

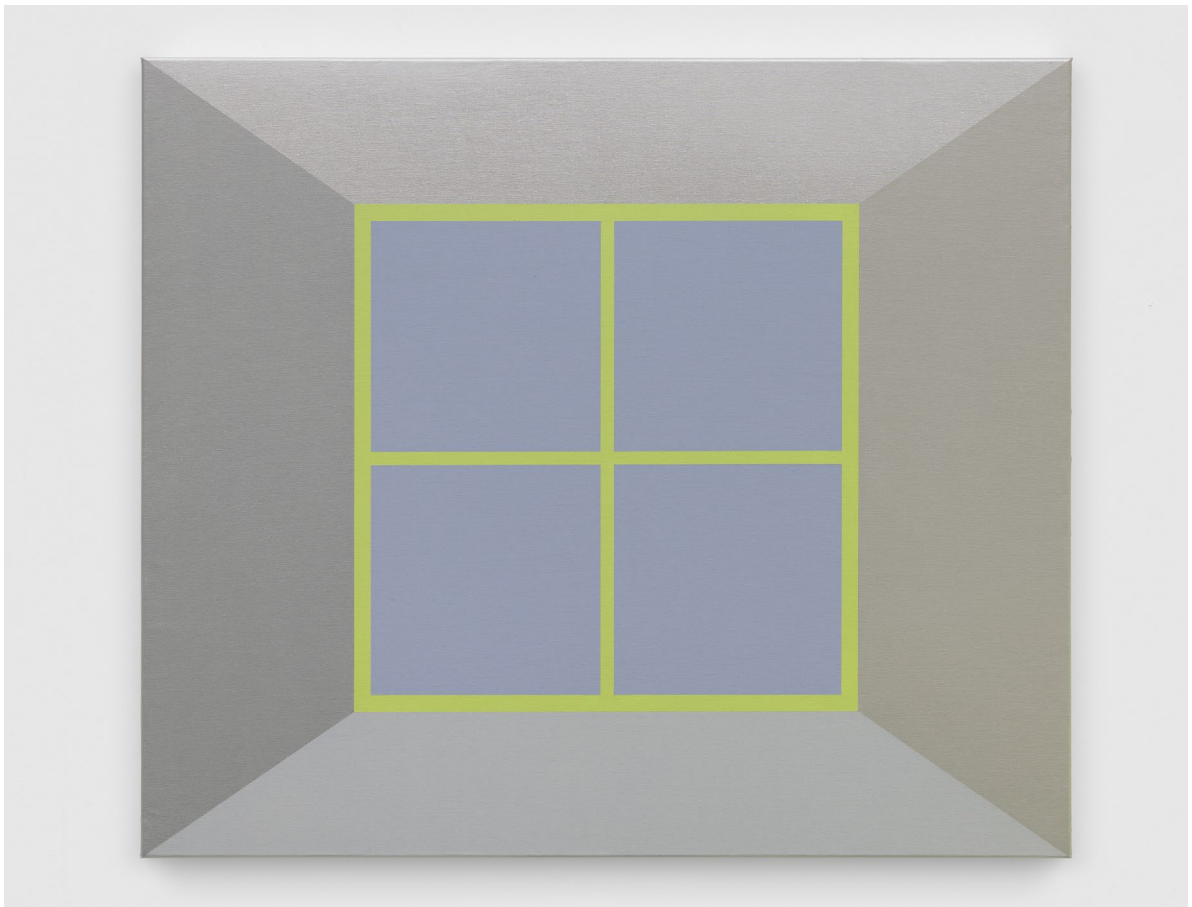
Press release

Nick Oberthaler

plains/portals

5 September—10 October 2026
Opening Saturday 5 September, 6—8pm

Thaddaeus Ropac
Paris Marais
7, rue Debelleye, 75003 Paris



Nick Oberthaler, *Untitled*, 2026
Acrylic on canvas. 140 × 120 cm (55.12 × 47.24 in)

Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Marais presents *plains/portals*, an exhibition of new paintings by Austrian artist Nick Oberthaler. The large-scale works on view form a continuation of his exploration of the canvas as a threshold or window, offsetting geometric abstraction with the alluring depths of implied illusionistic space. Alongside them, a group of smaller works reveals a more gestural aspect of the artist's practice.

Oberthaler mines and plays with the centuries-old principles of painting theory, which for him are far from exhausted but rather a rich pool of compositional possibilities to be blended into new visual and conceptual frameworks. While his pared-back, often geometrically inspired works inherit from the history of abstraction, the recurring oblique lines and planes of flat colour that lead the eye back into the deep space of the canvas – which,



Nick Oberthaler, *Untitled* (detail), 2026
Acrylic on canvas. 140 x 120 cm (55.12 x 47.24 in)

in some cases, terminates in a sharply honed meeting site that resembles a vanishing point – gesture to early didactic descriptions of linear perspective. The resulting images flicker between two-dimensionality and spatial illusion, and between abstraction and recognition.

Across the larger works on view, we encounter – more or less explicitly – parameters that resemble apertures or openings. Here, Oberthaler engages with the Renaissance conception of the painting as a window, famously described by Leon Battista Alberti in his 1435 treatise on painting *De pictura*, a foundational framework that the artist both honours and destabilises. In an abstract, minimalistic, pictorial language, Oberthaler suggests windows or doors slightly ajar, or the light that comes through from behind a lowered blind. While some of these frame-like compositions reveal, as the artist describes, an ‘open field to look into’, in others, the window seems to open, with a surreal, almost Lynchian logic, onto further flatness, recalling the way Marcel Duchamp’s leather-backed window *Fresh Widow* (1920) thwarted our expectation of a view.

Counterintuitively, such flat surfaces and planes are equally as central to these works as the illusion of depth. Lines, stripes and patterns can be read in the lineage of the repetition of neutral, elementary forms found in the work of Olivier Mosset, or indeed in Marthe Wéry’s call to ‘live the surface’ through densely packed linear patterns that fill the surface in such a way as to confound the distinction between form and format. Oberthaler harnesses the optical properties of aluminium paint, whose lightly reflective, scintillating quality brings the canvases to life as the visitor moves around the gallery. By layering it with coloured paint, the artist creates interwoven stratifications of translucency that shift depending on the viewing angle,

recalling the way we negotiate the unstable reflectivity and transparency of a glass window pane.

The works on view offer evidence of process, turning a self-referential eye onto the acts of painting and exhibiting themselves. Much like James Bishop – another key reference for Oberthaler – the artist includes subtle hints at the shape of the taut, gridded silhouette of the stretcher, as well as at the idea of the frame, within the work itself. In some pieces, Oberthaler does not paint to the edges of the canvas, leaving the compositions ‘open’, as he puts it, in a manner that recalls Robert Motherwell’s window-like rectangles left incomplete on one side. In other works, conversely, Oberthaler paints beyond the face of the canvas onto its sides, sometimes in a contrasting colour, offering a further play on traditional modes of presentation.

The smaller, more intimate paintings are distinctly more gestural, displaying a quality that the artist himself describes as ‘dirty’. In these works, Oberthaler isolates and accentuates fragments of the larger paintings: concise, keenly delineated structures that he overlays with patches of expressive brushwork which consume the compositions like low-lying clouds. Across the exhibition, the dominant technological silver and ‘high-pitched’ shades of bright green-toned yellow and purple- or blue-toned greys are juxtaposed with a palette of sienna browns. This earthy tonality is inspired by Blinky Palermo’s use of *Bleimennige*, an orange anti-rust paint, but is also deeply redolent of Renaissance painting. It is from these precisely constructed dialogues – between digital and natural, geometry and gesture, surface and depth, abstraction and illusionism – that Oberthaler creates works that suspend our habitual ways of looking, hijacking recognition to prompt us to consider the boundary between looking at a painting and looking into it.



Nick Oberthaler,
portrait of the artist

About the artist

Nick Oberthaler was born in Bad Ischl, Austria in 1981. He studied at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Geneva, and currently lives and works in Brussels. His teaching activities include a professorship for Painting at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Lyon (since 2020). His works are held in important institutional collections, including the 21er Haus/Belvedere, Vienna; LENTOS, Linz; Landesgalerie Linz; Musée départemental d'Art contemporain de

Rochechouart; and Caldic Collection/Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar, Netherlands. He has been featured in numerous international exhibitions, notably *RIDEAUX/blinds*, Institut d'Art Contemporain Villeurbanne/FRAC Rhône-Alpes, France (2015); *The blackbird must be flying*, with Thomas Julier, Centre d'Art Bastille, Grenoble (2014); *Calculated Reserve*, Museo Hendrik Christian Andersen/Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome (2014); and *Minimal Myth*, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam (2012).

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