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*Vereinfachtes Zeichnen*, 2005

Oil on canvas

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Signed, titled, and dated "Vereinfachtes Zeichnen A. Oehlen 05" on verso

Provenance: Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris  
Private collection

Literature: Holzwarth, Hans Werner, Roberto Ohrt, Martin Prinzhorn, John Corbett,  
*Albert Oehlen*, Taschen, Germany, 2017, pp. 332, illustrated.

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**EDWARD TYLER NAHEM**

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Rendered in a vibrant palette, Albert Oehlen's *Vereinfachtes Zeichnen, 2005*, is imbued with the anarchic spirit that has characterized the artist's oeuvre from the start. Marking his return to pure painting after an extended period of experimentation with digital manipulation, the present work belongs to a series of paintings that Oehlen made in the mid-2000s, distinguished by arrangements of figurative and abstract forms against a white background. This was a new approach for the artist, who explained: "I had never composed a painting; that was something I didn't want to bother with. You grease the whole canvas evenly anyway. But now I'm starting to ask myself: why shouldn't I also profit from the beneficial effect that a white background can have on the viewer" (Albert Oehlen cited in: Hans Werner

Holzwarth, Ed., *Albert Oehlen*, Cologne 2009, p. 412).

In *Vereinfachtes Zeichnen*, incidents of detailed precision blend with passages of raw fluidity and dispersion to encapsulate the combination of spontaneity and control emblematic of Oehlen's work of this period. He first began experimenting with abstract painting in the early 1990s, developing a hallmark style that he has playfully dubbed "post-non-representational painting" (Albert Oehlen cited in: Charles Harrison and Paul Woods, Eds., *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Oxford 2003, p. 1164). *Vereinfachtes Zeichnen* exemplifies this style, presenting an ostensibly abstract idiom that never entirely abandons figuration. The result is a composition brimming with allusions that inevitably evaporate into a misty haze. This nebulous veil spreads across the canvas in kaleidoscopic colors and amorphous shapes like the thick fog of time and memory. Investigating the relationship between figuration and abstraction, Oehlen employs techniques of obliteration and erasure to challenge the very precepts of image-making.

Having imposed rules and limitations upon his painterly practice throughout his career, from reducing his palette or working in muted grisaille, to producing art digitally, and using collaged advertising material, Oehlen has ceaselessly tested and challenged the conventions of painting. In the present work, the artist deploys abstract and figurative motifs in a de Kooning-esque manner,

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against a bright-white background. With this effect, as curator Bonnie Clearwater explains: “Not only does Oehlen introduce fragments of representational images in inconsistent scales, but he also varies the size of the abstract units in a painting: the relative size of each shape moves the viewer’s attention towards, away from, and across the picture plane in rapid succession. The figurative

elements exist without dominating the canvas. At first glance, the paintings appear purely abstract. Only after the viewer has spent some time with these works do the figurative elements reveal themselves” (Bonnie Clearwater, 'I Know Whom you Showed Last Summer' in: *Op. cit.*, p. 422).

Similar paintings to *Vereinfachtes Zeichnen* can be found in museum collections around the world, including *ABSTAND*, 2006, The Broad, Los Angeles, and *Farbe in Bäumen (Color in Trees)*, 2005, The Hall Art Foundation, Vermont.



Albert Oehlen, *ABSTAND*, 2006, The Broad, Los Angeles



Albert Oehlen, *Farbe in Bäumen (Color in Trees)*, 2005, The Hall Art Foundation, Vermont