

• FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE •

Dmitri Obergfell
The Idiot's Defense

March 7 — April 18, 2026
Opening Reception: Saturday, March 7, 5–8 pm
Chess Match: Saturday, March 28, 3–5 pm
Free and open to the public | Artist in attendance

David B. Smith Gallery is proud to present *The Idiot's Defense*, by Denver, CO-based artist Dmitri Obergfell. In his first solo exhibition with the gallery, Obergfell presents a series of sculptures—including vases, figural sculpture, smoking paraphernalia, and a chess set—set atop clear pedestals and custom wood furniture. Blending functional design objects and sculptural elements as well as combining both ancient and pop references, together the works contemplate the frameworks that shape experience.

In *The Idiot's Defense*, the artist frames gameplay not as escape, but as structure: a rule-bound field in which the individual is both supported and constrained. The centerpiece of the exhibition is a chess set, table, and chairs fabricated by the artist. Here the chess set becomes a meditation on how such structures shape agency—how one moves within them, resists them, or occupies them differently.

From the *Venus of Willendorf* as queen to flame vessels cast in mirror-polished bronze, archetypal forms and contemporary iconographies intersect across the exhibition. With deep metaphorical ties to chess theory, philosophy, and ancient civilizations, the works situate personal memory within broader cultural frameworks, tracing the threshold where private interiority meets structured cultural systems. This dynamic unfolds materially through symbols that traverse vast historical and aesthetic registers—from a public-domain 3D scan of an Athenian artifact from the Louvre to the highly stylized eyes of Japanese anime—collapsing antiquity and contemporary visual culture into a shared symbolic field.

More broadly, the exhibition title references three texts: *The Luzhin Defense* by Vladimir Nabokov, *The Idiot* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and the final chapter, “Idiotism,” in *Psychopolitics* by Byung-Chul Han. Across *The Luzhin Defense*, *The Idiot*, and Han’s “Idiotism,” the figure of the idiot emerges as someone who disrupts structured systems—whether chess, society, or neoliberal performance—by refusing or failing to fully internalize their strategic logic. Obergfell pulls from these texts, likening the artist’s position in society to the idiot’s, and asking how one might exist within systems of power without being fully absorbed by them.

Here, game-play becomes a container for chaos, one where the individual may find themselves both protected and limited by rigid structures that they exist within and willingly adopt, represented by the chess set as the centerpiece of the exhibition. Obergfell has had a lifelong relationship with chess, finding enjoyment and comfort in the focus and strategy necessary to excel. Having spent hours of his childhood in solitude, a portable electronic chessboard came to symbolize that formative period. He was drawn to its structured, self-contained world of focus and order, one that nevertheless allowed for chance. That early relationship returns here in material form. Featuring hand-built ceramic pieces, parallels between ancient belief systems, late-stage capitalism, and modern sensibilities come to the fore in *The Idiot's Defense*, as Obergfell offers cultural critique informed by personal narrative.



Dmitri Obergfell, *Breath of a Vessel No. 1*, 2025, ceramic, 16 x 9 x 12 in. (40.6 x 22.9 x 30.5 cm)

About Dmitri Obergfell

Dmitri Obergfell (b. 1986, CO) is a visual artist living and working in Denver, CO. He received a BFA from Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design in 2010. His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally at institutions and galleries including the Denver Art Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Montoro12 (Rome and Brussels), Plain Gallery (Milan), and Galleria Upp (Venice).

Obergfell has participated in residencies at La Napoule Art Foundation (France), Casa Maauad (Mexico City), Yucca Valley Material Lab, No Vacancy (Denver), and RedLine Contemporary Art Center. His work is held in the Graci Collection (Italy) and in private collections internationally. His work has been featured in publications including *The New York Times*, *The Point Magazine*, *Westword*, *PBS NewsHour*, and *The Book of Ladders: 100 Contemporary Artworks*.

In addition to his studio practice, Obergfell has a professional background in higher education. He has worked in the engineering departments at the University of Denver and the University of Colorado Boulder, and currently works in the Daniels College of Business at the University of Denver.

About David B. Smith Gallery

David B. Smith Gallery is committed to presenting intelligent and culturally relevant exhibitions in its Denver location, featuring the region's most important emerging talent alongside internationally recognized artists. Through its curatorial program, participation in art fairs, and extensive media coverage in publications such as *Artforum*, *Art in America*, and *ARTnews*, David B. Smith Gallery has cultivated a strong regional, national and international collector audience. *The New York Times* hailed the gallery as offering "an exciting contrast of cutting edge works." The gallery also maintains an active publishing division, which produces exhibition catalogues and editions.

David B. Smith Gallery is a member of the New Art Dealers Alliance (NADA).

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