

ALEXANDER DIK



2025

Alexander Dik

Grosse Esser

2025



“My paintings are battles. Not only against the world, but also against myself. I use my body because the mind often lies – but the body never does. The canvas is not a window for me, but a ring. I paint with rage, with hope, with hunger. My work emerges where vulnerability meets resistance.”

PROFILE

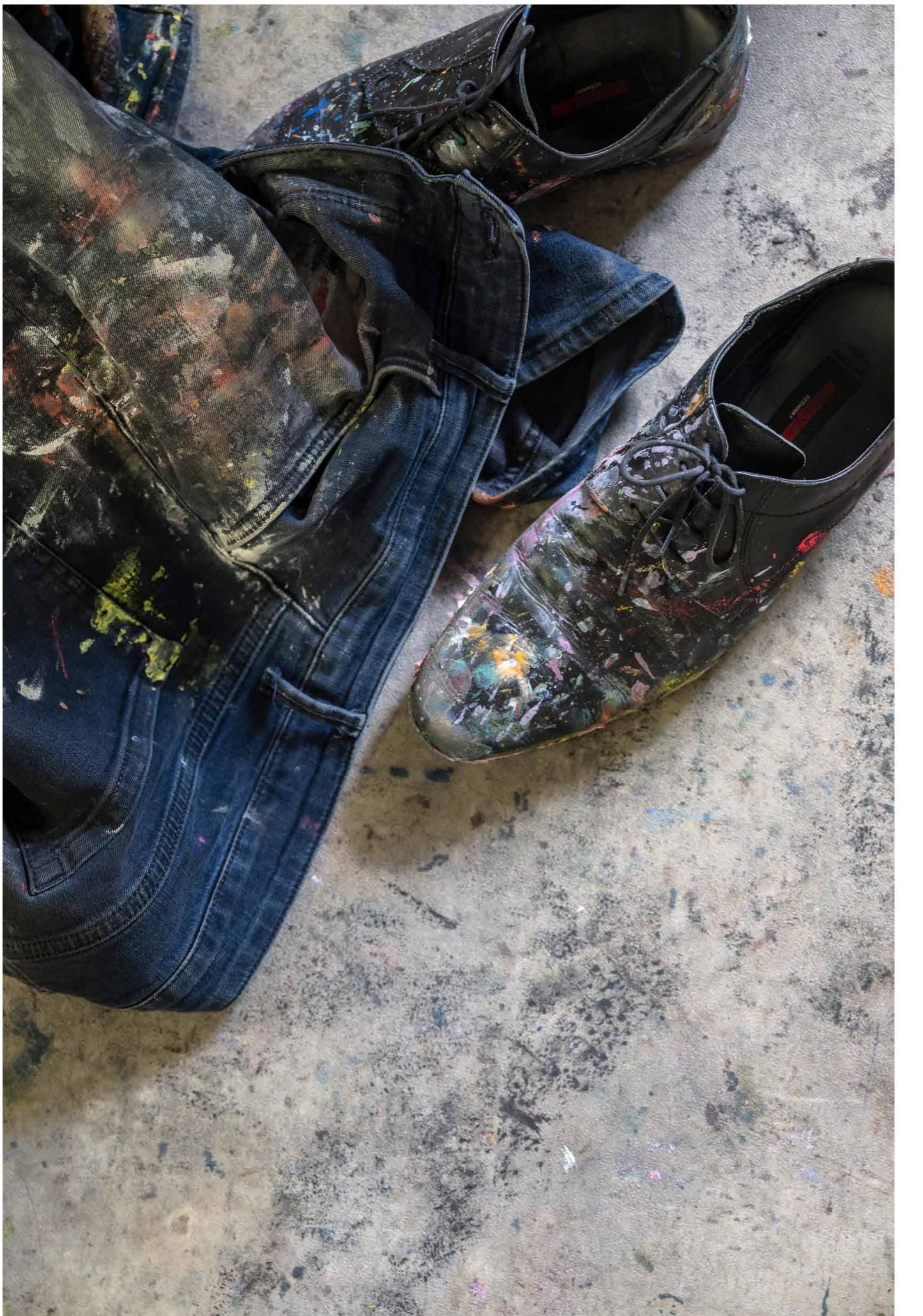
Alexander Dik (b. 1983, Kazakhstan) is a Berlin-based painter and sculptor. His work moves between figurative abstraction, action painting and social provocation.

He descends from a Volga-German family who was deported by the Soviet Union to Kazakhstan during World War II. In 1992, they migrated to Berlin-Marzahn, a working-class district of the former GDR caught between the pressures of adaptation after German reunification and a stubborn collective resilience. This history of dispossession and fractured identity runs through Dik's oeuvre indirectly – as an instinctive refusal of conformity, indifference and cultural erasure.

Dik spent over a decade competing in Taekwondo and worked for years in his family's supermarket, later running his own business in the food-retail sector. Discipline as a practice of self-formation through bodily training and physical labour is key to understanding his *Weltanschauung*. Only at 35 began Dik formal art studies at the Academy of Arts in Berlin. He was appointed *Meisterschüler* by Andreas Amrhein in 2024.

Influenced by Georg Baselitz and mentored by Ute Wöllmann, Norbert Bisky, Jonas Burgert and Christopher Lehmpfuhl, Dik paints in oil, working on the floor, using hands, feet and weight, exploring dramas of consumption, greed, resistance and hope across contemporary power dynamics. The series *Grosse Esser* establishes his distinctive position within German Neo-Expressionism.





CURATORIAL STATEMENT

¹ *Post-cool* describes a phase in which a city's formerly avant-garde scene, displaced by gentrification, has become more demure, nebulous and increasingly shaped by marketing forces. See "The Post-Cool", *Spike Art Magazine*, no. 81/82, Winter 2024, published on the occasion of the magazine's twentieth anniversary.

The first time I wrote about Alexander Dik was nearly a year ago, in November 2024. Back then, he was preparing his first solo show overseas, *Berlin Compositions* at JARILAGER Gallery in Seoul. As often happens when an artist has just joined a gallery's roster, a studio visit was planned. Some impressions from that day have stayed with me ever since.

I knew that, until very recently, Dik had been painting almost clandestinely in the basement of a supermarket he runs in Berlin-Spandau: a windowless room packed with shelves and cardboard boxes; hardly a place anyone would mistake for anything artistic, if not for its smell of oil paint and cigarettes, and for the fact that he still occasionally flips it into a makeshift exhibition night.

Dik's biography is filled with contradictions and irregularities – what someone might call a post-romantic epic. So, I was not surprised when I met him in his new workspace and faced a big warehouse in the middle of nowhere, far from the noise of the capital, a place ruled by air and light. The scale felt like an aircraft hangar compared with the cellar in Spandau. I half expected to find an airplane inside; instead, I found piles of canvases, paint tubes, old magazines, art books, sculptures – and Alexander, showing me everything with the fervour of a scientist who has just made a major discovery. When he finally sat down on a chair, I took the armchair opposite him and started writing down some notes:

"Alexander Dik. Impossible to tell the age of the hand behind his works. Everywhere the energy of a first time. He paints like someone who never had the luxury to develop a style slowly. He wants to find his language now. No bored dandyism, no sugar-coated lies, no decorative beauty. He shows me a canvas he is working on: the *Tannenbaum* pierced by dozens of swords, Germanness at its breaking point..."

One year later, as Dik gets ready to present the *Grosse Esser* to the international public, I find myself circling back to the same questions I had on my mind after my first visit: What does it mean to be an artist today? In our (horizonless?) contemporary, what is actually art for? How do we recognise art that deals productively with the world? And then: What is left to say from good old Germany, if even Berlin – once a refuge for so much artistic experimentation – has now gone post-cool¹?

–Marta Cassina, December 2025

GROSSE ESSER



GROSSE ESSER

A meal usually ends when the diners are full. The mouth, of course, has no idea when its task is complete; it keeps opening as long as the hand keeps feeding it. Only the stomach and the brain – feeling and thinking – know when enough is enough. When they fall out of sync, when one of them stops working properly, satiety never arrives. The mouth just chews on.

Capturing this sense of bottomless appetite, Alexander Dik's series *Grosse Esser* tackles the mechanism behind society's "always-more, always-forward" mantra. Amidst what he sees as the system-wide expansion of a bulimic disorder, Dik paints the human being as a Big Eater (or should we say *binge* eater?), in other words, at a point where both the physical and societal body have slipped beyond the control of their owners. In doing so, he delivers an unsettling medical tableau of our times¹, an x-ray detecting excess, compulsion, loneliness and dismay. Something which is hard to find today in a landscape where superficiality and amusement are com-modified daily.

We face a group of large-format, bust-length portraits arranged as a loose constellation, a chorus repeating the same performance over and over. Each canvas shows a Big Eater in mid-bite, eyes bulging, jaws gaping, hands ravenous, at once a cursed and hieratic apparition. Tangerine, crimson, ochre and yellow vibe against complementary tones of blue, bottle green and mauve. A sulphurous glow shimmers from the backgrounds, producing a hallucinatory suspension, an alcoholic tremor. Caught in this frozen moment, the banquet might well continue on its own, forever.

A few faces are easily recognisable – this one must be Adolf Hitler, or is it Max Beckmann? Others, we can scarcely narrow down. Some, in fact, are almost faceless; their features collapse under the force of the brushstroke, as materiality overrides depiction. Such painterly dialectics operate in more than two ways simultaneously, with areas that are "abstract" and areas that "represent" remaining in erotic tension, since representation/"likeness" itself requires here radical abstracting, even a radical violence. Dik conveys the convexity of the bite with a coagulated blob of colour: a liminal, unarticulated mass midway between the food and the living flesh, a glob that lifts palpably off the canvas to define the centre of its composition. All this effectuates a sense of extraordinary frenzy, as though the diners were eating too voraciously for their gestures to be legible except through accumulation.

¹ Dik frequently refers to painting as a diagnostic tool for reading the present, and to the canvas as an "operating table". This metaphor was central to the curatorial concept of *NOT ARZT*, the exhibition at *Stiftung Starke* (November 2025) in which the *Grosse Esser* were first presented in Berlin.

² Term coined by Guy Debord to characterise the final stage of capitalism, in which the "spectacle" – a social relation mediated by images and commodities – permeates all aspects of life (politics, media, culture), creating a seamless system that fosters pseudo-needs, false unity and endless consumption. See Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of Spectacle* (translated from French), Verso Books, original ed. 1988.

³ See David Hockney, *Picasso*, Hanuman Books, 1990.

It hardly needs saying that the allegory of the eater is not painted here for the first time. For all the art historical invocations in Dik's new work – literal, figural and devotional –, from the Christian iconographic Adam eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden to Leonardo's *Last Supper* (1494-1498), to Goya's *Saturn Devouring His Son* (1820-1823) and Van Gogh's *Potato Eaters* (1885), one precedent might be the most resonant and haunting: Georg Baselitz's series *Orangenesser* (1981-1982), its psychological tension, its banal motif taking on a visionary absoluteness.

Speaking of this influence, Dik suggests: "The *Grosse Esser*... initially have something to do with my encounter with Baselitz, whom I regard as a visual model and a father. The second reason for creating the *Grosse Esser* is that I felt suddenly surrounded by the images of an artistic generation that, in my view, has betrayed the legacy of German Expressionism, endlessly chewing the same fruit, the same formulas, with neither courage nor invention. The *Grosse Esser* are my reaction to both."

While Baselitz's work may have served as impetus for the *Grosse Esser*, they spur the most Dikian – painterly and biographic – reflections: "I was painting on the floor to stay close to the medium and far from any predetermined composition. After several brush attempts, I decided to step into the canvas and paint the *Esser* with my feet. The canvas functions as a Taekwondo ring; there, just as I am used to, I am fighting with my whole body". Far beyond his expressionist and neo-expressionist predecessors, Dik refurbishes the body as the measure of all negotiations between will and execution, between subject and object. Athleticism incorporates the surface, determining its dimensions (never larger than the span of Dik's limbs) and its rules, trace as strategy across a friction zone – oil pigment stroked, rubbed, dotted, layered and scraped. Efficient slides and steps for a stable defence, controlled kicks to attack.

The world Dik paints is no longer the one Baselitz confronted in the 1980s – a world walking along the brink of the "integrated spectacle society"², but not yet staring into its abyss. Dik's *Esser* are today's avatars. His contextual ether is one of bodies atomising and self-itemising in order to survive within society's relentless vortex, consuming everything at hand – every possible thing the Internet is selling, every byte of information, every image, every ideology, every trace of spirituality, every natural resource; then, consuming themselves. Hence the *Esser* of the cycle Dik calls *Manier*, where

the eater's head is eating and eaten at the same time, served up like a still life laid out in full view on a table.

One of those heads could as well carry Germany's name. Perhaps reflective of his own displaced perspective as a former Volga-German now living in Berlin, Dik sees in post-unification Germany a country detached from itself, unable to face its traumas and therefore condemned to repeat them mechanically. In a fragile democracy, potholed with amnesia and omission, the *Esser* tell a story of self-destruction pushed towards indifference.

But there is no reason to fall into the trap these scenes set for us. Not everything is lost. Dik is not painting to sink further, but to push back. These, quite typically for him, are not works about body-horror or crisis-y helplessness, but about seeing numbness and confronting it – then, for someone who has spent a lifetime training to turn vulnerability into strength, about feeling and knowing that (where) it hurts. For surely, however many voids may remain unfilled, only bodies allowed to accept and understand the pain at their heart can attempt a response to catastrophe, rather than linger in it.

Finally, a few thoughts on *Grosse Esser – Rezessionist 1*. The *Esser* here is Adolf Hitler – though Dik insists that what we see is ultimately what we *choose* to see. What should strike us, anyway, is not the subject itself, provocative as it is, but the way it is painted. Many will recall the 1937 decree in which Hitler banned Expressionism as “degenerate” art. Dik flips that history back onto itself; he goes fully meta: what was once forbidden becomes the cage for the man who forbade it. Which leads to a sharper question: What is actually so dangerous about painting? If it were not dangerous, why would every system of power promote certain images while outlawing, marginalising or “shadow-banning” others?

David Hockney once argued³ that painting will never die, nor will it be replaced, because image-making is not the replication of reality, but an ethical position within it. He gives a really clear example. Think of a war scene, any massacre or atrocity that demands documentation and remembering. A professional photographer, bound to physical presence and their own safety, will almost inevitably shoot from the side of the oppressors. A painter, without those constraints, can depict the same scene from the side where the story *deserves* to be told. Not a more exact reality, but a more just one. With Dik, one is tempted to say: painting is, indeed, still in very good hands.

DELIKAT

The body as the artist's primary instrument. Dik meditates on athletic mastery as a way to overcome limitations and achieve philosophical virtue. A contemporary form of "know thyself", grounded in exercise and self-acceptance rather than speculation.

Grosse Esser - Delikat 1
2025
Oil on canvas
250 x 202 cm





Grosse Esser - Delikat 2
2025
Oil on canvas
250 x 202 cm

Grosse Esser - Delikat 3
2025
Oil on canvas
250 x 202 cm





Grosse Esser - Delikat 4
2025
Oil on canvas
250 x 202 cm

LIMONCELLO

The most resonant cycle of the series: a radiant dialogue with classical heritage, *Italianità* and the cultural imaginary of the Mediterranean. The parabola of the artist who faces backwards in order to move forwards, digging the past for the tools to envision what comes next.

Grosse Esser - Limoncello 1
2025
Oil on canvas
250 x 202 cm





Grosse Esser - Limoncello 2
2025
Oil on canvas
250 x 202 cm



Grosse Esser - Limoncello 3
2025
Oil on canvas
202 x 250 cm



*Grosse Esser - Limoncello
Spiegelbild
2025
Oil on acrylic glass, re-
verse-painted, glazed, framed
80 x 100 cm*

MANIER

Dik's intervention in the still-life canon. Quiet depictions of inert matter turn into a cannibalistic ritual: *Who* is on the menu today? The banquet as a metaphor for the impossibility of separating appetite from sacrifice.

Grosse Esser – Manier 1
2025
Oil on canvas
250 x 202 cm





Grosse Esser - Manier 2
2025
Oil on canvas
250 x 202 cm

Grosse Esser - Manier 3
2025
Oil on canvas
250 x 202 cm



REZESIONIST

A love letter to Expressionism – “degenerate art” in its stand against fascism and censorship. Dik celebrates the absolute independence of the artistic act as a form of resistance that has to be renewed every day, in every present.

Grosse Esser – Rezessionist 1
2025
Oil on canvas
250 x 202 cm

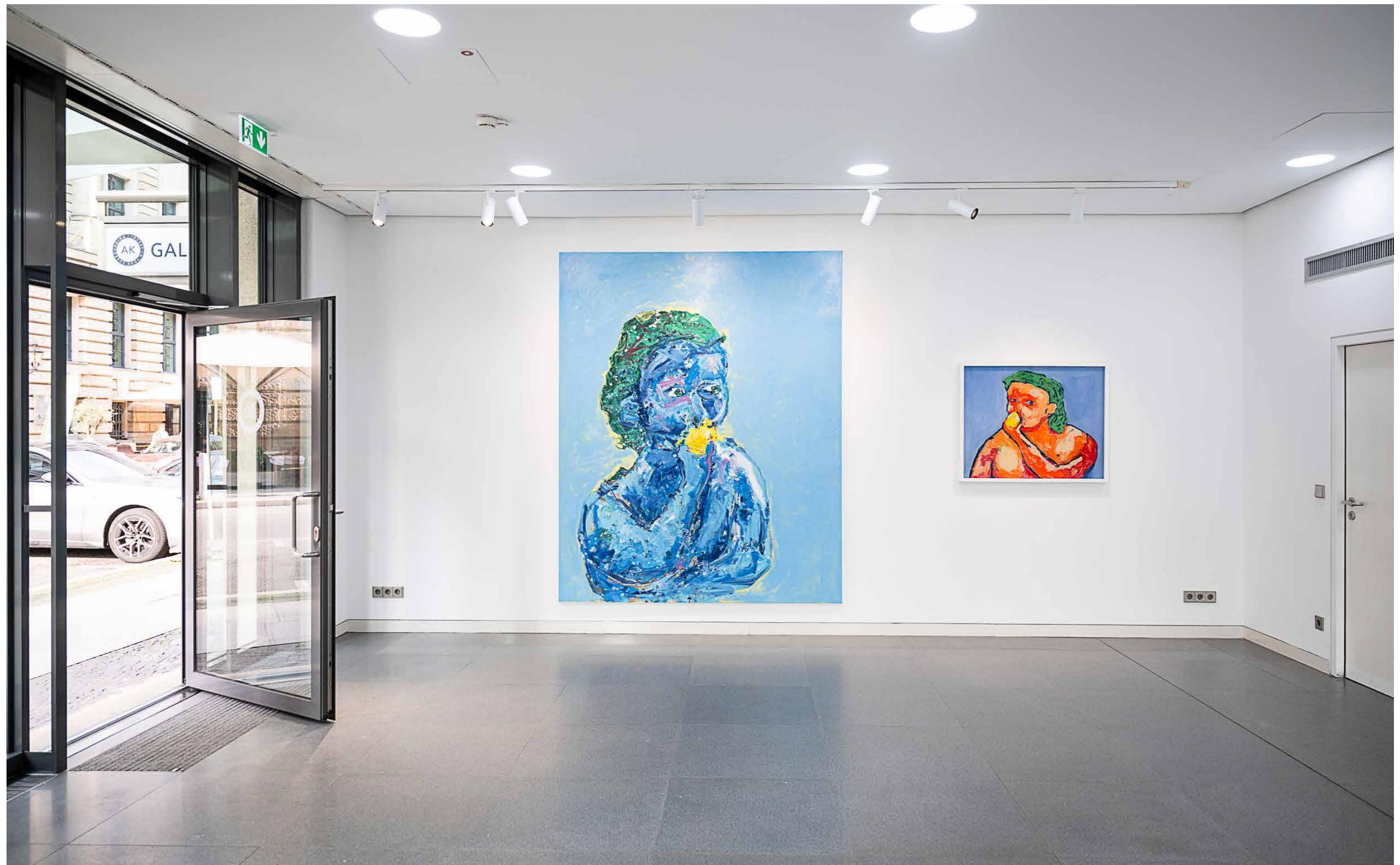




Grosse Esser - Rezessionist 2
2025
Oil on canvas
250 x 202 cm



Grosse Esser
2025
Mixed media, glazed, framed
50 x 40 cm



Limoncello
Installation view
AK Galerie, Berlin
2025



Rezessionist

Installation view

Stiftung Starke, Berlin

2025

Ph. Angela Regenbrecht



Alexander Dik with Andreas Amrhein
Stiftung Starke, Berlin
2025
Ph. Angela Regenbrecht

VITA

1983 Born in Lenger, Kazakhstan
1992 Migration to Berlin, Germany
2005 Completed training as a retail salesman at Galerie-Künstler-Museumbedarf Gerick
2019 Enrolled under Andreas Amrhein at the Academy of Arts, Berlin
2024 Appointed *Meisterschüler* by Andreas Amrhein at the Academy of Arts, Berlin
Alexander Dik lives and works in Berlin

Solo exhibitions

2025
Farbe Bekennen, AK Galerie, Berlin, DE
Trinity, AK Galerie, Sofia, BG
2024
Berlin Compositions, JARILAGER Gallery, Seoul, KR
Podium, Stiftung Starke, Berlin, DE
Das Manifest, NOTAGALLERY, Berlin, DE
2023
Das Schaufelwerk, Pashmin Art Gallery, Bad Tölz, DE
2022
Sex, War and Blooms, AK Galerie, Berlin, DE
Migrant... und nun?, B1 Galerie, Berlin, DE
2021
Bahnung, Pashmin Art Gallery, Hamburg, DE

Group exhibitions

2025
NOT ARZT, Stiftung Starke, Berlin, DE
Summer Selection, Pandora Gallery, Berlin, DE
2024
With These Eyes, JARILAGER Gallery, Seoul, KR
Metamorphose, ASK Galerie Berlin e.V., Berlin, DE
Gesunder Größenwahn, NOTAGALLERY, Berlin, DE
2023
Art as a Universal Momentum, Mark Rothko Art Centre, Daugavpils, LVA
Partnerships: A Global Dialogue Through Art, Songzhuang Contemporary Archive Art Museum/Pashmin Art Consortia, Beijing, CN
Collective, AK Galerie, Sofia, BG
The Unexpected, Monat Gallery, Madrid, ES
2022
50 Years of cultural exchange between Europe and China, Pashmin Art Consortia, Chongqing, CN
Bloom of Youth, Monat Gallery, Madrid, ES
Berliner Künstler, BV Galerie, Klagenfurt, AT

Public collections

La Colombe d'Or, FR
Kunsthalle Osnabrück, DE
Kunsthalle Rostock, DE

Private collections

Manuel Koch Collection, DE
Asenov Family Collection, BG
Scharfmann Collection, DE
Weidemann Collection, DE
Hedegaard-Lyng Collection, DE
Khodzitski Collection, DE
Wendisch Family Collection, DE
Cremer-Thurbsy Family Collection, DE/USA
Horacek Collection, AT
Loitsch Family Collection, DE

Corporate & art trade collections

DTB Attorneys, DE
Jari Lager Collection, DE/KR
Morgen & Stern Collection, DE
Prea Group, DE
Allianz, DE
WBF Ingenieurbau GmbH, DE
Kimmerle Group, DE

Literature

“Alexander Dik and his expressive power of articulation”, *Aesthetica – The Art & Culture Magazine*, no. 105, 2022
“Alexander Dik and the beginning of an Epoch”, *CANS Contemporary Art News*, no. 207, 2022
“Alexander Dik und sein Neoexpressionismus”, *Parnass Kunstmagazin*, no. 4/2021
Migrant... und nun?, Lothar Berg, Anthea Verlag, 2020

