

David Ostrowski

Text by Paul Soto

It's a (painting) show about nothing!¹

The press release for David Ostrowski's "From bad to worse" is accompanied by a photograph of a pink-haired man² standing on the edge of the passenger side window of a Jeep Cherokee. The car seems to be moving forward as the man sprays an imprecise diagonal of black paint from right to left along the cement retaining wall of a freeway. A second line on a shadowed portion of the wall, cut off on the right edge of the picture, is probably also a mark of his. It looks to be sundown.

Taken with an extreme zoom, the photograph bears a grainy look that suggests both a swift casualness and panoptical surveillance. It is between these two extremes, between surrender and self-monitoring, that Ostrowski's paintings register. Like his paint sprays and canvas assemblages, this photograph seeks to depict nothing in particular, *in action*. Yet it is difficult to forget that the photograph's event is staged. This is likely a friend of the artist snapping the picture from across the freeway. The centering of the can in the man's hand is too perfect, for one. You can almost hear the conversations leading up to this moment, which to me sound intentionally mindless and thus deeply affected.³

The title "From bad to worse" describes the moment when bad painting⁴ slips into self-conscious painting, when mindlessness slips into affectation. Whether in whited-out spray lines, appliqués of adhesive foils, or lacquered paper elements, each gesture seems unable to come to terms with itself and its desire to express nothing.⁵ Each hesitates in the active denial of its communicative function, and each blunders as the intellect floods the instinctual mid-sentence.

¹Thanks to Jerry Seinfeld

²**I am not sure whether this is the artist himself or his avatar. Either way, a punk attitude resounds.**

³Here, affectation means taking up a specific artistic strategy or pose, while mindlessness denotes the emptying out of that strategy. In other words, Ostrowski seeks out the pose of *no pose*.

⁴An Albert Oehlen reference will do here. Did the press release forget to mention that Ostrowski studied with Oehlen?

⁵As opposed to nothingness, which would imply an ontological search.