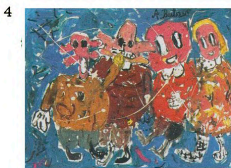


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ART WORLD

André Butzer

"Titian said painting is about flesh and water, and I say it is about flesh and lemonade"



- 1 **Pluton** (2002)
oil on canvas, 250 x 200cm
- 2 **Untitled (mit N-Haus)** (2007)
oil on canvas, 135 x 230cm
- 3 **Untitled (Eichmann)** (2007)
oil on canvas, 90 x 70cm
- 4 **Untitled** (2008)
oil on canvas, 130 x 170cm

ANDRÉ BUTZER moves fluidly between abstract and representational styles and also makes grey monochromes. This sounds like an apt description for the work of fellow German painter Gerhard Richter, but Butzer comes from a very different place: an expressionist for our times, he energetically throws his own cartoon types and vision for the future up against the modern world and recent art history. The results are childlike portraits that recall post-war artists such as Dubuffet and the CoBrA group, and abstract paintings of the kind he imagines Donald Duck would make – some in a vibrant array of colours, others against a more muted grey ground. **INTERVIEW:** Paul Carey-Kent

Does the name Butzer suit you?

Yes, because there's a lot of image-making in that name. It is a south-west German or Swiss name historically associated with the carnival culture of the devil's mask, and also means a maker of stained glass windows. And it is close to the verb putzen: to make things clean – that's what I do.

What inspired your cartoon characters?

I was aware that I couldn't find a way to produce art without emotional references to pop culture, and my childhood love was and still is Disney. That world of Disney made me feel very comfortable and secure, and I wanted that in my world of images as well. I see my paintings as trying to go through the unknown until I come back to the known again. Like happily recognising something familiar, but seeing it for the first time as well, and this all happening together in one very new moment.

Who are the characters?

There are two main types that I have used, though they are all different individuals: I have never painted the same person twice. My main spiritual topic was always the USA and Germany. The basic models are the death head derived from the SS skull with crossbones together with Munch's scream; the living M&M style thing, or candy head with eyes wide open for American consumption; pop; and the children's world. Where there are four characters, that represents the male and female of those types, and black cats – the shadow of mankind.

Germany and America are also seen in your paintings of the imaginary future community of Nasaheim, aren't they?

Yes. I don't need to use that directly any more, but it still lies as an option in the background. I drove past Anaheim 10 years ago and thought: what is this, a German town in California? Then I found that it was the original home of Disneyland. I wanted to

create a place towards which the paintings should travel, so my friend Björn Dahlem and I combined Anaheim with NASA to make what an outer space version of Disneyland would be called. It gave my paintings a purpose. It's like seeing them going to heaven, though some still go to hell. But the N which I have used to stand for Nasaheim, is also a red negative letter, so it is a contradictory utopia. The symbol is a house with two windows but no door, because it is closed to you. When people have asked me who is sitting inside the house, I used to say it was me or Matisse or Disney, but more lately I say that abstract art is sitting inside the house, and that's the truth now.

Your paintings of a while ago combined cartoon characters with abstract motifs. Are they separate strands now?

I think of my abstracts as being painted by Donald Duck and his friends. The cartoon characters have left the space of the painting but their presence can still be felt. I see the cartoons as lifelong – you can't change them, whereas I'm trying to develop the abstract paintings as the ever-evolving output of an expressionist Sci-Fi machine.

How do you avoid just repeating the Abstract Expressionists?

Expressionism early in the 20th century was about going back to nature and nakedness, about inner more than outer space. Now we can give this field a new task – to be informed by seriality, post-industrialism and modern mankind's artificiality. So I include organic and non-organic parts, fake nature and fake human. Titian said painting is about flesh and water, and I say it is about flesh and lemonade. Water was pure nature, lemonade is an artificial and serialised fluid. But as we know, a brown sugary drink can kill the flesh. The Abstract Expressionists, besides Pollock, Guston and Rothko, aren't very interesting for me, so let's not repeat them, they completely suck – just think of de Kooning!

Some have seen a critique of capitalism in the way you deconstruct consumer and pop references. Are they right?

Maybe – I like it if people read it that way or, at least, I don't care if they do so. But I don't aim at that: I am a big fan of capitalism and of Henry Ford in particular. And it is not my strategy to be critical of anything. I am very positive and optimistic. Art is about the image, and to make an image is 100% affirmative in the very fact of choosing and creating it.

It looks as if you typically work big and fast all over the canvas. Do you?

The colour contrasts may look violent, but the paintings are produced very tenderly and slowly. And I find I can work on only one painting at a time – so if I can't finish it, I'm very depressed and I don't just move on to a different painting, because I honestly think I have to stop painting altogether. I avoid all-over compositions in Pollock's style: mine are balanced with activity across the whole canvas, but have no grid behind – though they are like Pollock in that there is a lot of figurative legitimation behind the abstraction.

What do make of Gerhard Richter?

I don't like this guy! He is a heavily overrated German state art product, and he believes that painting should be about another medium – photography. That's his main problem. So I am trying to replace him in the number one spot – which people don't realise yet, because in Germany many people think I am a joke painter and not the new number one.

Finally, if you could live with any work of art ever made, what would it be?

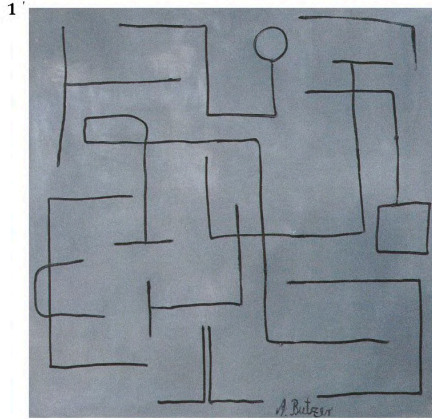
A small, sad Matisse oil painting from the late 40s, with flowers or fruit in it.

Exhibition: *Many Die In The Home Country: Fanta, Sprite, H-Milk, Micky And Donald! Paintings 1999–2009*, Kunsthalle Nuremberg, 18 Jun–23 Aug, www.kunsthalle.nuernberg.de; Alison Jacques, London, [dates to be confirmed], www.alisonjacquesgallery.com

CV Born: Stuttgart, Germany, 1973 Studied: Akademie Isotrop, Hamburg Lives and works: Rangsdorf, Germany Represented: Alison Jacques Gallery, London; Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin; Galerie Guido W Baudach, Berlin; Metro Pictures, New York; Gio Marconi, Milan



Untitled (2008), oil on canvas, 180 x 130cm



André Butzer on his “grey” paintings

Among his other abstract works, Butzer has created a number of paintings united by a grey ground. Over this he uses an anarchic variety of devices and marks, creating images which seem to crackle with electricity: “I like to follow colour theories,” says Butzer. “I make grey paintings because they contain all colours. I will say, ‘today I will make an abstract painting without red’ – I set myself restrictions which force me to move on. But from then on, it is all spontaneous, but

with one thing leading to another, causing a mathematical reaction within the painting. The grey paintings were too dark when I started with them, so I brought in more white, until they became almost like silver, and now I have started adding bright colour on top, over what was already a lot of art history. I have reduced the impasto in the grey in these works, but started adding ready-made brushstrokes in the style of Roy Lichtenstein, but really painted.”

1 **Untitled** (2008), oil on canvas, 260 x 260cm

2 **Untitled** (2008), oil on canvas, 300 x 200cm

3 **Untitled** (2008), oil on canvas, 170 x 130cm

4 **Untitled** (2008), oil on canvas, 260 x 340cm



Untitled (2009), oil on canvas 250 x 200cm