

Dates

Guided tour by Miriam Elebe:

Wednesdays January 24th and February 7th at 6 p.m., respectively

Director's tour with Frank-Thorsten Moll:

Sunday, March 4th at 3 p.m.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME

For any inquiries about our guided tours and the educational programme please refer to Miriam Elebe: m.elebe@ikob.be

OPENING HOURS

Wednesday—Sunday 1—6 p.m.

Admission: with voluntary donation; recommendation 6 euros

Free entry for children and teenagers up to 18 years and for adherents of the museum

Free entry on every first Wednesday and on every first Sunday of the month

With the support of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, the Cultural Heritage Service of the Wallonia-Brussels Region, the Province of Liège and its Cultural Services as well as the Meuse-Rhine Euregio



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Glossary, Part IV: Freedom

Right at the very beginning, Butzer “contaminated [his] canvases with themes that don’t belong in them.” This contamination was “the legitimization for [his] resolution to cleanse them before the eyes of one and all for the rest of [his] life.” Although it appears to him as if he were completing something “that others began. These are historical, traditional lines that extend extremely far into the past and hopefully point just as far into the future.” It even “sometimes seems” to him as if he had “begun with the end and since then has been painting toward the beginning.” For him, this beginning is “the complete, the entire picture” that he attains with the N-pictures.

He finds a metaphor for human existence in these pictures. His pictorial figure is an existential figure, a figure in which human existence unveils and reveals itself in an allegorical way. A shaken, yet steadfast figure that yields up no experience, but—in joy and sadness, commemoration and premonition, pain, solicitude and death, hope and life—gives voice to an existence reconciled to itself.

This occurs without the N-pictures “being able to change back into earthly pictures. Inasmuch as they renounce both themselves and the world, inasmuch as they become a true artistic relinquishment, only then do they find their true place in the world. And if the images are no longer a world, we must learn what it means. Why are they nonetheless part of the world? The fact is that they are what first impacts us.” Simple and luminous, founded upon themselves, the N-pictures show us how we can again and again reestablish ourselves, and learn, in the midst of the fullness of the past and the future, how to grasp our own human possibilities all the more resolutely.

For Butzer, “that is freedom: I believe one must arrive at precisely that point, because only there can one experience what it is to be free. Before, one has a fantasy of ‘freedom’—it is suggested to one, so to say. But ‘real’ freedom, if it were to exist, would be something really awful that one simply has to endure. I have now reached that state.”

A Preface to the Exhibition

In his first solo exhibition in Belgium, the well-known German painter André Butzer, who was born in 1973 in Stuttgart and co-founded the notorious artists' group *Akademie Isotrop* in Hamburg, offers an overview of the recent decades of his still-young creative output.

Highlighted against the simple white walls of the exhibition spaces at the IKOB, antithetical paintings await the visitor: abstract and colourful pictures alternate with black-and-white pictures. Brightly coloured worlds collide with black surfaces. It is these painterly extremes that have made Butzer one of the most successful painters of his generation. Noise and silence, excess of colour and concentration on the surface, art history and comic books: one frequently encounters oppositions such as these in his pictorial worlds. Whereas the black-and-white pictures initially seem to withdraw from view, there is an immediate forward thrust to the coloured paintings, the strident, variegated figures that resemble comic books or children's drawings. The artist, who lives in Rangsdorf outside of Berlin and considers himself to be the painterly heir to German Expressionism, has specific models ranging from Friedrich Hölderlin past Edvard Munch all the way to Walt Disney. But it would be overly hasty to conclude that the colourful pictures are simply there to be consumed while the only superficially monochrome pictures aim at quiet, time and contemplation. Butzer considers both groups of work to be part of the same struggle. One could also say that they speak the same language in different dialects. His constant concern is painting itself and the question as to what painting is still capable of expressing today. Neologisms such as NASAHEIM, Friedens-Siemens and 'N'-Pictures are more than simply words. They indicate worlds, universes, utopias and visions which Butzer regards as the simultaneous beginning and goal of painting.

A fundamental argument of this exhibition, however, is omission—both the painterly and the narrational gaps that manifest themselves in his works and in the selection of the pictures on display. It is precisely these gaps that allow the visitors to this exhibition to themselves engage in the production of fantasy and to experience space for speculation. In the end, these gaps must also simply be endured.

Moreover, the exhibition is the start of the new annual theme at the IKOB. If in 2017 the political theme of rancour was the leitmotif accompanying visitors through the IKOB year, 2018 will

be the year of pragmatism and self-organization—the qualities and capabilities that characterize individuals, groups and nations not only in times of crisis and empower them to engage in action. Butzer, who is represented internationally by many successful galleries and participates year after year in countless museum exhibitions, has created a quite unusual system of autarchy that allows him to retain all processes of exhibition planning and of marketing in his own hands. This is important to him, because otherwise an apparatus of assistants could quite likely insert itself between him and his pictures. This must be avoided by all means so that art can remain art and be lived as an aspect of contemporaneity that engenders meaning and does not simply amass capital.

My thanks go to the team of the IKOB that has once again done outstanding work, to Dr. Thomas Buchsteiner, who (re-)established the contact to André Butzer, to Dr. Christian Malycha for his professional support, as well as to Matthias Hübner from possible.is and Kasper Zwaaneveld, who were responsible for the graphic design. My deepest expression of gratitude, however, goes to André Butzer, the artist who has made this exhibition possible.

Frank-Thorsten Moll

André Butzer

17/01—

Le Bulletin
No. 5
January 2018

André Butzer was born in 1973 in Stuttgart; he began to paint at the age of twenty. From 1996 to 2000, he was a member of the Hamburg-based *Akademie Isotrop*, a group of avant-garde artists to which Jonathan Meese also belonged. In 2006, Butzer moved with his family to Rangsdorf near Berlin, where he set up an apartment and studio in part of the former Bucker Aircraft Factory.

English
edition

04/03

He considers Italian Renaissance painters to be his models along with Friedrich Hölderlin, Edvard Munch, Henri Matisse and Walt Disney. Up to now, Butzer has presented himself to the public under different names such as *N-Hölderlin*, *Henry Butzer* or *Calvin Cohn*.

Whereas his black-and-white works from recent years seem to withdraw from the viewer's gaze, in the pictures he

Painted around the year 2000 glaringly colourful figures reminiscent of comic books or children's drawings thrust themselves into view. Butzer considers both groups of works—as well as the pictures done in other productive periods—to speak the same language with different dialects: His unswerving focus is on painting itself and the question as to what painting is still capable of expressing today.

/2018

IKOB—
Museum of
Contemporary Art

Interview

between André Butzer and
Frank-Thorsten Moll in December 2017

Frank-Thorsten Moll (FTM): For decades, art criticism and parts of art history have repeatedly spoken of the end of painting. So without wanting to, painters end up having to justify themselves for what they do. Do you feel this pressure toward self-justification, or does it pass you by completely?

André Butzer (AB): I've always seen painting as a beginning. All European painting is a continuous establishment of beginnings. That is already a principle intrinsic to the picture: a picture can't be conceived on the basis of its conclusion; or we could say a picture never comes to an end. So it would now of course make sense to ask what a picture is. It seems that today it's not so easy to put this concept of the picture into words. There are all sorts of different notions; most of the time when people say 'picture', they mean an image from the Internet, something that comes from a spray can or a camera. Or with 'picture' you think of something that refers to you in the sense of a self-image you want to find or create.

The picture as that profound, sad, essential form telling of beginnings and more or less derived spiritually from ancient Greece is a sort of universal matrix for artistic vision. It is a ceaselessly vibrating, constantly recurring, fertile form of being that engenders life and the future; but it itself is without form.

FTM: Do you still recall the moment when you first stood in front of a work of art and realized that you want to do that too? Paint! Be an artist?

AB: I was around 14, most likely at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. I saw Georg Baselitz, *Painter with Sailboat*—Munch, if I recall well, and Lucio Fontana. Later in Hamburg at the Kunsthalle, I saw Asger Jorn, *The Green Ballet*. Right up to today, I do more or less the whole thing, plus Rembrandt, Titian, Raphael, Cézanne and so forth, and of course Matisse. Taken together, this is what is known today by the name of André Butzer. Disney as well. But also the intuition that art isn't painting, but something more. For a long time, I have called it 'NASAHEIM'. Eternal Parousia. A second life, a second death,

however that is expressed: colour, rhythm, proportion, commensurability, enlightenment, illumination. Revelation, actually.

I think in terms of coloured surfaces. In other words proportionately. Harmony. That's tragic, but there is always birth, fruits. The matrix gives rise to this. So I do genealogy; or more precisely, I collaborate. I'm allowed to participate. The energy in the picture, the forces in the universe allow me to become part of this cycle of creation, an endless loop that is truly beautiful. But it also causes me pain; that's the way I am. This depth and space, infinity, proximity, the home: everything causes me pain, the instability. I'm a part of this energetic arc. The depiction is the category of this arc, the self-renewing frequency. It comes and goes in the same moment; it isn't time, it switches. It turns time off.

FTM: In my experience, talking about pictures (in the plural) has for the most part replaced speaking about the picture. The only persons continuing to work on the picture or perhaps even

on the impossibility of the picture are painters. Is that perhaps the most elegant characteristic of the painter? The defence of the singular against the plural?

To put it another way: Is the end of painting a capitulation in response to the plurality of visual experiences, the simultaneity of all images on all channels? I'd be interested in how you see the role of the painter in particular and not of the artist in general.

AB: Painters are in a hopeless situation. But that's good and appropriate. They have to be there where the need is greatest. That means there where the picture is received as an inheritance like a dangerous, wonderful, life-engendering set of goods. It's clear that painters need many pictures for this purpose. These are all the same; but they repeat themselves so that everything is always beginning and uniqueness. Every picture is a huge mistake—thank God, one can only say. It's not easy to paint such a mistake.

FTM: Your exhibition at the IKOB includes selections from your early paintings along with more recent works. It seems to me as if you had deliberately excluded what occurred in-between in painterly terms in order to increase the energy within the exhibition and among your paintings. Is that the case?

AB: Yes, definitely! This is an exhibition with a gap of 15 to 20 years in the middle. Although it isn't clear what I did first, the older or the newer pictures. I believe I came from the other direction. So I started with an end. In the late young years, so to speak. I hope the exhibition will call into question what people think about development and chronology.

FTM: Are you concerned with giving expression to an empty space, to the imagination—or less pathetically, to something that is supposed to provoke visitors to engage in reflection?

AB: No. Everybody can take a look at home at what I did during the time in between: in books or computers. It took some time to sink to the depths. That can be seen in our show. But I still have a chance to evade the abyss. The truth of the picture serves as an extremely fertile foundation. A placenta, as it were; today the term for that is matrix.

FTM: What do you mean exactly with the truth of the picture? Is it an inviolable veracity that constantly resonates from the beginnings of painting in a continuum of human history, so to say? Or is

it a valuable set of goods that are constantly being renegotiated? Or to put it another way: is 'NASA-HEIM' the site where the Holy Grail of this truth is preserved or the site where it is constantly renovated, complemented and extended further?

AB: Without ongoing renegotiations or rebalancing, there is no continuum. Establishing the new is a triggering of the action of the continuum. NASAHEIM is only one option that offers itself. People like me as well as quite different fans tune in and gain experience of a golden continuum. It's a wonderful possibility for taking something up and summarizing it. But although it isn't possible to get past N itself, NASAHEIM is fully accessible and available to one and all as a scenario. Everyone understands it and can benefit somehow from it. There is no secret or something technical or complicated. It is pure irrationality and points us human beings towards that sort of irrationality which, however, is full of intrinsic logic, full of encouragement and empathy. It is utilizable and promising as a utopia. It brings people to their actual activity and capacity for action, in the sense of a truly human motion and an action that imparts rhythm, sound and recurrence to proportion and to the commensurability of colour.

FTM: You act internationally as an extremely successful German painter. The attribute 'German' accompanies you with utter plausibility without your having requested it or being able to defend yourself against it. Have you noticed differences in the reaction to your painting—let's say in the USA or Japan—that have to do with your country of origin? How do you handle your role, never fully avoidable, as the

“It comes and goes in the same moment; it isn't time, it switches. It turns time off”

representative of a supposedly German style? I can imagine that you must abhor such attributions. Is that the case?

AB: I'm moving now, to America. There, just like at home, I'll be the only German Expressionist. With regard to my first name, it sounds like I'm French. So Matisse, Cézanne and so forth.

What counts is the mixture. I don't get much praise in Germany for what I do. That's okay. I receive lots of attention in foreign countries.

FTM: Have you had any concrete experiences with a Belgian audience?

AB: No.

FTM: What do you associate specifically with Belgian art or with the Belgian art scene?

AB: Not so much. Sorry. But I'm a one-track person who doesn't notice much of what's going on.

“People like me as well as quite different fans tune in and gain experience of a golden continuum”

FTM: To be honest, I don't really believe you; but from my point of view, it's quite a plus for you that you didn't mention Magritte.

The patron saint of Belgian art can be felt to be inspiring or oppressive in equal measure.

It seems to me that his Surrealism derived from language has become the writing on the wall of

Belgian art. In this country, there is no talking or thinking about art without a distinction from or comparison with Magritte. The same is true in Germany with the figure of Beuys. How do you deal with his-

torical figures like that?

AB: Oh yeah. I'd forgotten or had guessed that there was something related to Surrealism and so forth. It's always difficult for me to engage in name-dropping when I'm not familiar with it. For example, with Marcel Brothase. And anyway, everybody is so super-informed about art today. It's become a quite common expertise. As for Surrealism, I'm not so knowledgeable. That's really not my thing. And I have real difficulty with preceding language. I read a lot, but it's not a good idea to turn your great reading material into the Fine Arts.

I don't believe that Baselitz or Förg are Germans. What both of them were able to more or less preserve is an international or at least traditional European, best of all Venetian element. I always say 'expressive element' in this regard. But that's confusing. Everybody then thinks that automatically means a lively style or Wild Painting and so forth. But Mondrian is also like this. That element is the actual legacy or the aforementioned continuum, subsequently considered to be post-Cézannish.

Star Work No. 26

*Saint Matthew by
Jeremias Geißel-
brunn (1595—1660),
photographed like
Dimitris Alexandrou
by Errikos Andreou*
Sophie Langohr

From the series
Glorious Bodies,
2013—2014,
Two black and white
digital photographs,
33 × 45 cm each

10



EN

Sophie Langohr uses all the artifices of professional shooting and studio work to transfer the glory and fame of the models and celebrities of today to these saints carved by Jeremias Geißelbrunn in around 1640 for the Friars Minor Conventual Church in Cologne, now standing on corbels in the St. Nicholas Church in Eupen. Here are the icons of the Apostles, posing for this unexpected second (of) eternity. [...]

St. Matthew, the dark introverted one, has only to get a tattoo of a living dead on the shoulder or a Christ-like face crowned with thorns on the arm to fully resemble the Greek model Dimitris Alexandrou.

Jean-Michel Botquin

Glossary, Part III: Nasaheim

“Art has a dissolving aspect; it is something that seeks to leave the earth and turn toward the heavens.” Butzer detaches himself from the earthly and goes “there, where the beginning is. The beginning is the complete, the entire picture.” After exposing himself to all experiences, going through them, and giving painterly expression to the full relationship between life and death through the figures in his pictures, he searches for a “world to call home,” a protected place to stay. This home, however, is not located on earth. It is an invention that is “everywhere and nowhere” and exists only in the picture. It is precisely in this self-aware fiction, however, that Butzer establishes his own concept of the picture. “This starts with N, which is also an irrational number. “N begins” at the point where all contradictions are combined, become interwoven, and mutually support each other. A new dimension that he yearns for everywhere, yet knows to be “nowhere else but within.”

From there, from deep within him, the seat of his own mystery, Butzer develops the cosmically distant NASAHEIM (2001). With bright, widely opened eyes and a head of almost planetary magnitude like the size of the earth, a Friedens-Siemens appears in the picture. As if rising out of a blazing, orange-red ground of flames, it ascends into a clear, blue sky. Attentively, it directs its gaze to a small “something” hovering in front of it. It stretches out both arms with trembling hands, fingers spread in order to grasp it. But, apparently, to no avail.

Inasmuch as Butzer envisions his own painting as the “cosmic depiction of another world,” does the entire pictorial event occur in Nasaheim, or does the evasive “something” withdrawing into the cerulean space symbolize the proportions of that mysterious place? What is, what does “Nasaheim” or “N” stand for? “‘NASA’ is extreme distance; what occurs far away, in our imagination,” beyond the world. In addition, there is *Heim* (“home”); in other words: “something quite near, warm,” or human. Earthly and extraterrestrial. With the composite neologism, “Nasa-Heim,” Butzer already conveys a state of equilibrium and identifies an “untouched” site, where all suffering finds solace and comes to an end. That is what “N” stands for.

Contents

Dates + Imprint	page	1
Glossary, Part IV: Freedom	page	2
Preface	page	3
Interview	page	5
Star Work No. 26	page	8
Glossary, Part III: Nasaheim	page	9
Glossary, Part I: History	page	11
Glossary, Part II: Friedens- Siemenses	page	12

Glossary, Part I: History

Butzer entered into a confrontation with the twentieth century, which stretched before him between two contradictory poles: mass consumption and mass destruction. Merging into an immense arc were beauty and terror, joy and sadness, hope and despair, construction and destruction, progress and collapse, self-determination and subordination. At least from a German point of view, the amenities of the postwar economic miracle were inseparably linked to the bestial, calculated deeds of horror in the Nazi concentration camps. In the totality of their opposition, industrial life and death, the production of goods and corpses were one and the same; the century was poised between pleasure and pain, between the atomic bomb and “new” technology, between Europe and America.

In this unreal situation, however, Butzer discovered a path into his own artistic existence in 1999. Above all, it had become impossible to return to the “beautiful formulas” of the past, as if nothing had happened. There no longer existed a preindustrial world, idealized in all its supposed innocence. One could not penetrate behind the achievements that also caused the devastation of the twentieth century. History had been contaminated, and humanity along with it. It was necessary to work through this: to enter it, be open to it, and endure it.

Glossary, Part II: Friedens-Siemenses

At a place named “Love,” there appears *Friedens-Siemens* (Peace-Siemens, 2000). It is an imaginary site of dreams, which, revealingly, lies “in protection-Florida,” as if Walt Disney World had been shifted in its entirety from Orlando, Florida, directly into the “cosmos,” where the “sun” and “moon” were already waiting. The figure is located left of center, but it is not clearly rendered or easily recognizable. Like the surrounding colored ground, it dissolves into thin air and spreads gently across the pictorial surface. No color, no word, no one thing after another remains around it; what comes into existence here is a figure that is surmised rather than known—a figure that is actually impossible.

The picture has no depth, but has become a dense surface held together by color. After the world was irremediably lost, for example, in *American Physical Exercise*, its individual elements now gather at this different-natured site around the Friedens-Siemens; they are intimately related to it and connected to it in an expansive sweep. The dissonant clash of the world has been transformed. Everything has found its place; in spite of all the contradictions, the pictorial whole is balanced. Amid all the contesting elements, reconciliation unexpectedly reigns.

Written or burned into the figure are the names of large international companies such as VW, Sony, Bosch, or IBM. It openly displays its industrial character, even multiplied many times over, inasmuch as there are more and more IBMs, International Business Machines. In addition, there are rhombuses with an emblazoned “H” for “hydrogen,” diagonal crosses, piles of ovals and records resembling circuit boards, all sorts of beverages—a simple “soft drink,” as well as Sinalco and various Mezzo-mixes or Mirandas—comparatively everyday foodstuffs such as beef, carrots, or beans (which, however, in proximity to a blue-pointed rhombus seem equally blue), and numerous smaller forms with an “H” that are reminiscent of pills, tablets, or other sedatives. On one of these forms is an “N,” a symbol for infinity—an indefinite, unnatural, and irrational number.

14



1



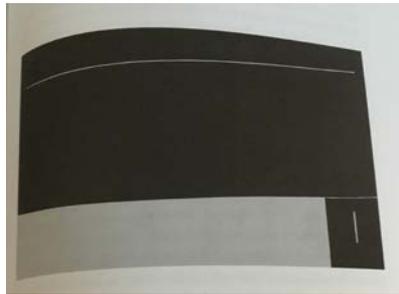
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11



12

- 1 *Schutztod (Teil 1)*, 1999, Acrylic and lacquer on canvas, 165 × 200 cm
- 2 *Mörder*, 1999, Acrylic and lacquer on canvas, 210 × 150 cm
- 3 *Friedens-Siemens I*, 2000, Acrylic and lacquer on canvas, 230 × 165 cm
- 4 *Untitled*, 2011, Acrylic on canvas, 150 × 210 cm
- 5 *Untitled*, 2013, Oil on canvas, 200 × 310 cm
- 6 *Untitled*, 2014, Oil on canvas, 200 × 250 cm
- 7 *Untitled*, 2014, Oil on canvas, 200 × 250 cm
- 8 *Untitled*, 2014-2015, Oil on canvas, 250 × 200 cm
- 9 *Untitled*, 2015, Oil on canvas, 300 × 190 cm
- 10 *Untitled (Eupen)*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 240 × 300 cm
- 11 *Untitled*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 210 × 150 cm
- 12 *Untitled*, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 300 × 170 cm