

### OLIVER OSBORNE AND THE VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Interview by Guido Santandrea

Oliver Osborne is a young London based artist born in 1985 in Edinburgh whose practice researches the innate ambiguity of images and questions their visual communication through the overlapping of different registers and languages in his paintings. Guido Santandrea met him in his studio to talk about his work and his upcoming projects.



View of Tomas Downes & Oliver Osborne, *Friendship in six planes*. Peles Empire, London, 2013.

GS: Here in London one may notice a common interest by many young artists in the ambiguous and fragile nature of an image, especially in relation to the Internet and to commercial and branding strategies of communication. How would you relate your practice to the context and the artistic scene of the city? In what way does it influence you? OO: I think I find myself drawn to images that are very recognizable and yet very enigmatic. Recognition can be very distracting and often conceals rather than reveals the nature or motives of an image. Cities behave similarly, and my understanding and reading of London is always on the move. It's difficult to understand the influence, because on the one hand I am very stimulated by the city, the area I live in and Leytonstone where my studio is, and on the other hand the internet keeps us hyper-informed and connected to things elsewhere. I'm probably quite a studio-centric artist though and I enjoy the fact that I can work with an image for a long time in a very controlled environment, but that life outside the studio is changing the meaning of that image on a daily basis. The internet is just one of many things that punctures that environment.

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# Tanya Leighton



Oliver Osborne, *Rubber Plant (Bar)*, 2013, oil and collage on linen, cm 45 x 32. Courtesy Vilma Gold, London.

GS: In a way also your works connect images of disparate natures and origins. You often use different and contrasting languages in your paintings. A hyper-realistic representation of a rubber plant could be overlapped by an insert of a cartoon. What is their role in your works? OO: I've always been preoccupied with how images work grammatically, how they deliver the intent of their production, or how we project a reading of images as viewers. Everything I use operates as a kind of found material, whether or not I've generated it myself. The painting of a rubber plant and the found cartoon come together very simply, and they have an impact on each other. Many of the cartoons that I've used in the past year or two have come from modern language textbooks, and so in their original context they were purposeful or instructive, when incorporated into my paintings, they lose their footing a little. They are disparate in their origins but I think when I choose to use certain languages or images it's because in some way I see them as the same or connected. In many ways I am always looking to make paintings pragmatically, which has some interesting difficulties.

GS: I find interesting how you question the medium of painting itself in this way. Could we talk a little more about this aspect of your work?

OO: I like to think of painting, and oil painting in particular, as a technology that I can use to produce images. It's a technology that is flexible, crude and technical. The fascinating diversity in its recent history (from Ingres to Kribber perhaps) gives huge scope to painters today, without needing to get lost in the ideological angst that sometimes threatens to make painting very self-absorbed. I'm always looking for ways to participate in painting, and currently that means handling large-scale monochrome paintings with a similar attention to small-scale paintings of a plant. I'm often trying to figure out orthodoxy, which in painting is actually very hard to pinpoint.

GS: You've started a series of paintings composed of monochrome panels with the insertion of a cartoon in the middle of the work. Could you tell me a bit more about this series?

OO: These paintings have evolved from the work I did whilst I was a student, which initially was focused on languages of abstraction and increasingly has become more focused on the combination of found imagery and monochrome painting, with the monochrome treated too as a found image. I like the possibility of a collapse in which the dumb, blank cartoons take on an abstract property, while the painted ground gains something close to representation.

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# Tanya Leighton



Oliver Osborne, *¿A dónde se fue Anna?*, 2013, screen printing, paper and oil on linen, cm 212 x 139.  
Courtesy Vilma Gold, London.

GS: Are the cartoons painted on the canvas or are they collages?

OO: The cartoons are screen prints collaged onto the canvas. Although the paintings are very flat this process gives them physicality that when encountered in person is quite rich in texture, but looks very graphic in reproduction.

GS: Recently you had a solo show in London at Vilma Gold Gallery and in Rome at Frutta Gallery. Could you tell me a bit more about these projects?

OO: The two shows were produced simultaneously and there are many parallels between the two. The show at Vilma Gold was titled *Anna*, the show at Frutta *Otto*. I wanted to give the shows proper names, in a manner similar to a roleplay exercise in a language lesson. Both names are palindromic, and both have a kind of pan-European haziness that allows me to inflate them with personality through the selection of images, colours and the modes of painting I employ. In the Vilma Gold show *Anna* is mentioned directly only in titles, and in these cases (*¿A dónde se ha ido Anna?* and *¿A dónde se fue Anna?*) to ask where she has gone.

GS: In the show at Vilma Gold you presented a painting that could be a connection between the other two series of works in the exhibition: I'm talking about a small ochre monochrome with an insert of a reproduction of a Romanesque low relief. It seems to me to mediate with the "rubber plant" paintings and with the new series of big composed monochromes with the cartoon inserts. The naïve style of the relief and its original educational purpose create a immediate parallel with the cartoon that you use. Could you tell me a bit more about this work and its role in the show?

OO: The image used in the painting *À l'église* comes from a book on Charlemagne that I've had at the studio for about a year. I included it in the show in order, in a very direct manner, to extend the languages in the show; it features a screenprint of a photograph of a relief sculpture collaged onto a monochrome painting. I think it could be seen as humorous, the potential linking of educational cartoons with early Christian art comes quite close to being funny for me, which is ok, but I hope too that it opens something new about the way images that may be very recognizable to us can be totally unruly as well.

# Tanya Leighton



Oliver Osborne, À l'église, 2013, screen printing, paper and oil on linen, cm 68 x 45. Courtesy Vilma Gold, London.

GS: And now what's next? Any upcoming projects?

OO: I'm currently working on a new group of works for a solo presentation at Independent Art Fair in New York with Vilma Gold. This will involve large scale paintings featuring Pferdle, a popular character from Swabian TV, and new smaller representational works. Also on the horizon is a show with Max Ruf and Emanuel Röhss at Carl Kostyál's space on Savile Row in London, which promises to be a really interesting project.

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