

## David Ostrowski

Arken Museum of Modern Art // February 28–June 14

THE TITLE OF Ostrowski's solo show, "The F Word: Exploring the Potential of Errors," presents a challenge to his paintings. In context, the phrase *the F word* refers to something controversial, suppressed, and stigmatized, but nothing is more maligned than *failure*—the word immediately evoked by Ostrowski's title. However, *F* also stands for fallibility and fragility, the qualities that add depth and complexity to the artist's 12 large-scale abstract paintings on canvas. Recalling both Kazimir Malevich and Robert Ryman, Ostrowski presents strategically composed canvases constructed to appear naked. Each painting's individual title starts with the letter *F*, followed by a subtitle referencing a work of literature (*Love in the Time of Cholera*, 2014), an artistic genre (*Landscape*, 2013), or an aspiration (*Ideal Woman*, 2013), as if Ostrowski were responding to an assignment by making his marked-up canvases look like almost but not entirely blank pages. The mostly monochromatic works are complicated with coarse geometric forms and feathery splashes of paint. However, unlike those of his Minimalist predecessors, Ostrowski's paintings seem scarred, awkward, and poignantly human.

Ostrowski's *F (Ideal Woman)* is a gray line hovering in the upper left-hand corner of an otherwise naked white canvas. *F (Hava Nagila)*, 2014, is appropriately more festive—a gold shape recalling a roughly made ceramic cup, surrounded by nothingness. *F (Landscape)* is a completely white canvas with another hazy line at its base, this time blue, recalling a seascape. Framed by their subtitles, Ostrowski's oddball abstract forms can easily be read as figurative, and the two small white slashes near the center of the raw tan canvas in *F (Love in the Time of Cholera)* can be seen as a radically abridged story of estranged love. But in other instances, a perceptible grunge ethos can be gleaned. Failure can also be a nihilistic act of rebellion, and Ostrowski's reductivism smacks of resistance. Insolence is flaunted in the title *F (Musik ist Scheisse)*, 2014, where a neon-yellow rectangle, like a slash of a highlighter pen, is adrift in the right-hand corner. Throughout the "F" series, even when the titles are less caustic and more emotionally ambiguous, ungainly sections of color highlight his medium's materiality while questioning his own purpose and existential potential as a painter. —Ana Finel Honigman

**David Ostrowski**  
Installation  
view of "The F  
Word: Exploring  
the Potential  
of Errors" at  
the Arken  
Museum, 2015.

