

Alison Langley, *The Financial Times*, London, May 27, 2006, pp. 3

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE ANDREAS HOFER

# The insatiable after the irresistible

Alison Langley meets the Berlin painter whose restless collecting has filled a home with ephemera

Space creatures, super heroes, dinosaurs and a Happy Meal toy clutter Andreas Hofer's living space. Well more than 1,000 figures are scattered on ledges, commodes and bookshelves and stuffed in plastic bags throughout this artist's flat in eastern Berlin, only a few steps from where a wall once stood that kept out such crass commercialism.

But the Munich-born Hofer needs to surround himself with these items. His action figures and his 2,000-strong comic book collection inspired him to build the 2-metre-high plastic sci-fi creatures that adorned his installation "This Island Earth" at Hauser & Wirth's London gallery this year. And they were the integral to the creation of the 12-metre-long painting that formed the focal point of the exhibition.

Hofer, 43, rented a 800 sq metre warehouse to serve as a studio when he was preparing for the show. Usually, though, he works in his one-bedroom apartment, which sits in one of the few turn-of-the-20th-century buildings still yet to be renovated in bohemian Prenzlauer Berg. And it looks very different than ones occupied by people with more mundane careers. Hofer's lifestyle - painting at night, arranging the business side of his work by day, frequently travelling to shows - has resulted in chaotic rooms that nevertheless enhance his art.

"All my ideas, my work itself, my exhibits are private, intimate so I have to create them in my private space," he says. "That is very different from working in an atelier, when the works take on a feeling that it has become a production, not a creation."

Of course a German *Oma*, or grandmother, would, of course, probably call

the place a dump. Hofer buys his prize possessions at flea markets, junk shops and curio stores all over the world and judging from the state of the flat, it looks as if he hasn't found the time to put anything away. Bags of newly acquired stash slump next to rows of old framed paintings picked up in recent months. But, after visiting for a while, it's clear that any *Oma* sent in to establish order would upset the creative feng shui.

At the centre of Hofer's living room is a ping pong table, though it takes a minute to register what it is. The net is obscured by stacks of drawings, paperbacks, a layout for an up-coming book and toy dinosaurs; a life-sized plastic

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A green Frankenstein vies for space with action figures, dinosaurs and a mini Barbie, crammed on top of a beige-and-brown plastic commode

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crocodile lurks underneath.

The far corner of the room sports the almost obligatory pink flamingo. An old Richie Havens album (*Mixed Bag*, 1967) is propped nearby, but Cream is on the dusty record player, which looks like it was made in the early 1970s. Next to it is an equally aged and grimy television no larger than the ones wealthy suburbanites install in their cars these days. On the opposite side, a green Frankenstein mask vies for space with action figures, dinosaurs and a mini Barbie. They are crammed on top



'I really like plastic. I like the colourfulness. It's like fire'

Kay Herschelmann

of a beige-and-brown plastic commode. "I love flea markets," Hofer says, simply and unapologetically, his eyes sparkling with passion.

A lampshade hanging above the ping pong table is Hofer's own creation - a square metal candelabra with faux rust found at some junk shop that he has electrified and beautified. The rest of the lightbulbs hanging from Hofer's ceilings are bare.

The only place for a visitor to sit in the entire flat is on a rounded cream-coloured PVC sofa reminiscent of old airline seats, complete with thin burgundy cushions, circa 1970. A primary-coloured plastic wardrobe stands next to it. In it, Hofer keeps his collection of Ed Wood DVDs.

"I like the material. I really like plastic," he says. "I like the colourfulness. It is like fire. It comes from fire, the

colours. It is completely different from the colours [as they appear] on wood. It is very artificial. The colours are eaten up and become the material. I love it."

In contrast to the living room, the kitchen is almost devoid of clutter. Almost. It is in this space, late at night, that Hofer kneels on a piece of yellowing foam rubber and works on his canvases, which he leans against the wall by the sink. "I don't cook," he confesses. Indeed, apart from a bag of coffee and a bottle of soy sauce, there's no evidence of food.

There are just a few of his collectables though - a smattering of dinosaurs and space figures perched on top of an ice box. A hot pink cuckoo clock, which he recently picked up in Stockholm, hangs next to a deer head that he has coloured brown with oil paint. "It's pleased, you can see that in his eyes," Hofer says

adding - as if it weren't clear - "I build my own creations from curios and action figures I've collected."

All the works hanging in his flat, including the curtains, are by and large his own creations, except for those in the foyer, where he has pinned a small photograph collage and numerous drawings from friends, all artists, in Berlin - Esther Buss, Erwin Kneisel, Andre Putzer, Thilo Heinzemann, Thomas Sipp and others.

His bedroom and living room walls are usually decorated with new paintings because, he explains, they dry more efficiently when hung, collecting less dust, and he can study them better at eye level. Shortly before an opening, he takes them all down and packs them off, leaving his walls - white, neutral, themselves wanting a spot of paint - to wait for another dressing.

These days, the walls are filling up with female portraits, mostly - since Hofer is planning a private showing of his work in Paris in early summer and is in negotiations for an exhibition in New York. The canvases are already framed because Hofer paints over old works he finds at junk shops, letting the original frames, which he doesn't take off while working, become part of the finished piece.

His next trip will be to Los Angeles, where he plans to spend a few months working. "I don't like the feeling of being firm in one spot," he says. "I want to continuously change my perspective. I have to always be moving to another part of another city."

Andreas Hofer is represented by Heuser & Wirth, tel: +41 207 287 23 00, [www.glu.ch](http://www.glu.ch)