

'Achtung Brixy – New Paintings and Special Guests', Old Pumping Station Neckarau, speech for the opening, by Dr Melanie Klier, 28 September 2013

Ladies and gentlemen, dear Dietmar Brixy, Mr Tammen, Marion Eichmann, and Lothar Seruset,

Last year I had the distinct pleasure of inaugurating the first collaborative show between Dietmar Brixy and Berlin's Galerie Tammen & Partner, entitled *Discover*. It was a particular joy to be present for that exciting 'voyage of discovery' through painting and sculpture, because, as visitors to the exhibition, we were able to 'discover' not only the artists' working processes, but also the parallels between Brixy's lyrical impasto painting and Herbert Mehler's steel sculptures. In addition, I was especially struck by the fact that even as visitors we were able to recognise that two creative personalities (the painter Brixy and the gallerist Tammen) had quite simply 'clicked'.

How wonderful that Dietmar Brixy found a first-rate gallerist in Werner Tammen, who supported him not only through successful exhibitions in Berlin, but also through celebrated international appearances at fairs (from art KARLSRUHE, to Contemporary Istanbul in November, and a special exhibition at Art Miami this December in the United States). And how generous for an artist to use his unique position to feature the work of his colleagues in his one-of-a-kind, tastefully arranged, spacious old pumping station. And what's more, Brixy doesn't even consider himself an exhibition organiser, but someone who creates an autumn exhibition of his own work every year for his artist friends. It's an event that has greatly expanded, growing from a word-of-mouth gathering to a must-see event.

I think I also speak for the guests when I say I am very pleased to be able to participate in such a successful art event. In the second collaboration from 4 to 26 October, we now see Brixy's new, highly developed series *Discover – Painting*, in conjunction with guest appearances by artists from Berlin's Galerie Tammen & Partner. On view are breathtaking sculptures and wall reliefs by Lothar Seruset, as well as drawings and collages by Marion Eichmann.

Some of you may already know that as an art historian and a specialist in German studies, I enjoy striving to understand thoughts of great minds. Consider for example, Edgar Degas' quote:

For people who understand art, words are not necessary.

One says: 'Hmmm! Ahaa! or 'Hooooo!'

and with that one has expressed everything!

But don't worry, I won't just leave it at that without first going into a bit more detail about the art.

There are distinct reasons behind the choice of name for today's show, 'Achtung Brixy: New Paintings and Special Guests'. I will show you how this title deliberately evokes many readings, for it inspires *Achtung* – in all three senses of the German word: 'attention', 'respect', and 'praise'.

Broadly speaking, you could say that:

1 we are primarily concerned with art, diverse as the connotations that the term may connote, that demands our attention, our *undivided* attention so that we can come to appreciate it fully. Only this way will we recognise the particular tenors and quiet nuances of each artistic individual's sense of before, behind, and within.

2 Artistic variety itself indicates a 'respect' for one another in an age of extremes. (Whether those extremes be social, political, or even climatic. This is not a political endeavour, however, and focuses on tolerance and appreciation of others.)

3 Finally as viewers we should come to the realisation that when considered on their own terms, things really are good, and after studying them one can only give praise where it's due.

I would like to begin with a short introduction to the work of our host, Dietmar Brixy. Many of today's guests are already familiar with this Mannheim artist's gestural painting, which oscillates between abstraction and figuration and features the unmistakable 'Brixy style' of exciting, heavily impastoed images. Each of them contains an intriguing multitude of layers and an enormous sensuous quality.

Now, most of you already know two things about his work: □ First of all, that Dietmar Brixy draws from the cornucopia of nature (primarily from his garden) as a source of inspiration for his abstracted images. And secondly, in his artistic explorations, he contends with the elemental power of painting, as seen through his handling of the colour and the paint itself.

Last year he developed his *Discover* series. These are works that recall staged scenarios of sumptuous vegetation, conceived with a very special formal artistic combination. Two remarkable components challenge the composition: first, the thickly impastoed serpentine traces of colour that wind their way across the canvas. This is usually a horizontal or vertical motion, dividing the pictorial composition into distinct fields of action. Providing room for insights and new perspectives, visual depths and horizons, these lines demarcate pictorial space by creating tensions between perceived closeness and perceived distance. This latter technique of a 'push and pull' between closeness and distance is achieved through mysteriously expressive surfaces of colour. As a viewer looking into these fields of colour, one's associations allow for new 'discoveries': meandering streams, fields of light, the atmospheres of evening or morning, rainy windows, or banks of fog.

With these newly opened colour spaces, it becomes apparent that Dietmar Brixy has 'discovered' his technique – playing with the possibilities for the application of paint and textural variety in the material itself. Depending on which style he employs and how often he goes over certain areas with the palette knife, the gestures are deliberately and sharply differentiated, and layers are left at the end of the act of painting in order to create specific visual effects.

In some places where they were roughened and brushed, these free surfaces of colour take on a staggered rainbow-like appearance. There is wrinkling and rippling, areas that are densely opaque and flatly compact, then a return to near transparency or lucidity.

This is still the case with the works here today. But it also becomes clear that Dietmar Brixy has now taken his *Discover* series to a new level. In so doing, he has also made a contribution to the artistic quest for variety in creative expression.

The viewers again discover Brixy's dense, meticulous layers of paint, applied with hands, brushes, palette knives, and putty knives. Also apparent are his purposive technique of dripping and pouring paint and use of imprints from palm and fig leaves. At first glance one stands before a thrilling, visceral

pictorial realm of experience, which clearly oscillates between representation and abstraction. Drawn in by Brixy's terrifically impastoed gestures (concretised in the form of gnarled branches of paint and tree-like growths with denser 'knotted' areas), today the viewer encounters more intense, formidably varied expressive surfaces of colour.

In this context, not only is the work opulent, but it is dramatic in its orchestration. Often black and blood-red, the horizontal and vertical movements of colour in Brixy's painting demonstrate his handling of paint in its materiality and aesthetic effects. In addition to the impact the paint has on us as viewers, there is also the immediate, perplexing effect of colour vibration. We are confronted by fields of colour that have practically been arranged in grid-like structures that apparently seek to regulate the over-painting, uncovering, and pictorial depth. When it 'rains down' over these fields of colour, this dripping often creates broken yet strong counterpoints to the latter, which results in a wholly new type of luminosity.

Dietmar Brixy has very clearly conceived of this exhibition as an experience of worlds of colour. Thus, standing here in the studio and below in the pumping room, you find yourself in exhibition spaces that are predominantly bright pink, blackish red, or rich yellow, which also make use of white-turquoise and bright green tones. The stage is dominated by blue tones, green tones, and works tempered by white. The pumping station's private living spaces are also enormously exciting. Here you see that Dietmar Brixy didn't shy away from experimenting with strong contrasts between light and dark, reducing his palette to many black-and-white tones in a new way.

As if we were beholding sombre, even ominous scenes from romantic ballets, we marvel at the spellbinding darkness of two large canvases in portrait format. The first draws our gaze into the eerie depths of its fluorescent turquoise. In the other, we are lured in by an iridescent shine, a will-o'-the-wisp against the black ground. What is really thrilling is that Brixy does not simply leave us trembling: his abstractions offer a certain hope. Brixy's artistic concerns always take the upper hand by making visible a colourful luminosity and plays of light and shadow.

So it becomes even clearer that the jungle-like thickness of each image and the dynamics of the visceral act of painting are governed by a balanced system: an equitable juxtaposition and unity of various sensuous qualities in the image's foreground, and a pronounced tension in the formal organisation of its visual depths.

- Whereby Dietmar Brixy – and this is very important – retains his secret. It is the striking resonance of an unrestrained, physical power that drives the painterly process.

This is a new element in the current *Discover* paintings. No less interesting is the large 'bubble' installation, which you will have the chance to admire later in the exhibition room in the cellar – next to a salon-style installation that offers highlights from each of Brixy's creative periods. I would like to point out that these bubble installations have become a trademark of Brixy's. Finally, for several years now, Brixy's innovative arabesques and flowing organic arrangements have won him a place at large art fairs such as art KARLSRUHE, as well as in private collections, and public exhibitions.

Anyone interested in learning more about these recent works, the earlier works, or *Eden* – the works on paper that he creates every year on La Palma – should come up and talk to me afterwards.

Since we also have other special guests here and I don't want to keep you for more than 15 minutes, I would now like to turn your attention to the two guest artists Marion Eichmann and Lothar Seruset.

MARION EICHMANN: From the 'Art of Seeing' and 'Seeing as Art'

Ladies and Gentlemen, let's start with a journey into the world of Marion Eichmann's art.

It was first at art KARLSRUHE that I saw Marion Eichmann's collages, objects, and installations 'of the everyday', which are so multi-faceted that, at first glance, they are nearly impossible to understand as a whole. And I remember thinking: 'Am I seeing straight?' Such a sophisticated, detailed, enormous microcosm, arranged to form an overwhelmingly impressive whole. I could hardly believe my eyes!

It became immediately clear to me that, in the case of Marion Eichmann, the viewer needs not only time to fully comprehend what Christoph Tannert has called her 'panorama of an accelerated and networked world'. One also needs persistence, which Marion Eichmann happens to demand from her viewers. This requirement is understandable, as this successful young artist is not afraid to devote her own time and energy in order to guide her audiences into these astonishingly clever and meticulously rendered worlds. But before you descend into the depths of the old pumping station to marvel at *Buffet Dreaming*, the elaborate table installation in the exhibition room and much, much more besides from this artist, I would like to tell you a little bit more about her as a person.

Marion Eichmann was born in Essen in 1974 and is certainly among the most exciting and important artists of her generation.

- For her 2002 thesis work *16,324,800 Stitches*, Eichmann covered an entire room in a black-beige wavy knitted pattern (including the walls, table, armchair, and live models). This thesis work gained the 28-year-old artist great attention in the world of international art and fashion.
- Her exceptional crafted artwork received not only numerous reviews in art, lifestyle, and design magazines, but was also featured in several in-depth television pieces.

I mention this early work because it provides a context for all of Eichmann's later projects. Marion Eichmann first studied

- at the Universität der Künste (Berlin) from 1994–1995,
- then from 1996—2002 at the Kunsthochschule Berlin – Weissensee, where she completed her Master's degree in 2003 with Professor Gotenbach.
- She has received numerous scholarships, and since 2003 has become a hugely successful freelance artist.
- Marion Eichmann is represented by well-known galleries.
- Her work draws crowds at international art fairs.
- Many of her works are in public and private collections.

In addition, the artist has also travelled extensively to better her understanding of the artistic world: to Asia and Africa and to megacities such as Tokyo, New York, and Istanbul.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves here. After all, what exactly is there to see, where and how should you focus your attention here at 'Achtung Bixy'?

Marion Eichmann approaches everyday life with fascination. She sets out on the sidewalk for as long as 10 hours at a time, equipped with only a pencil and her sense of wonder. She sees the world fragmented into minute details, at 1000 times their normal resolution; not even the smallest detail escapes her visual acuity. Her carefully composed, largely white collages, objects, and installations are based on extremely complex, thoroughly analysed drawings, which in their accuracy and detail essentially provide a precise script for the execution of the final work.

Marion Eichmann says that she sees 'drawing as deciphering.' Join the artist as you climb to the 11th storey of a high-rise building at the corner Broadway and Seventh Avenue in the work *Times Square*. To quote from the current catalogue: 'Spellbound by the life taking place in the narrow thoroughfares between the buildings (...) encircled by brick and garbage', look at 'the debris on the rooftops (...) and see the bustling masses on the streets below, where the shopping district is booming.' Loud noises occur alongside quiet moments, 'colour next to colour', innumerable patterns and shapes that take form, networks of lines, seductions that open up both near and far as you look closer.

You have to take a moment to let it all sink in, for the artist is portraying urban scenes as an entire microcosm, thousands and thousands of the smallest details within the macrocosm.

You must imagine her labouring: Marion Eichmann makes pencil drawings drawn 'in-situ' from life. In the studio, these black-and-white sketches are then transferred to a larger format in white. Using a fine liner to emphasise the linear aspects of these sketches Marion Eichmann then decides how and where to add colourful accents, but she doesn't use paint. Instead, she uses small, cut-out pieces of colourful cardboard, which she often glues on in several layers to form relief. Then the artist uses white to neutralise the colour (sometimes applied in up to 10 layers), creating an impressive final work. As Christoph Tannert accurately describes it, this process 'does not complicate, but rather has a de-cluttering' effect. Thus we experience the amazing structural ordering of an entire visual world.

When you visit the exhibition room, take a look at the table installation *Buffet Dreaming* – a terrific visual tableau of a sumptuous wealth of information: chandeliers, ornamental vases, étagères, plates, cups. The piece is brimming over with sheets of paper and toys such as little animals, cars, carousels, little dresses, pasted over or decorated with numbers, sentences, and words.

Take your time to enjoy it. Be persistent, because that is the only way you will experience the exhibition title 'Achtung Bixy' as both an artistic performance and a way of perceiving. Only by looking steadfastly will you come to recognise the range of the accuracy, conscientiousness, and care in the artist's handling of paper, colourful fine liner, and cardboard.

LOTHAR SERUSET: The world on its head – a question of point of view or openness to interpretation?

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like now to turn to the work of the wood sculptor Lothar Seruset. His archaic yet contemporary wooden sculptures offer multiple meanings and an openness to

interpretation, demanding – and what else would you expect in the context of ‘Achtung Brixly’? – close attention.

Before we do this, you should know a little about the artist’s general background.

- Lothar Seruset was born in Ulm in 1956, and is now a highly successful sculptor.
- He completed his studies at several schools of higher learning. He began at the Freie Kunstschule Stuttgart, then continued studying painting at the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Nuremberg, and in 1988 finally graduated from the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin, where he studied sculpture and painting as a master student under Professor Schmettau and Professor Strautmannis.
- Lothar Seruset is represented by distinguished galleries in Munich, Ulm, Reutlingen, Berlin, and Sylt.
- For a number of years, his works have made a splash at prominent art fairs
- He has also made a strong impression with his exhibitions, for example in the Städtisches Kunstmuseum Reutlingen, in the Kleine Orangerie in the Schloss Charlottenburg, and in the Kunsthalle Osnabrück, a former Dominican church.

Pablo Picasso once said: ‘Art is the best way to understand the culture of the world.’

Please keep this quote in mind when you encounter his works in the old pumping station’s outdoor area, on the patio, and throughout the entire property. They are exciting works, free-standing sculptures and wall reliefs that easily reach more than two metres in height. You will discover how Lothar Seruset saws, carves, and cuts into wood a world completely his own, a marvellous place replete with deep meanings and various interpretations. His figures – usually ‘house husbands’, women, couples, fishermen, and kings – have to carry entire houses, forests (Waldträger), and ships (Bootsträger). Others carry animals, such as dogs, cats, and fish (Fisherman). They usually stand on strange ground. On balls, the roofs of houses or cars, or on animals such as dogs, cats, and fish (as in Frau Fisch). The world stands upside down or on top of itself, and accordingly the head usually remains the load-bearing element.

Does this prompt questions about place? Point of view? An opportunity to turn things around? Are all of these acrobatics simply a gymnastics exercise? In the end, everything in this sculptural world revolves around the idea of balance, and is concerned with:

- a physical sense of balance. (As in *La Strada*, when a king rides backwards on a horse, which is in turn standing on a roller skate-like construction of small matchbox cars.)
- carrying and being held
- finding balance and keeping it
- a practiced seriousness and concentration

The compact figures seem to grow together to form a single, solid body with resolute facial expressions. We can see that within these towers, each individual figure has stories to tell. The complexity of these sculptures poses questions regarding the human condition and the tasks that life imposes on all of us.

Sometimes one even wants to ask how one emerges from the whole? Again and again, it's as if these figures want to 'learn how to fly' and take off as a group....

The fish that repeatedly emerges in Seruset's work remains ambiguous and the works remain open to different meanings. The fish is a symbol of fertility or death. It is one of the oldest secret symbols for Jesus Christ, an emblem for spiritual sustenance or a successful catch. Seruset's technique reinforces his work's openness to interpretation and thus encourages the viewer to ask such questions. One sees Seruset's interest in material, surface texture, and colour. Upon closer inspection, we find a raw surface and a targeted, sparing use of colour, a technique that reveals the wood's natural texture. It is a material of intrinsic crudeness which bears evidence of work with chain saws, drills, and gluing. Everything is left in a raw, unpolished state; nothing is concealed.

As has already been mentioned, Seruset's wooden sculptures demand intense examination of a world that is standing on its head, calling into question our assumed points of view. Jürgen Schilling said of the figures: 'All of them come from a fantastical repertoire of personal iconography, which is based on ironically rendered classical motifs. (...) The subversive energy inherent in these forms seems grotesque, and what is ostensibly amusing about this artistic approach is that it takes one aback, because the laughter it evokes sticks in the back of your throat.'

I hope that your laughter does not stick in the back of your throat – but instead that you feel compelled to look closely at this multi-faceted work. But: '*Achtung*'. As I said, look closely!

Thank you for your time.

Melanie Klier