

Wilhelm Sasnal *family / history*

01 April – 23 May 2026
17 Savile Row London W1S

Opening Wednesday 01 April, 6-8pm



Wilhelm Sasnal's exhibition of new paintings at Sadie Coles HQ is titled *family / history*, a title intended to capture the duality of content in Sasnal's intertwined subject matter, activating with equal energy images from life at home and current affairs. Intimate, affectionate portraits of the artist's interior life and family reappear in his work. But any family history exceeds the comfort of the domestic and sits within a bigger sphere of politics and culture which can shape, expand, disrupt and destabilise.

Sasnal describes his paintings as 'cover versions' of existing pictures. Always referring to the source material – whether gathered from archived memorabilia or photography he captured himself – each painting hints at a secondary image behind the canvas. The relationship to the original image is reductive: colours shift or simplify, elements are removed, and patterns or graphics are exaggerated as painterly gesture. Much like memory itself, which is never truly trustworthy but preserves a sensation of poignant moments, these paintings offer an essence rather than a reality. Alongside a library of his own references, Sasnal revisits subjects after decades of distance or draws from generations before his own, paraphrasing experienced or witnessed encounters into a painted album.

Distinct genres of subject have emerged in Sasnal's works. Alongside the family portraits in this exhibition, he returns to music, landscape, history and politics with a fervour. The portraits of musicians expand the autobiographical resonance of his paintings, drawing on the subjective ability of an admired artist to conjure a period, a location, or a feeling. Alongside the intensity of fandom and the scenes of family life are studies of the greyed-out faces of politicians and sites of authority, such as the Oval Office and a NATO convention. For Sasnal, the dissected, examined past and present are exchangeable and activate each other, articulated through the direct economy of reductive viewpoint, equally semiotic and sentimental.

Responding to both the reality of the images and the historical reality that brought them to life, in *family / history* Sasnal examines collective memories as exactly as he observes private encounters. Perhaps in reaction to how the daily dump of momentous imagery from global news is often cushioned by our domestic security, this exhibition registers and witnesses the layered reality of human experience.

Wilhelm Sasnal (b. 1972, Tarnów, Poland) studied architecture at the Krakow University of Technology (1992-1994) followed by painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow (1994-1999). Sasnal has exhibited internationally with major solo exhibitions including *Painting as Prop*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2024); Sadie Coles HQ, London (2024); *Under the Asphalt*, Longlati Foundation, Shanghai (2023); *Such a Landscape*, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw (2021); Sadie Coles HQ, London (2020); *ENGINE*, Kistefos-Museet, Jevnaker (2018); *Sleep*, Sadie Coles HQ, London (2018); *Take Me To The Other Side*, Lismore Castle Arts, Ireland (2014); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2012); Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (2011); *K21*, Düsseldorf, and Centro De Arte Contemporáneo, Málaga (both 2009); *Wilhelm Sasnal - Years of Struggle*, Zachęta Narodowa Sztuki, Warsaw (2008); *Matrix*, The Berkeley Art Museum (2005); and Kunsthalle Zürich (2003). He was included in the XXVI Bienal de Sao Paulo, 2004, and was shortlisted, with four other finalists, for the 2004 Vincent Prize at the Stedelijk Museum. With Anka Sasnal, the artist has written and directed feature-length films including *The Assistant* (2025); *We Haven't Lost Our Way* (2022); *The Sun, the Sun Blinded Me* (2016), *Huba* (2013); *Aleksander* (2013); *It looks pretty from a distance* (2011); and *Swineherd* (2009).