

Exhibition press release

Jiří Marek: Palimpsest

12 September 9 – 24 October 2025

Curator: Tomáš Knoflíček



Trafo Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition by the painter Jiří Marek (*1991) entitled *Palimpsest*, which focuses on painting as a space for reflecting upon memory, time and visual perception. In contrast to the fleeting nature of the digital world, the artist uses layering and uncovering to map the relationship between vision, experience and the recording thereof. His paintings do not tell a single story, but allow layers of past and present meanings to speak for themselves, each exposing the other. The exhibition opening will take place on Thursday 11 September at 7pm. For more information, visit www.trafogallery.cz.

At a time when images circulate through the digital world at the speed of data flow, disappearing before they can register in our consciousness, Jiří Marek turns to painting primarily as an act of anchoring. For him, a physical work is not a formal relic, but a way of reclaiming the authenticity of the relationship between the eye, the hand and memory, a way of reaching out and touching reality.

Marek delves with obvious enthusiasm into the vast terrain of cultural debris, mixing the present with historical references and drawing on both personal and collective consciousness. Throughout, however, he remains focused. He picks up individual shards of reality, examining each one carefully and dusting them off if necessary. This is not in order to restore them to their original condition, but to further expose the traces of wear and tear. The artist's fascination with ruins and his attempt to capture decay through painting reflects on the one hand the uncertainty of our existence, while on the other is undoubtedly motivated by an interest in how things work, a need to penetrate the structural essence of individual forms and, with the help of the past, to view our present and future with greater prescience.

American art theorist and curator Douglas Crimp understood memory as a heterogeneous sediment of cultural deposits, whose form is constantly being revised and rewritten according to current needs and ideologies. In order to capture this type of asynchronous movement, he adopted the term palimpsest in his essay *On the Museum's Ruins* and other texts. Palimpsest originally referred to a manuscript on parchment whose older textual layer had been erased and replaced with a new one. However, the process of erasure was never so successful that letters, words or sentences from the original text did not show through between the lines of the new text. Readers who picked up a palimpsest therefore inevitably perceived not only the last entry, but also – at least subconsciously – the fragmentary layers of text beneath it.

Marek's approach to painting seems similar in principle. His paintings do not seek original sources, but rather structures of meaning. They tell us, in the manner of Crimp, that beneath every image there is always already another image. In the short post-Covid period, when the artist immersed himself most deeply in exploring the social memory of humanity and deposited individual synapses on canvas as if on a photosensitive plate, it seemed as if his almost surgically precise technique would be helpful in this endeavour. In time, however, he realised the limits of this modus operandi and turned to a technique that suppresses techné, while in return being in closer symbiosis with the central message of the images, rendering it easier to express the volatile essence of memory, its inherent unreliability, brevity and fragmentary nature. In other words, this technique allows him to transform his own canvas into a palimpsest. Marek mastered the process of layering and subsequent washing out while still at school, and his inner doubts often obliged him to return to specific works, piling up *pentimenti*, making changes and corrections. From a certain moment onwards, however, he no longer felt the need to erase these traces. Disconnected fields – sometimes illusory paintings with elements of trompe-l'œil, sometimes textures accentuating materiality – became not only an ideal medium for associative motifs, but also an eloquent metaphor for his thinking via the image.

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