

METRO PICTURES

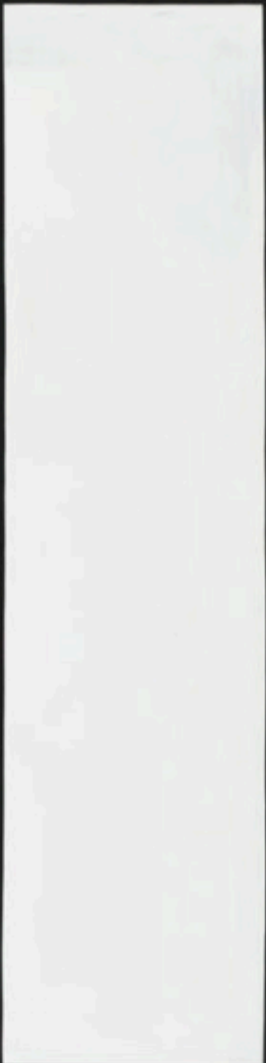
LaSalle, Sarah. "Andre Butzer," *Salon – Internationales Kunst- Und Kultur-Magazin* (Winter 2017/2018): 56-67.

SALON

30 kilometres south of Berlin. Our navigation system guides us through splendid nature and, for an instant, it reminds us of the French edge of the forest in Fontainebleau. It was at the idyllic spot of Barbizon where artists like Millet and Corot, whose works influenced Impressionism so intensively, met. Suddenly, we've arrived at our destination and the grand gate opens to the studio of contemporary artist **André Butzer**. Collectors like Charles Saatchi and the Rubells have been purchasing his pieces stemming from *science fiction Expressionism*, and since 2010, the *N Pictures*, too. The witty Butzer is surrounded by the most renowned gallery owners and tells us about his enthusiasm for Disney and Rembrandt.

INTERVIEW
SARAH LASALLE





SL — Collectors say that you are surrounded by a great deal of literature. How much do you read?

AB I surely began as a pupil, but I really do not read all that much. Unfortunately. Some of the literary context that I have referenced in my paintings comes more from what I have felt than what I have read. With my works, it is more about what I am currently feeling, and not about what I am reading. It tends to be more instinctive. I actually call myself Hölderlin, but not because I have read a lot of his works. Lots of things from him and about him have inspired me, which means that I have recognised myself in him.

SL You were born in Stuttgart. Hölderlin was born 200 years earlier and 50 kilometres away. Was Hölderlin really the star of lyricism at the school in Baden-Württemberg?

AB No, it didn't start at school for me. I was at the Hegel Gymnasium. Hölderlin and Hegel lived together for a while, as did Schelling, if I'm not mistaken. I read Hölderlin in my mid-twenties. I didn't read Hegel until later, but I was disappointed or didn't understand him, and then forgot him again.

SL If a further book was written about you, would a befitting title be *Artist without a Present*?

AB Yes, I could live with that.

SL Why?

AB Because I think that the concept of the present, and with it contemporaneity, is overburdened and is always being misused. In art, people have never been contemporary. In art, you should always be external, meaning outside of time, in order to be effective with something sometime later, without oneself.

SL Let's depart from the topic of the present. You call your pieces *science fiction expressionism*. Science Fiction sometimes takes a realistic approach to the future, but how are your works science fiction?

AB I thought up the term many years ago because I was interested in combining the two words. The adjective expressionist by itself is often interpreted as something antiquated. But Expressionism has nothing old, though. We correctly associate it with Kirchner or

Nolde, but I think that this expressive element is present and transcends time in every piece of art. For me, it should be something eternal, like an expressive machine that works and calculates in an irrational manner. An eventful, but calm element between life and death that measures the future. The term science fiction caught my eye, since we do not know what it truly is, but the term extends to our present nonetheless. For lots of people, it is perhaps more like a phantasm that is able to create the future first.

SL I see lots of black in your *N Pictures* from 2010. You don't see it that way, though. You see light. Could you explain that?

AB The light is not natural light. Pictures don't have a surface, they have a place, an image place. It is not on top of the picture, it is also not behind it with a perspective or in an illusion of depth. The place lies in between. Let's call it a transitory place, an un-place, a frequency that oscillates. The light of the image is no light in terms of naturalism or electric light, but a light that the picture itself generates, like a source of light. Precisely this light can also be very dark.

SL But I still see a lot of black.

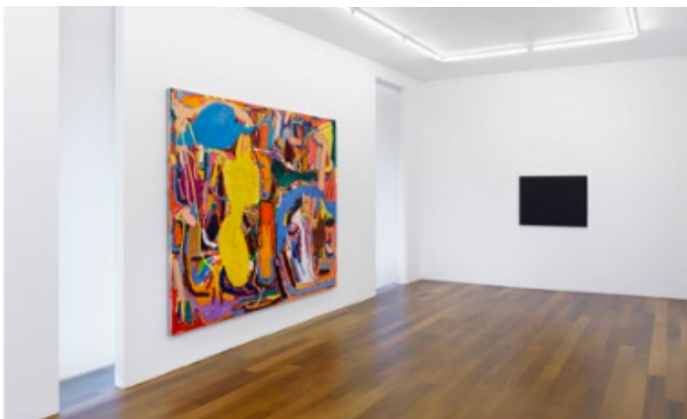
AB With Rembrandt, you can easily recognise how the naturalistically captured light has transformed itself into its own luminosity and, in turn, that colour has become bodies of light. It seems to get darker and, above all, browner, and then the observer finds their light in Rembrandt's brown. Brown is like a fusion colour, like lots of sounds that fuse to become one sound. Thus, painters have something like a target colour. They often develop over their entire lifetime towards a golden colour that in the end contains all the other colours. It would be difficult or even impossible to do so methodically; it's more a question of fate, meaning that it cannot occur on purpose.

SL What role does Jorn play in your fate?

AB *Green Ballet* by Asger Jorn. It was one of the first pictures that I at the age of 20 felt was a very special picture. Green may seem to be a natural colour, but green is very artificial in the case of this painting. Green as a monochrome trend in this piece harbours all of Jorn's motific characters, like insects or birds. And I interpreted them to be Disney characters or perhaps misinterpreted. Not as naturalistic-romantic actors that are contained within, but rather as beings that have migrated through popular culture and been stored in this potential green monochrome.

SL What was the artistic path from figurative painting to the *N Pictures*?

AB It was never a certain moment in which everything changed. Within an artistic piece, that can only change slowly, and such a piece was and always is abstract, which is evident. Over the years, I have painted a great number of grey, monochrome pictures. It became clear to me, though, that I needed to get away from painting with thick paint, because the aforementioned image place is not on the surface. Step by step, I became *flatter*





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In 1935, the first abstract pieces by Danish artist Asger Jorn emerge. He was influenced by Vassily Kandinsky and Fernand Léger. In 1960, he painted *Green Ballet*

and once again used a brush, instead of the opening of the paint tube, to apply the grey. Then I always wanted to destroy the grey and made it lighter and lighter until it became almost white, and that is where I realised that I had manoeuvred myself into a kind of black-and-white contrast. That doesn't represent a graphic contrast for me, though. On the contrary, since the principle of the sacred surface stands above, or completely outside of, those merely graphic pieces, and is called colourism.

S L Since 2010, have you also worked on figurative paintings or only on the *N Pictures*?

A B I'm not really sure about that. It is probably that all of the pictures that I have made in the meantime are *N Pictures*, even if they include figures.

S L A pending ineffective condition, so to say?

A B I'm not sure. Satisfaction is a very brief happiness. I feel obliged to make these paintings in order to produce a certain contra effect, meaning that I even allow for such a contra effect. I cannot say, like during a normal process, that I am developing only with respect to this one goal. In my case, it's more of the contrary principle. This contra effect is evidently also the principle that keeps me creating. Probably, because it continuously tortures me.

S L Was it your will or career path that led to you becoming an internationally successful artist?

A B There is no will. Will and method are not what would advance me. Even in painting, will is out of place. I don't think that you can use your will to progress with a picture. I tend to turn it off, or to be more precise, it is turned off within me, since something else leads me in the intended direction.

S L Let's return to the present. In your texts, you use the term patron saints. Who is the patron saint in your life?

A B There are lots of living people who are very important to me. The actual patron saints are only Walt Disney and Matisse, though, since they are both already dead.