

Jonas Burgert

Jonas Burgert (b.1969, Germany) paints a stage every time that he lifts his brush: with every stroke, with every composition. His works depict the inexhaustible theatre play that Burgert considers to be human existence: man's need to make sense of his purpose in life. It is a quest that seems inconclusive, but which opens doors to every sphere of reasoning, imagination and desire. Oversized canvases are crowded with fantastical figures of different proportions.

Some are gigantic, others are as small as infants. There are monkeys and zebras, skeletons and harlequins, Amazons, children, sometimes the painter himself. The supernumerary play a gruesome game: walls disintegrate and floors open where Burgert reveals heaps of bodies or glowing liquid, people wear masks and costumes, war-like paint decorates some of the faces. And what is a carcass and what is alive if often unclear. An inexplicable darkness looms everywhere amidst Burgert's work that reminds of the play between life and death in a Freudian sense: between libido and cessation.

According to Burgert, humanity's desire to find meaning in existence beyond physicality creates an enormous need for an overarching narrative that invests a purpose: 'In our mind, we create existences as heroes, gods or clowns. They lead unbearably loud, malicious, cynical, witty and passionate lives, in wonderfully strange or terrible places. In my art, I merely try to paint the scene of this ongoing process of debate and negotiation, with all its peculiarities.'

However, attempts to find assured and final answers ultimately fail: in the end, there is no certainty. The darkness, the grotesque and the brutality in Burgert's work confirm this failure. *Bergung II*, (Rescue II) accurately illustrates this theory: figures pull shaman-like creatures from a hole onto higher ground where they are to be sorted into shelves that Burgert explains to be 'categories' of our imagination. 'The picture is (depicting) a recovery of all our failed attempts.' Attempts to give life meaning before and beyond death. In *Zweiter Tag Nichts* (Second Day Nothing), a green poisonous yet seductive liquid spills out of the ground and sticks to the figures that populate the canvas. It recalls images of ecological disasters and radioactive substance while confusing the beholder: the figures greedily dig for the liquid ladling it into buckets. According to the artist, the green represents the illusions with which people poison their minds: the false hopes and lies that dictate human narrative – the failed attempts.

References to Renaissance painting and Flemish masters like Hieronymus Bosch are apparent in Burgert's work; Freud's psychoanalytical theories come alive with imagery that recalls 20th century surrealism. And yet, contemporary pop culture is equally present: from works by Mike Kelly to movies by David Lynch, comic strips and the absurd logic of science fiction: the timeless uncanny dictates Burgert's paintings. They are a fragmentation of scenes that the viewer thinks to recognize because they tap into the unconscious by combining styles of the past with a fiction of today. Contradictions fuse and become a heavily referential spectacle – slightly absurd, like a beautiful nightmare.

'(To paint) is extremely intimate,' Burgert confesses. It is as if, 'you present your soul on a tray.' It is this honesty and intimacy, which one can find in Burgert's works, which validates his explanation

that he paints the ultimate human narrative. Burgert is not afraid to render himself vulnerable, and in the end, he manages to capture humanities vulnerability as a whole: in an ever-reincarnated theatre performance of colour and form, of fantasy and dream. 'I always paint the same painting, in the end.'

Jonas Burgert graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts, Berlin, in 1996 and consecutively studied for a post graduate title (Meisterschueler) under Professor Dieter Hacker in Berlin. Since 1998, his work has been on view in numerous group shows around the world, including *Geschichtenerzaehler* at Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg (2003), and *Triumph of Painting Part VI* at London's Saatchi Gallery (2006). In 2008, Cydney Peyton curated *Zweiter Tag Nichts* at MCA Denver, Promenade Space.

Since 2006 Burgert's work has been on view in solo exhibitions around the world, including: *Jonas Burgert: Enigmatic Narrative*, Victoria H. Myhren Gallery, University of Denver, US (2008); *Jonas Burgert*, Arndt & Partner, Berlin, DE (2008); *Jonas Burgert: Hitting every head*, Haunch of Venison, London, UK (2009); *Jonas Burgert: Lebendversuch*, Kunsthalle Tübingen, DE (2010-2011); *Jonas Burgert: Lebendversuch*, Kunsthalle Krems, AT (2011); *Gift gegen Zeit* (Poison Against Time), Blain|Southern Berlin, DE (2012); *Schutt und Futter*, Hannover Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover, DE (2013) and *STÜCK HIRN BLIND*, Blain|Southern London, UK (2014).

Forthcoming solo exhibitions include: *Lotsucht*, MAMbo Museum, Bologna, IT; Galerie Isa, Mumbai, IN and Blain|Southern in London, UK.