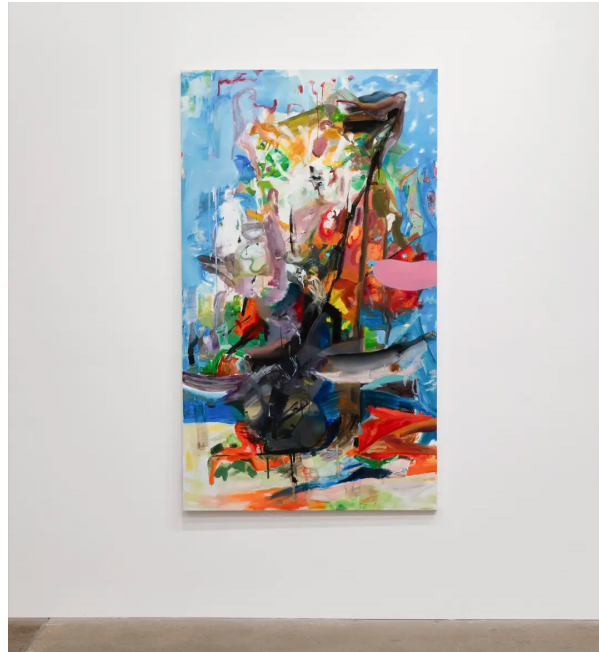


## *Albert Oehlen & Kim Gordon*

By Debra Riley Parr | March 2025



Albert Oehlen, *Untitled*, 2024. Oil on canvas, 74 x 43 inches.  
Courtesy the artist and Corbett vs. Dempsey.

For fans of Kim Gordon, one of the founders of the post-punk band Sonic Youth, among others—Free Kitten, Body/Head—much excitement swirled around the opening of the exhibition *Albert Oehlen & Kim Gordon* on view at the Chicago gallery Corbett vs. Dempsey until March 1, 2025. Would she be there? Yes! Would she perform? No! And yet, when the door to the gallery’s library opened and Gordon could be glimpsed, dressed in black, chatting with a few people, and grasping a tiny shot glass, the sheer magnetism of her presence—and that distanced cool—made some of us a bit dizzy.

Presenting collaborative work between the two artists, this exhibition builds on the gallery’s long standing commitments to work at the intersection of art and music. In operation since 2004, Corbett vs. Dempsey functions also as a record label, making it a perfect venue for Kim Gordon’s first art exhibition in the city, although she has played many concerts here, including a recent performance in the Bohemian National Cemetery.



Installation view: Albert Oehlen & Kim Gordon, *Corbett vs. Dempsey*, Chicago, 2025. Courtesy Corbett vs. Dempsey.

For this exhibition Gordon created eight-minute-long bursts of sounds to accompany German-born artist Albert Oehlen's three massive twelve-foot-tall metal constructions. Flat cutouts attached to the walls of the stark, over-lit, white gallery space, they are shaped like huge omega forms. Their curved elements are softened into organic almost phallic silhouettes, perfect for Gordon's pas de deux of low grumbling and dissonant feedback. Oehlen's structures also assert that it takes two to tango. He's not just partnering with Gordon but working through a productive dialectic between categories to create the possibility of play in a space between sculpture and painting. Made of sculptural material, they occupy the space of painting—the wall. Their substrate is not canvas, but the call back to painting is registered in their flatness and how their metallic surfaces are smeared with expressive gestures of blue and red enamel paint. Gordon's sounds aren't just add-ons to Oehlen's metal sculpture/paintings, instead they turn the materiality of his monumental forms into a way for her to generate her own work. Behind the structures, visible between the metal and the wall, an electronic system turns Oehlen's forms into amplifiers that periodically project Gordon's electric guitar squalls of distortion and hum.

Corbett vs. Dempsey describes Gordon's process: "She developed these sound recordings in direct material relationship with the paintings, using the transduced metal plates as amplifiers for her electric guitar. Rather than simply making these sounds for the paintings, she made the sounds on them." This method of working aligns with a long history of avant-garde practices where an artist might, through transduction, transform one thing materially into something else. The conversion of Oehlen's sculptural/painterly forms into objects that transform electrical energy into sound waves can be traced back to historical avant garde objects from the early-twentieth-century such as Futurist painter Luigi Russolo's *intonarumori*, or noise intoners. One of Russolo's scores written for the *intonarumori*, sets forth a Futurist dream of transduction whereby his friend Umberto Boccioni's painting *The City Rises* could produce a noisy, sonic experience. Oehlen's objects strive in this direction, too, but remain visibly sculptures turning

into painting and vice versa. Gordon's sound, however, transforms the surfaces of Oehlen's objects in a way that paint can only gesture toward. In her hands they become not paintings, nor sculptures, but something else, something noisy and disruptive.

The production of noise throughout Gordon's corpus has always been and continues to be her forté—listen for example to “Bye Bye” from her most recent album, *The Collective*. Gordon's flat, affectless, LA voice, intones a packing list of ordinary things including mascara, conditioner, and maybe not so ordinary Bella Freud, a reference to the Bella Freud white shirt Gordon wore on one of her tours. Layered onto industrial, noisy beats, the talk-singing lyrics are lip-synched at the beginning of the video by her daughter Coco. In another performance film, *12341 Branford St. Sun Valley (2022)*, co-directed with Manuela Dalle, Gordon rocks her body against the shells of wrecked cars as she wields her guitar and produces her signature noise, generating it, as she does with Oehlen's metal structures, through working with the materiality of the objects in front of her.

The collaboration between the two artists creates the collective visual/sonic impact of this show. Perhaps as an aside, the exhibition also includes a painting by Oehlen and a suite of small paintings by Gordon. A moment of pink in his painting licks in from the right side of the brightly chaotic canvas. By comparison, the quick short gestures of sometimes muted, muddy colors in Gordon's canvases seem less contained and painterly; it is almost possible to read them as if they could be a score for future sounds.



Installation view: Albert Oehlen & Kim Gordon, *Corbett vs. Dempsey*, Chicago, 2025. Courtesy Corbett vs. Dempsey.