, dates and venues they once advertised disappeared leaving waveform, op-art abstractions that suggested a city reduced to an inhospitable frequency, or altogether abandoned. Recent paintings, more legible as landscapes (by dimension), pan away from urban static to sparse, peripheral wastelands.

Free of the signifiers that would otherwise align them with a social event, they gesture toward a model of art that Jean-Francois Lyotard proposed in the aftermath of May '68; one that, instead of reasoning with established systems of representation or providing articulate solutions, would tap into the viewer's phantasies, the figural, the here-and-now.¹

How such an art distinguishes itself from the type of abstraction that historically invited a gaze away from social reality is the contention of Skoczek's current work. In one sense it is addressed materially, through his insistence on exhibiting the cumbersome infrastructure of an itinerant life: automobiles lived in, plywood beds slept on, the shelves of a bookshop kept alive in various guises across the city over the last five years. In another, it's explored through

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signifiers that misdirect the readings coming out of, or projected onto, the images. If the phrase stretched across the face of the most recent paintings—*Belle Estate*, 'beautiful summer' in Italian—conjures that time of year for an affluent escape to the periphery, or allegorises a bourgeois fantasy of the art-life; it also pivots on its potential misreading in English, and an ambivalence that allows 'beautiful property' to emerge as potential from a stressed length of packing tape.

Matt Hanson

Rafal Skoczek (*1989 Bystrzyca Kłodzka, PL), lives and works in Zurich. He was part of several solo- and group exhibitions and projects at Galerie Oskar Weiss, Zürich; Plymouth Rock, Zürich; XYZCollective, Tokyo; Mikro, Zürich; Stadtgalerie Bern; Kunsthalle Zürich; Kunsthhaus Glarus; Shindisi; Centre d'Art Neuchâtel; Diana, Los Angeles; Les Urbains, Lausanne.

He co-founded the exhibition project Chickentown in Zurich, runs the self-publishing house E.G.G. (Edition Gora Gora) and the music label Czarnagora.

1 Paraphrased from Lyotard, J-F. (1984). „Notes on the Critical Function of the Work of Art,” in Driftworks, ed. R. McKeon, Semiotext(e), Inc., pp. 69-82

