

Press Release

Stefan Brüggemann. White Noise

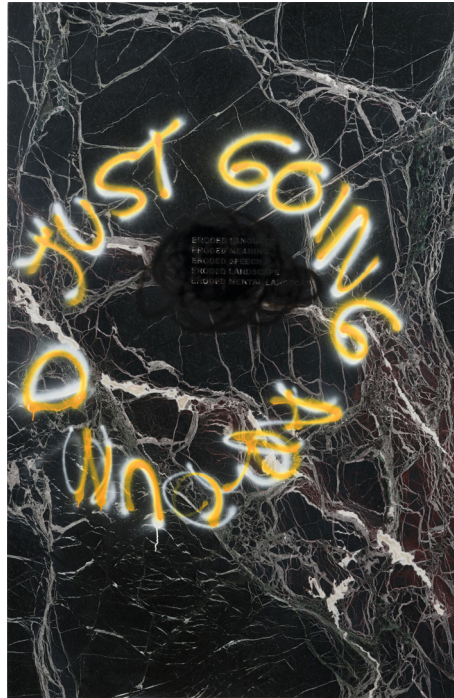
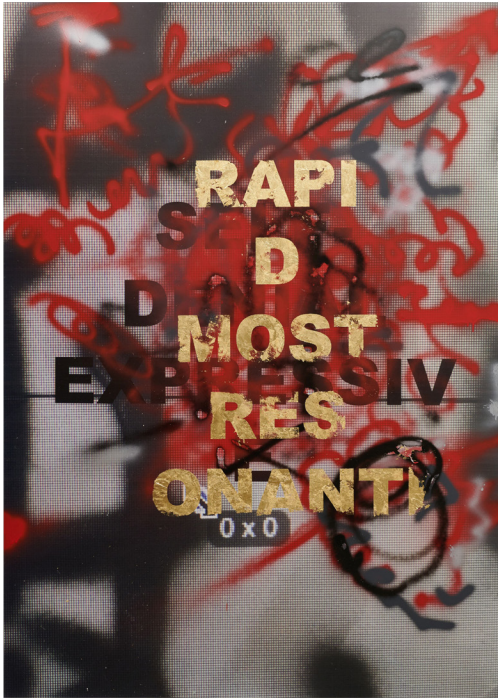
Hauser & Wirth Downtown Los Angeles
North B Gallery
15 September 2023 – 14 January 2024



Los Angeles... 'White Noise,' the first Los Angeles solo exhibition by Mexican-German artist Stefan Brüggemann, will debut works created over the past two years. Together the paintings, installation and neon works on view address ways in which information and misinformation saturate our consciousness and shape our approach to the world in which we live today. Brüggemann's art layers texts in a distinctive type of controlled chaos, opening a space between legibility and abstraction that introduces a healthy degree of doubt and questioning to the process of parsing truth.

The nexus of the exhibition, 'TRUTH / LIE' (2023), updates an earlier version of a major neon piece that was unveiled on 3 November 2020—the last presidential Election Day in the United States—on top of Tunnel House in Tijuana, at the precise border between Mexico and the US. Presented back-to-back on an open metal grid and suspended in midair, the glowing red, white and blue text of 'TRUTH/LIE' (2023) acts as a veritable billboard that becomes difficult for the viewer to read. The work's deliberate illegibility is further achieved by the addition of sound via a recording of Jonathen Debin ominously intoning a text by Mexican writer Jesús Silva-Herzog Márquez. 'TRUTH / LIE' (2023) offers an analog to the erosion of language and fracturing of objectivity created by the mass reproduction of words and images in the second decade of the 21st century.

In the same room, five paintings from Brüggemann's recent series *The Final Mess* (Headlines/Transition Paintings) achieve a similarly dense and layered textual abstraction. The full series of eight spray painted red, white, blue and black works on gold leaf-coated canvas were completed, one per day, in eight days leading to the 2021 presidential inauguration in Washington D.C. Brüggemann has redeployed here the contemporaneous headlines of media outlets covering the news, imbuing the paintings with the immediacy and aesthetics of street protest that evoke the feeling of their moment. The canvases of *The Final Mess* become abstractions that act as a metaphor for the enervating process of trying to distinguish truth from misinformation, with the artist's gestures declaring the absence of the signified.



Made at the end of August especially for the exhibition in Los Angeles, 'Headlines and Last Lines in the Movies (Writer's Strike)' (2023) takes on particular poignancy at the time of the Writers Guild of America Strike ongoing since May 2023. The multi-colored spray paint on silver leafed canvas work is the latest in a series started in 2010 foregrounding headlines taken from the news of the week during which the work is made juxtaposed with movie lines quoted from historically important dramatic films (running from Citizen Kane to Oppenheimer). To the artist, the texts of 'Headlines and Last Lines in the Movies (Writer's Strike)' (2023)—layering everyday reality with constructed fiction—function as maxims that shape and underpin social constructions.

A poem for a series

Within the recorded sound that accompanies 'TRUTH / LIE' (2023) is an original poem by Brüggemann:

Eroded language
 Eroded meaning
 Eroded speech
 Eroded landscape
 Eroded mental landscape

This five-line text serves as the central element of the artist's 2021 series ERODED PAINTING, which layers spray painted climate change headlines atop the poem on wall-mounted marble panels. Brüggemann sees the natural phenomena of sedimentation and erosion as essential metaphors for our semiotic environment. Just as the endless accumulation of carbon, plastic and industrial waste on Earth threatens the long-term survival of humans, so too does the endless accumulation of alarmist headlines, political slogans and party propaganda in our discourse.

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Brüggemann further plays with doubt in 'Exit Door (In Gold We Trust)' (2023), a work that continues his 2017 series, here substituting gold leaf for the stainless steel of earlier pieces in the series. This luminous gold finish simultaneously references the spiritual and economic authority of ancient art and artifacts, and the alluring glitter of contemporary luxury goods. Here, Brüggemann uses a seemingly standard architectural feature—an off the shelf emergency door—but one that is inoperable because its push bar does not work. By removing its functionality, he focuses the viewer's attention on the visual allure of the physical object, a luxe commodity set in a red-carpeted room from which there is no exit.

Painted in the same red hue as that of the lush carpet in 'Exit Door (In Gold We Trust)' (2023), the final room of the exhibition brings together ten recent works from two series: HI SPEED CONTRAST PAINTINGS and TO BE POLITICAL IT HAS TO LOOK NICE. Painted in 2022 over an earlier 2018 example from the HI SPEED CONTRAST series, layers of gold text and spray paint Brüggemann's vocabulary. Playing with the aesthetics of digitization, the works in this space combine digital printing with the hand-painted gestures, further blurring the lines between human agency and machined erasure. These canvases began with the 2018 works: digitally augmented photographs of particular on-screen details with added text. These works became the base for the current series, printed on aluminium and, finally, spraypainted by hand. Further layered with new additions of text and paint, these series draw attention to the inevitable deterioration and loss of original imagery and messages through the hyper-frequency of image-sharing that has become so commonplace as to be unnoticed.

Finally, TO BE POLITICAL IT HAS TO LOOK NICE (2023) is the latest in Brüggemann's series of Text Pieces, which date back to 1997 and underline his longstanding interest in language. Rendered in Arial Black typeface in gold leaf, the provocative statement of the title invites viewers to interpret its meaning and contemplate its implications. Inherent in the words is an understanding that everything is political, even appearance.

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Tuesday – Sunday, 11 am – 6 pm

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Caption and courtesy information:

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17/JAN/2021 White Riot (HEADLINE)
2021
Spray painting and gold leaf on canvas
175.5 x 145.5 x 4.5 cm / 69 1/8 x 57 1/4 x 1 3/4 in
Photo: Damian Griffiths

HI-SPEED CONTRAST PAINTING (RAPID MOST
RESONANT) GOLD
2022
Spray paint and gold leaf on inkjet print mounted on
Dibond aluminium
209 x 150 x 4.5 cm / 82 1/4 x 59 x 1 3/4 in
Photo: Daniel Schäfer

ERODED PAINTING (GOING)
2021
Spray paint on marble
230 x 160 x 4 cm / 90 1/2 x 63 x 1 5/8 in
Photo: Jeff McLane