

MICKAEL MARMAN
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1. Friis, Joachim Aagaard. "An explosion of an exhibition," Subjekt, March 19, 2025.

Subjekt

An explosion of an exhibition

Joachim Aagaard Friis
March 19, 2025



In a small and quiet street in Frogner in Oslo, one of the capital's most ambitious art galleries is hidden.

It's amazing what several of Oslo's galleries manage to achieve with a fraction of the budgets of the Munch Museum and the National Museum. And OSL Contemporary is at the top of this group. They manage to

create great art experiences time and time again, and you don't have to stand like a herring in a barrel among the tourists.

This time it's Mickael Marman who has been given the opportunity to open his first solo exhibition. Marman was born in Oslo, but has lived in Berlin for many years. He was educated in Germany at the prestigious art academies in Hamburg and Frankfurt.

Marman is not very well known in his home country, but perhaps he will become so now. It will at least be deserved.

From the gallery's garage door, you enter the exhibition directly. You are greeted by bright light from the stylish skylights, before Marman's energetic world unfolds on 9 brand new "mixed media" works on canvas (all from 2025).

They demonstrate his anti-aesthetic approach, where painterly pleasure is rejected in favor of artistic innovation. Here, photographs, newspaper clippings, paint in gaudy colors and more rustic textures are mixed together in wild compositions.

Although Marman's works appear chaotic, nothing is accidental. Each explosion of paint and each glued fragment appears as the result of a well-thought-out, if not entirely transparent, narrative. Marman is an artist who clearly prioritizes the artistic experiment – not the final product.

In "World of its Mouth", the background consists of a series of layers of non-complementary colors such as orange, red, light blue, a "dirty white" and rectangles of sticky brown paper. Three newspaper clippings appear on top of this background. One shows a wall with a map of Jamaica painted on it, the other a newspaper article about Cardi B, who wants to get divorced, and P Diddy, who is having a hard time in prison. The third is only half a picture of some fresh fish.

A bit banal, one might ask whether this is an expression of a connection between Jamaica, the USA and Norway? In any case, the title refers to the expression "word of mouth" and the work thus relates the media's gossip discourse with the world's other geopolitical contexts, especially in a diasporic context.

The exhibition text is written by one of the gallery's other artists, Vibeke Tandberg. This is a good idea rather than producing a standard, semi-boring gallery catalogue.

It can be seen that the two artists share certain personality traits and perhaps even temperament. In the text, Tandberg explores Marman's practice in a creative and engaging way through his own observations mixed with conversations with him over Whatsapp.

As Tandbjerg writes, Marman's work sometimes expresses resistance to the artistic creation process. As if the artist does not really like what he is doing. The result of this relationship, however, is not an unfinished work of art, but rather an insight into the act of creation itself, without thought of the finished product.

By fighting against their own form and materiality, Marman's paintings appear extremely energetic. The legacy of abstract expressionism can be traced, although the documentary elements anchor Marman's work more in politics and history.

The exhibition text briefly mentions that Marman was inspired by a recent trip to Jamaica. The inclusion of images – often of landscapes and abandoned public places – gives the exhibition a personal dimension. Although they are not from Gambia, where Marman himself has roots, they seem to point to feelings of geographical and identity-related division, but also to pure wanderlust.

Yet these glimpses of documentary are most often hidden under layers of paint and paper, as if the artist consciously resists simple interpretations. Perhaps ambivalence – both motivic, material and formal – is the word that best describes Marman's practice in "hello driver!".

Layer upon layer, fragment upon fragment, a detailed narrative is built up, but it is never unambiguous or fully understandable, as if the materials and symbols of the works are constantly changing. It feels chaotic, but it is an incredibly beautiful chaos.