

NORBERT BISKY
POLYMPSEST
Esther Schipper, Berlin
June 13 – July 30, 2025



Esther Schipper

Norbert Bisky



Norbert Bisky was born 1970 in Leipzig, Germany. He studied painting at the Berlin University of the Arts in the class of Georg Baselitz. Furthermore, Bisky spent an academic year during his studies at the faculty of fine arts of the Universidad Complutense in Madrid and he joined the class of Jim Dine in the Salzburg Summer Academy. He lives and works in Berlin and Andalusia.

From 2008 to 2010, Bisky was a visiting professor at the Geneva Academy of Fine Arts HEAD and from 2016 to 2018 at the Braunschweig University of Art.

Bright and seductive, Bisky's paintings have an emotional depth, stemming from the lingering echo of the artist's early sources. Born into a family loyal to the regime in what was then communist East Germany, Bisky's biography is an important factor to understand his iconography. His figures, mostly young men, initially drew on the imagery of totalitarian regimes or even capitalist propaganda, which

generally portrayed the male body in ideologically charged ways: as a conventionally beautiful, athletic, and healthy body, as a soldier, worker, or consumer/object. In Bisky's paintings the glistening bodies are both attractive and joyful, yet their depictions are on second view also fragmentary, their bodies disjointed in the light. Often located in a precarious space—falling, suspended in mid-air or hanging upside down—their untetheredness is a formal expression of an existential state. To Bisky the dissolution of East Germany represented simultaneously loss and gain—as an entire system vanished, a point of familiar orientation fell away but so did its restraining and disciplining bondage, giving him the freedom to choose his way of life and to become an artist.

Bisky's vivid imagery has also featured in the context of performing arts. In 2013, he created the stage design for the Staatsballett Berlin's performance of **Masse**, which took place in the Halle am Berghain. His work **Vertigo** has been permanently installed in the entrance area since May 2017. For the Stuttgart State Opera in cooperation with the Ludwigsburg Palace Festival, he directed and created the stage design for the play **Die Schöne Müllerin** in 2024. His series of works **Colaba** is part of the new collection presentation at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, **This is Tomorrow**.

Norbert Bisky's works have been shown in numerous international solo exhibitions, including: **Walküren**, Museum der Stadt Worms im Andreasstift, Worms (2024); **Im Freien**, Kunstverein Freunde Aktueller Kunst, Zwickau (2023); **Mirror Society**, SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia (2022); **DISINFOTAINMENT**, G2 Kunsthalle, Leipzig (2021); **Berlin Sunday**, Le Confort Moderne, Poitiers (2020); **Pompa**, St. Matthäus-Kirche, Berlin (2019); **Rant**, Villa Schöningen, Potsdam (2019); **Balagan**, Bötzwow, Berlin (2015); **Zentrifuge**, Kunsthalle Rostock, Rostock (2014); **Special Report**, Kunsthalle Memmingen (2013); **A Retrospective of Ten Years of Painting**, Kunsthalle Marcel Duchamp, Cully (2011).

His work is represented in the following collections: Hall Art Foundation, Reading, Vermont; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Palm Springs Art Museum; National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Le FNAC Fonds National d'Art Contemporain; Berlinische Galerie, Berlin; Brandenburgisches Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt (Oder); Deutsche Bank Collection, Frankfurt am Main; G2 Kunsthalle, Leipzig; Kunsthalle Rostock; Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Schlossmuseum Murnau; Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe; Staatsgalerie Stuttgart; Stiftung Kunstforum Berliner Volksbank; The MER Collection, Segovia.

Exhibition view: Norbert Bisky, **Polympeest**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)

Photo
© Andrea Rossetti

PRESS TEXT

Esther Schipper is pleased to announce **Polympsest**, Norbert Bisky's first solo exhibition with the gallery. On view will be all new paintings and a lamp sculpture.

Norbert Bisky has established a formal vocabulary in which bodies become representations of existential states. The title, **Polympsest**, a neologism composed from the word palimpsest and the prefix poly, already signals two main tenets of the new body of work. It emphasizes the plurality of influences and the layered iconography, which is a contemporary urban equivalent of the ancient practice of overwriting manuscripts, to which the word palimpsest originally referred.

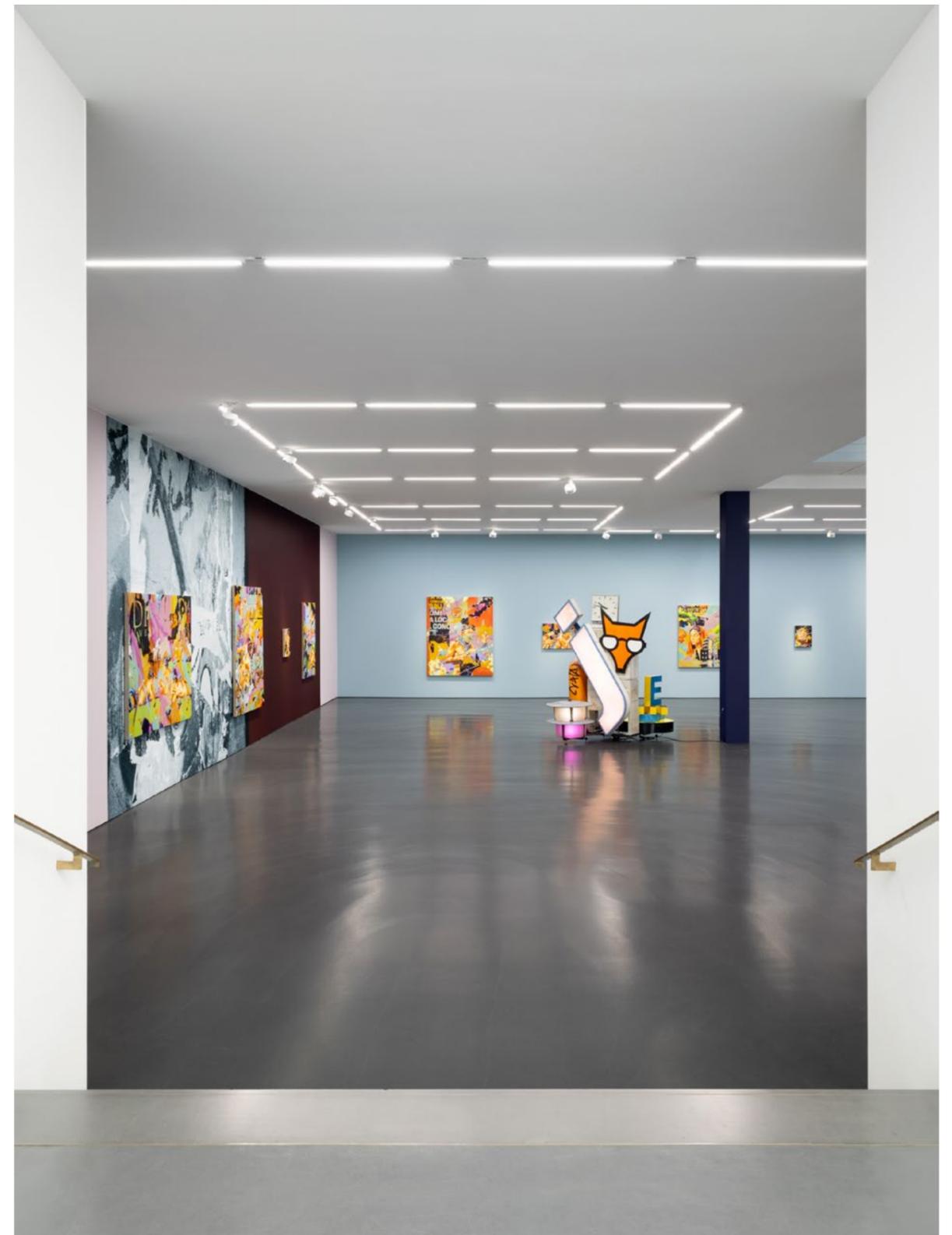
Bisky's figures—painted in bright and seductive colors yet fragmented, falling, untethered—have always been a symbol of the precarious nature of man in totalitarian societies and under capitalism. The new paintings provide this intuited meaning with concrete narrative underpinnings: The young men have banded together in apparent conflict in some paintings or address the spectator directly; some appear to be shouting, others are masked, holding a Molotov cocktail in their hand, or gesture a gunshot. These paintings are of the here and now: they picture landmarks of Berlin life, some of which are threatened by gentrification or urban decay. They are a wakeup call by articulating a wider sociopolitical mood and the consequences of the state of polycrisis on psyche, society, or city—as exemplified by Berlin where the artist has lived since 1981.

The state of the city, and society at large, is represented by heady mix of quotations from urban life. The streets are alive in these paintings but also in a feverish dream of change, upheaval and decay. A recurring motif of these works are tromp l'oeil-like depictions of torn posters with parts of words or single letters of text remaining. The reference to the aesthetic of the French post-World War II artists known as "affichistes" (from French affiche meaning poster) is not only formal but conceptual, pointing to the larger context of that moment in the late 1950s and 1960s. The affichistes drew on Abstract expressionist aesthetics but grew out of the radical politics of reappropriation (détournement) and urban wanderings (dérive) of the Situationist International. Comics, signs, and fragments of street art also feature in Bisky's paintings, reiterating the hybridity of the urban environment, a living canvas of signs in constant flux.

Formally drawing on painting's history and its contemporary discourse, Bisky's works combine figurative and abstract elements. His figures are surrounded by painterly sections of thin translucent glazes applied in broad loose strokes. At times, they appear to delve into a sea of color or are partially obscured by sweeping patches. Some sections appear at first like raw canvas. A major theme of the current body work, then, is ruin. With their deliberate play on an unfinished and fragmentary quality, the paintings evoke its history as elegiac motif in 18th and especially 19th century painting and architecture where ruins functioned as symbolic representation of the fleetingness of life and, more broadly, of civilizations.

Championing plurality over purity, the formal incorporation of a wide array of art historical and everyday life influences is understood as a political gesture at a time when personal, sexual, cultural, and political freedoms taken for granted—in the West, in Germany and Berlin—are under threat. The bright and playful aesthetic has a combative quality, not just in its narrative allusions to unrest but with its insistence on a socio-politically coded color scheme, with its purple blurs and pink, orange and baby blue defiantly celebrating an exuberant camp aesthetic. The message is clear: We need to be alert to the changes in our environments and take seriously the messages scrawled on the walls, the election posters ripped to shreds, and the slogans that threaten communities.

With its assemblage of urban fragments such as electrical boxes, trash cans, illuminated letters, doorbell panels, and streetlamps, the lamp sculpture installed at the center of the exhibition space further emphasizes the references to street life. The work was produced in collaboration with Lars Murasch.



Exhibition view: Norbert Bisky, **Polympsest**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)



Exhibition view: Norbert Bisky, **Polympeest**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)



Norbert Bisky, **Rewind**, 2025, oil on canvas, 190 x 160 cm (74 3/4 x 63 in) (NBI 034)

EUR 84,000.00 (excl. taxes)

High-res jpeg download: <https://we.tl/t-Fg00l6Y7UC>





Exhibition view: Norbert Bisky, **Polympeest**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)



Norbert Bisky, **Oblivion**, 2025, oil on canvas, 170 x 130 cm (66 7/8 x 51 1/8 in) (NBI 035)

EUR 72,000.00 (excl. taxes)

High-res jpeg download: <https://we.tl/t-CHmnt63yUJ>





Exhibition view: Norbert Bisky, **Polympest**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)



Norbert Bisky, **Passage**, 2025, oil on canvas, 150 x 120 cm (59 x 47 1/4 in) (NBI 021)

EUR 65,000.00 (excl. taxes)

High-res jpeg download: <https://we.tl/t-08E4hga5JE>





Norbert Bisky, **Scion**, 2025, oil on canvas, 150 x 120 cm (59 x 47 1/4 in) (NBI 013)

EUR 65,000.00 (excl. taxes)

High-res jpeg download: <https://we.tl/t-3PiiHOekmf>



Exhibition view: Norbert Bisky, **Polympeest**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)



Norbert Bisky, **Fandom**, 2025, oil on canvas, 180 x 150 cm (70 7/8 x 59 in) (NBI 029)

EUR 79,000.00 (excl. taxes)

High-res jpeg download: <https://we.tl/t-0iPTuTlo4v>

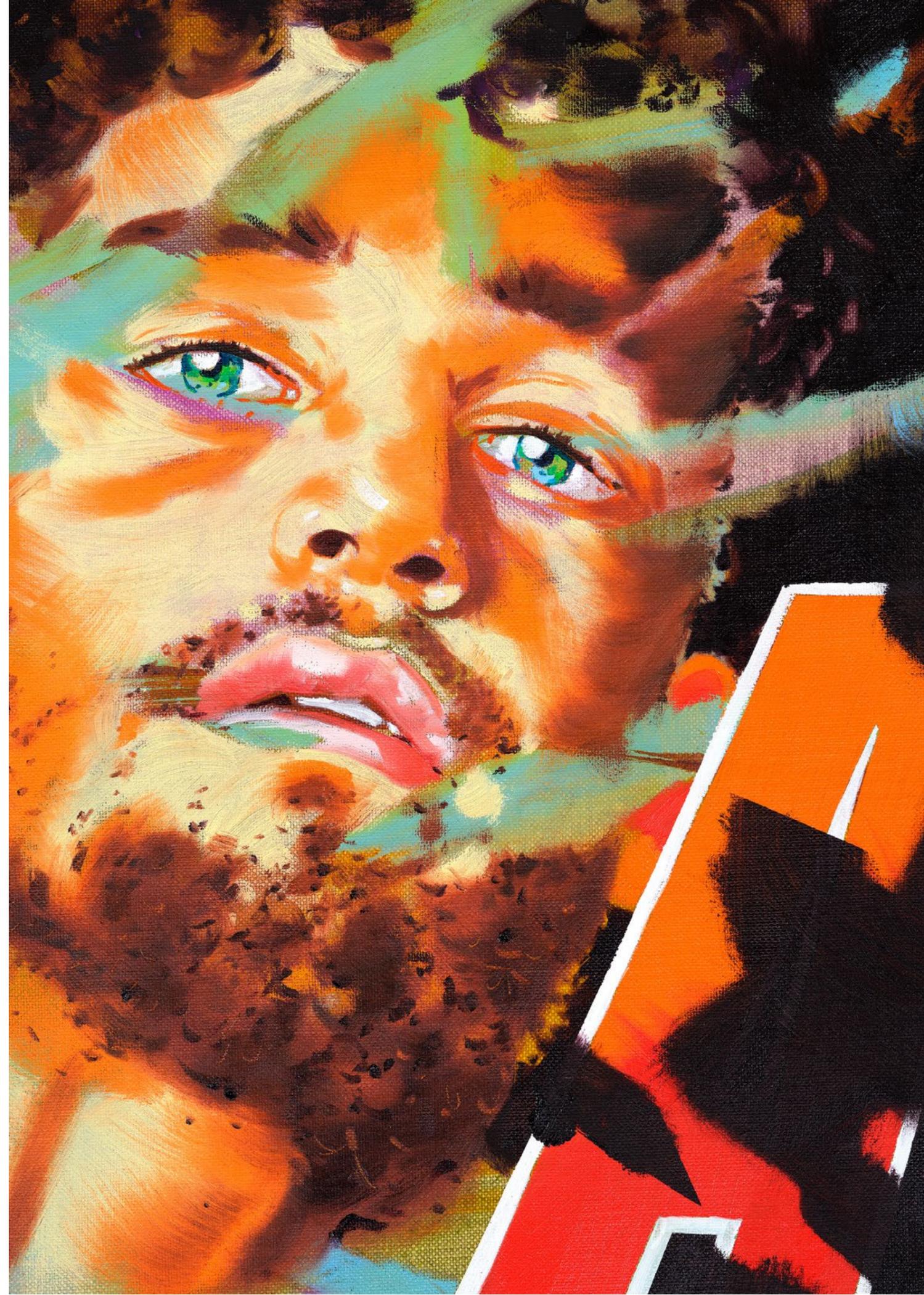




Exhibition view: Norbert Bisky, **Polympest**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)



Norbert Bisky, **ALLY**, 2025, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm (19 3/4 x 15 3/4 in) (NBI 042)





Norbert Bisky, **Petroglyph**, 2025, oil on canvas, 150 x 120 cm (59 x 47 1/4 in) (NBI 031)





Exhibition view: Norbert Bisky, **Polympeest**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)



Norbert Bisky, **Offiz**, 2025, oil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm (23 5/8 x 31 1/2 in) (NBI 038)



Norbert Bisky, *Fire Society*, 2025, oil on canvas, 190 x 160 cm (74 3/4 x 63 in) (NBI 025)





Exhibition view: Norbert Bisky, **Polympeest**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)



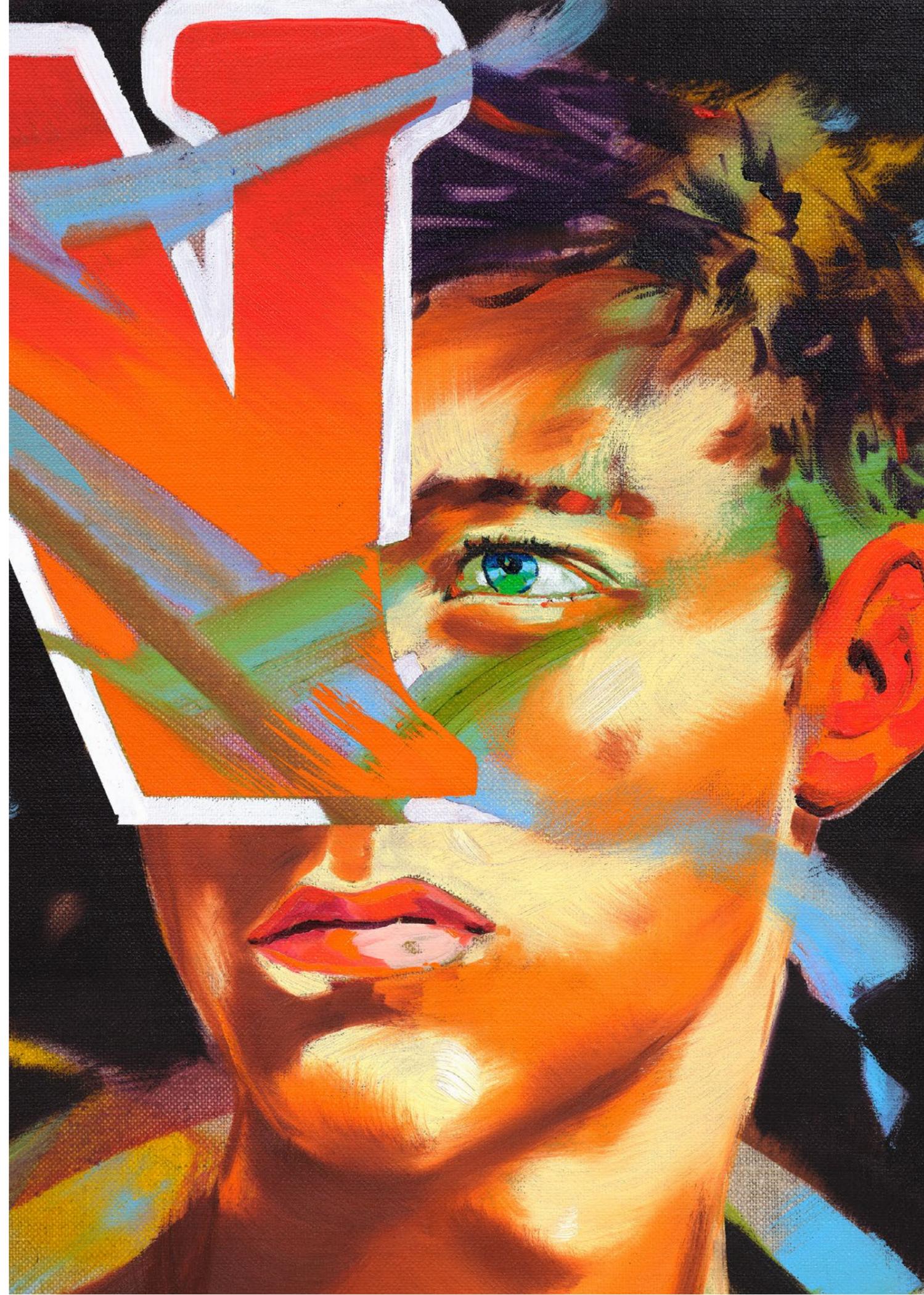
Exhibition view: Norbert Bisky, **Polympest**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)



Norbert Bisky, **Berliner Allee**, 2025, oil on canvas, 150 x 120 cm (59 x 47 1/4 in) (NBI 020)



M, 2025

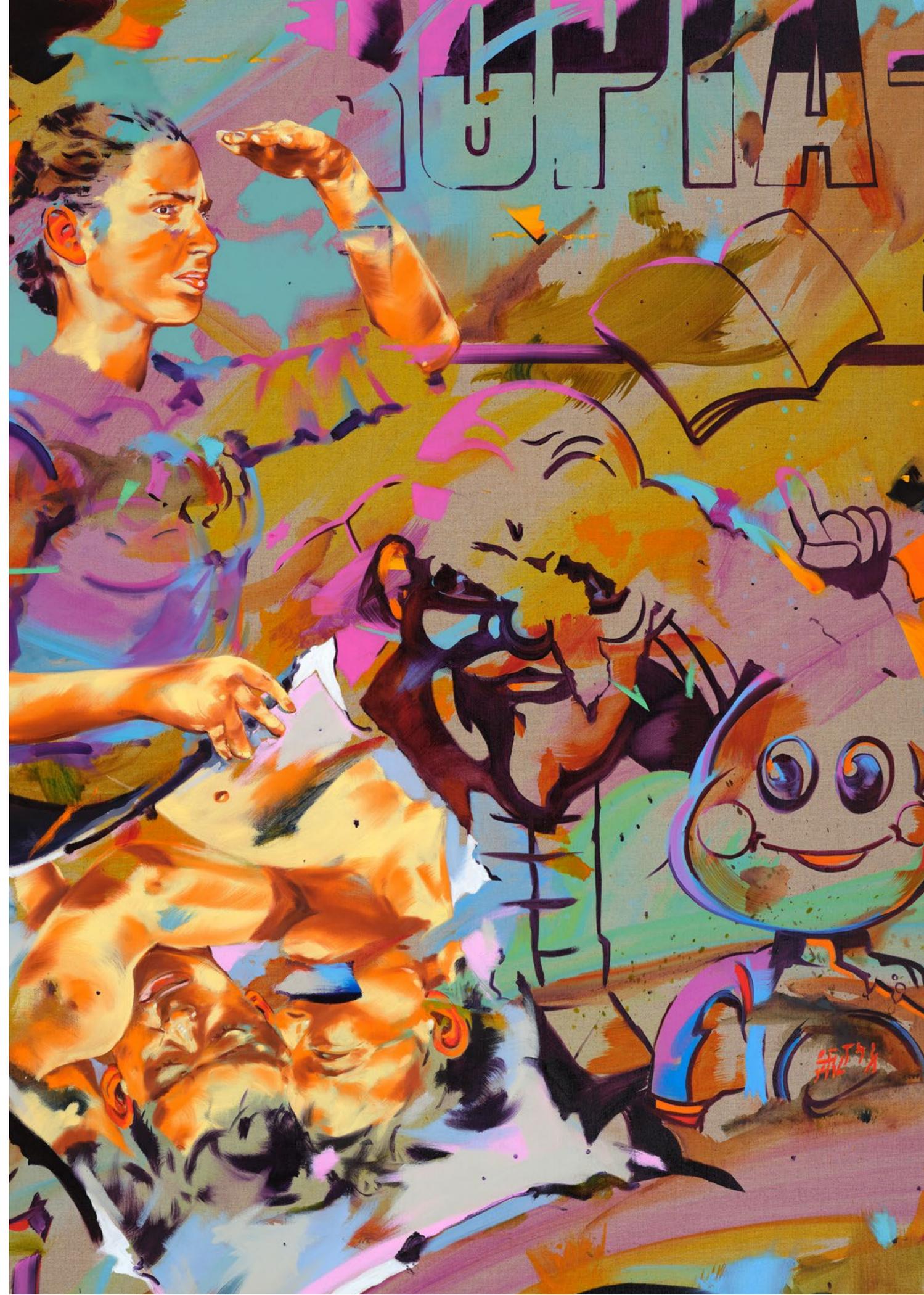
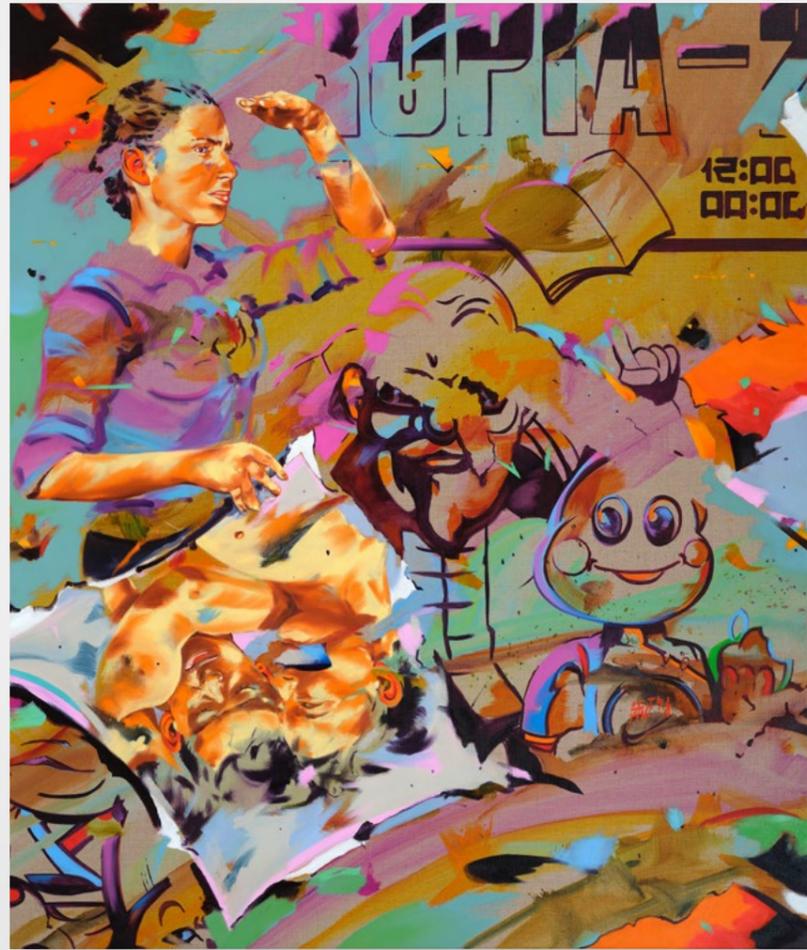


Norbert Bisky, **M**, 2025, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm (19 3/4 x 15 3/4 in) (NBI 041)

EUR 22,000.00 (excl. taxes)

[High-res jpeg download: https://we.tl/t-jg16GwqwZl](https://we.tl/t-jg16GwqwZl)

ANDRUCK, 2025



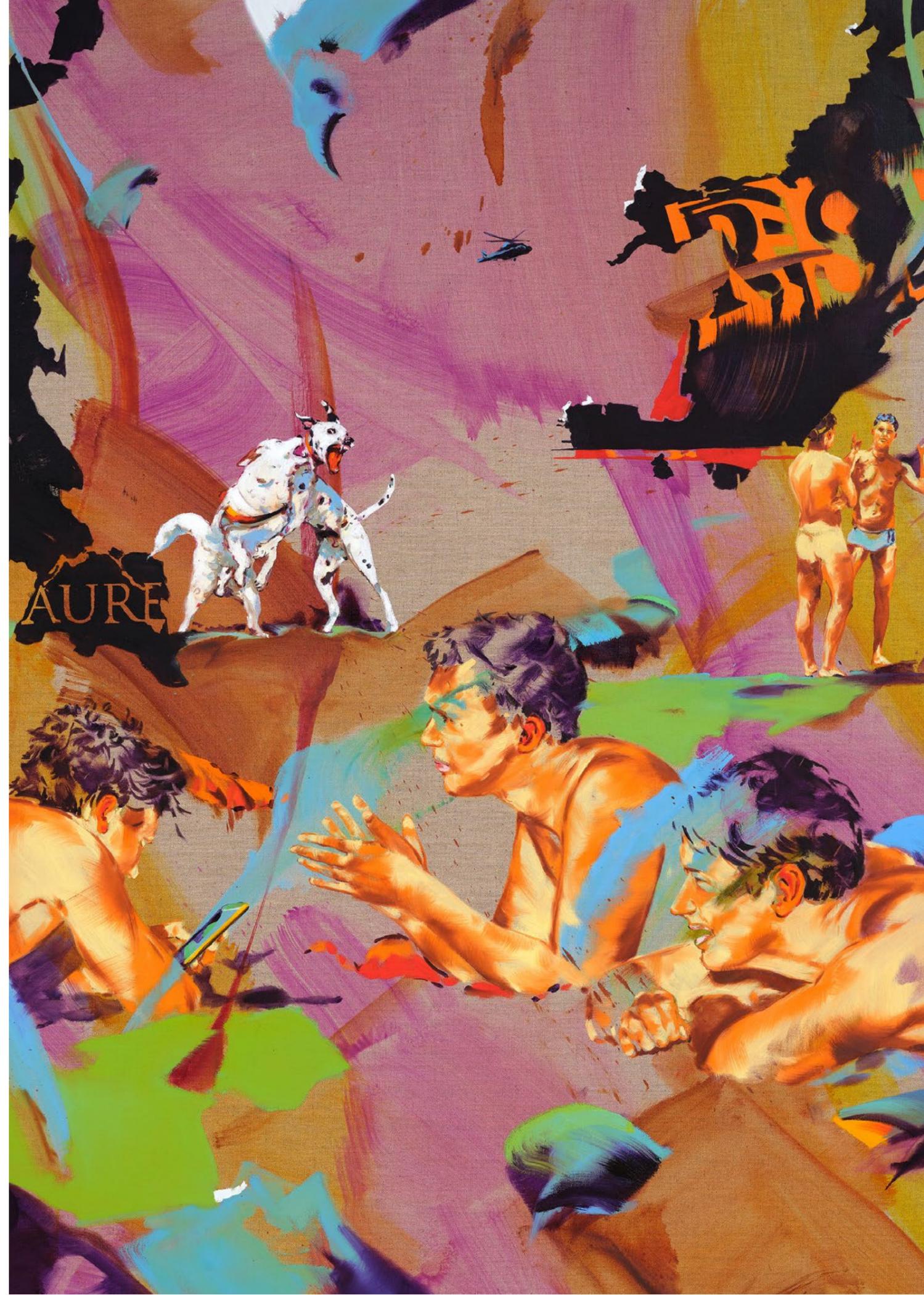
Norbert Bisky, **Andruck**, 2025, oil on canvas, 190 x 160 cm (74 3/4 x 63 in) (NBI 026)

EUR 84,000.00 (excl. taxes)

High-res jpeg download: <https://we.tl/t-OllHEdzzz9>



Exhibition view: Norbert Bisky, **Polympest**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)



Norbert Bisky, **Park Society**, 2025, oil on canvas, 150 x 200 cm (59 x 78 3/4 in) (NBI 028)

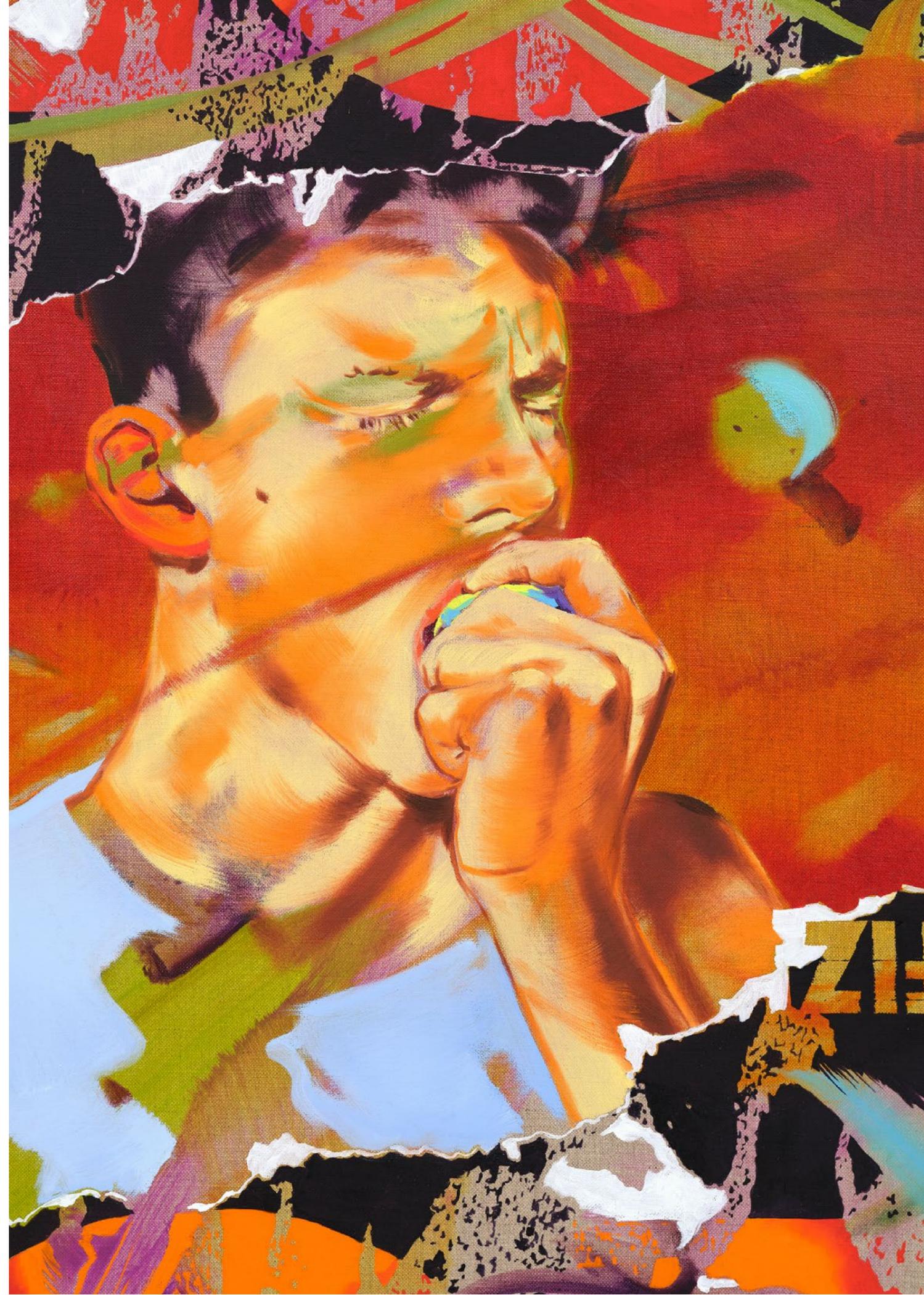
EUR 84,000.00 (excl. taxes)

High-res jpeg download: <https://we.tl/t-t7vA3vcFr8>



Exhibition view: Norbert Bisky, **Polympest**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)

LEMON EATER, 2025



Norbert Bisky, **Lemon Eater**, 2025, oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm (39 3/8 x 31 1/2 in) (NBI 032)

EUR 43,000.00 (excl. taxes)

High-res jpeg download: <https://we.tl/t-07iIKSiMgK>

PASSION FRUIT, 2025



Norbert Bisky, **Passion Fruit**, 2025, oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm (39 3/8 x 31 1/2 in) (NBI 033)

EUR 43,000.00 (excl. taxes)

High-res jpeg download: <https://we.tl/t-4Dva54r9oo>





Exhibition view: Norbert Bisky, **Polympest**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)

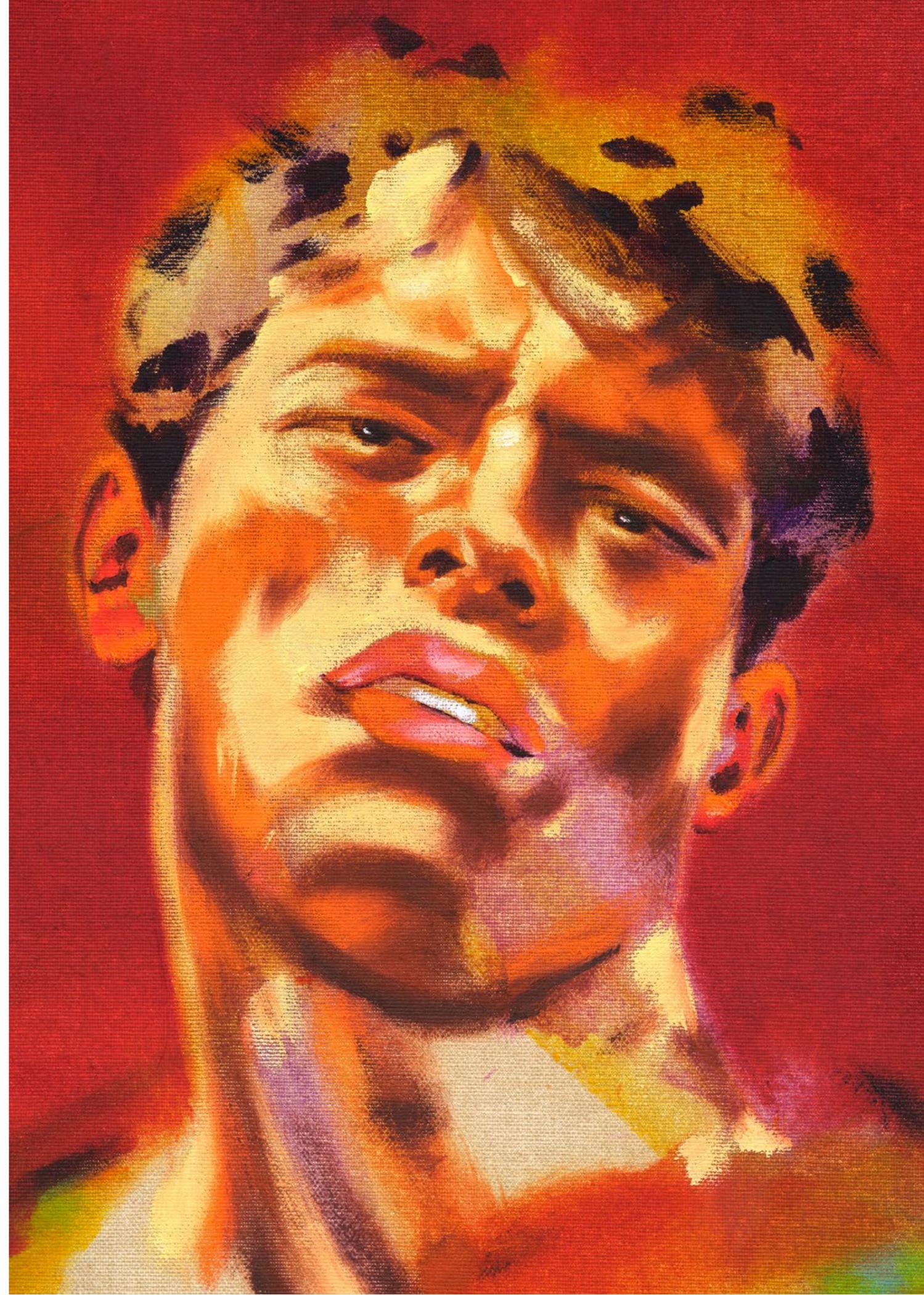


Norbert Bisky, **Prequel**, 2025, oil on canvas, 170 x 250 cm (66 7/8 x 98 3/8 in) (NBI 024)

EUR 101,000.00 (excl. taxes)

High-res jpeg download: <https://we.tl/t-8DoNrJXE44>

REVERIE, 2025



Norbert Bisky, **Reverie**, 2025, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 cm (15 3/4 x 11 3/4 in) (NBI 043)



Exhibition view: Norbert Bisky, **Polympest**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2025)



Norbert Bisky, **Lit j**, 2025, assemblage of found street lights, signage and urban objects, lighting electronics, 238 x 220 x 160 cm (93 3/4 x 86 5/8 x 63 in) (NBI 022)

EUR 55,000.00 (excl. taxes)





Norbert Bisky, **Lit j**, 2025, assemblage of found street lights, signage and urban objects, lighting electronics, 238 x 220 x 160 cm (93 3/4 x 86 5/8 x 63 in) (NBI 022)



Norbert Bisky, **Lit j**, 2025, assemblage of found street lights, signage and urban objects, lighting electronics, 238 x 220 x 160 cm (93 3/4 x 86 5/8 x 63 in) (NBI 022)



Norbert Bisky, **Lit f**, 2025, assemblage of found street lights, signage and urban objects, lighting electronics, 231 x 100 x 70 cm (91 x 39 3/8 x 27 1/2 in) (NBI 023)

EUR 30,000.00 (excl. taxes)





Norbert Bisky, **Lit f**, 2025, assemblage of found street lights, signage and urban objects, lighting electronics, 231 x 100 x 70 cm (91 x 39 3/8 x 27 1/2 in) (NBI 023)



Norbert Bisky, **Lit f**, 2025, assemblage of found street lights, signage and urban objects, lighting electronics, 231 x 100 x 70 cm (91 x 39 3/8 x 27 1/2 in) (NBI 023)

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