

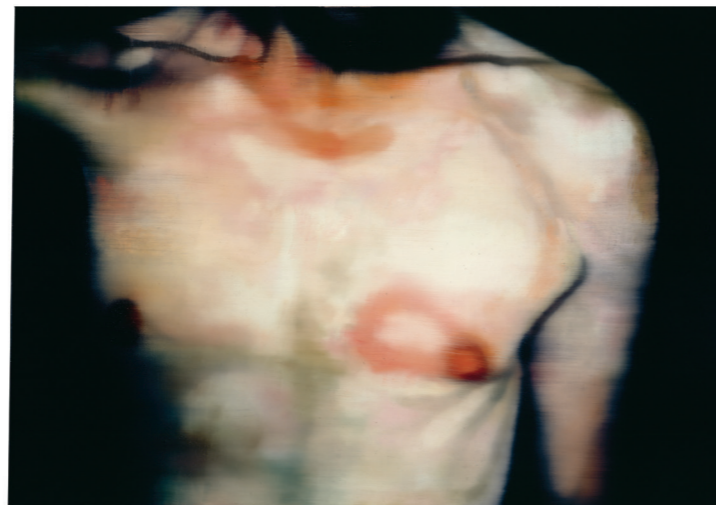


*„Wenn ich an meine Bilder denke, die sich in deiner Sammlung befinden, dann sind da mit Sicherheit einige dabei, die es einem nicht so leicht machen. Die Leute wollen manchmal, dass ich etwas Helleres, Leichteres mache. Du aber scheinst damit kein Problem zu haben.“*

*Hast du keine Angst vor der Dunkelheit?“*

Johannes Kahrs im Gespräch mit Andy Hall  
Von Anneli Botz





*Therapy (Stich)*, 2004  
Dyptichon, Öl auf Leinwand  
55,5 x 84,3 cm; 55,2 x 78 cm

Als vor rund 15 Jahren Museen wie das Centre Pompidou, der Hamburger Bahnhof oder das MoMA damit begannen, Arbeiten von Johannes Kahrs (\*1965) anzukaufen und zu sammeln, nahm die Karriere des deutschen Malers schnell an Fahrt auf. Die Bilder des Absolventen der Berliner Hochschule der Künste tauchten bald an allen wichtigen Orten auf und wurden immer häufiger gehandelt. Kunst aus Berlin war damals schon sehr gefragt. Als Teil dieser Szene profitierten Kahrs und seine Künstlerkollegen von den Freiheiten der im Wandel begriffenen Stadt – ohne die in der Kunstwelt sonst üblichen ökonomischen Verstrickungen und Bindungen.

Ungefähr zur selben Zeit stieß der Sammler Andy Hall auf der Art Basel Miami Beach auf Johannes Kahrs' Arbeit. Hall war begeistert von ihrer fotografischen Qualität und ihrer existenziellen Sensibilität und fing an, Kahrs' Bilder gezielt zu suchen und seiner wachsenden Sammlung hinzuzufügen.

Diese beiden Welten treffen nun auf Schloss Derneburg in Niedersachsen aufeinander. Das Schloss, das Hall und seine Frau Christine von Georg Baselitz erworben haben, ist heute Sitz der Hall Art Foundation und ein wichtiges Zentrum zeitgenössischer Kunst. Im September hat Johannes Kahrs dort eine große Einzelausstellung eröffnet – ein guter Anlass, Künstler und Sammler, die einander noch nie begegnet sind, für ein erstes Gespräch zusammenzubringen.

Andy Hall: Vor etwa 15 Jahren haben wir die gesamte deutsche Sammlung von Georg Baselitz angekauft, darunter auch einige Bilder von Jörg Immendorff. Eines von dir ist mit einem Text überschrieben. Er lautet: „Diese Fragen an die Künstler richten – auf Antwort bestehen.“ Die beiden Fragen waren: „Für was, für wen?“ Meine Frage ist also: Warum malst du, und für wen? Hast du ein spezifisches Publikum im Kopf?

*Kahrs denkt lange nach.*

Johannes Kahrs: Das ist eine schwierige Frage. Ich denke, heute male ich einfach für mich selbst. Aber es hat Zeiten gegeben, in denen sich alles verkauft hat, was ich als Künstler produziert habe. Und das war nicht ohne, ja, es war fast schon gefährlich. In gewisser Weise kann man nämlich sagen, dass zu viel Erfolg nicht gut ist. Es hindert den Künstler daran, zu experimentieren. Stattdessen riskiert man, sich in der eigenen Kunst zu wiederholen, weil man weiß, dass etwas ja schon einmal funktioniert hat. Es kann also sein, dass ich damals unbewusst für ein gewisses Publikum gearbeitet habe – ein Publikum, von dem ich wusste, dass meine Arbeit ihm gefallen würde.

AH Wodurch hat sich das geändert?

JK Damals habe ich mit der Luhring Augustine Gallery in New York zusammengearbeitet, aber diese Beziehung endete. Das war ein echter Schock, denn solche Trennungen sind hart – genau wie in jeder anderen Beziehung auch. Mich hat das in eine Krise gestürzt. Es war schwer, aber es hat mir auch geholfen. Plötzlich habe ich mich nicht mehr so sehr für das Ergebnis interessiert und angefangen, neue Dinge auszuprobieren. Ich dachte, wenn es schon nicht läuft, dann kann ich auch was ausprobieren.





*Untitled (four men with table), 2008*  
Dyptichon, Öl auf Leinwand  
197,5 x 237,5 cm; 197,5 x 215,5 cm



AH Ich habe Künstler immer bewundert, die sich selbst neu erfinden und sich nicht darum scheren, wenn Galerien und Sammler sich darüber ärgern, dass die Arbeiten plötzlich nicht mehr ihren Erwartungen entsprechen. Ein gutes Beispiel dafür ist Philip Guston. Er hat den abstrakten Expressionismus aufgegeben und sich einer fast comicartigen Figürlichkeit zugewandt.

JK Was er gemacht hat, war fantastisch. Er konnte das Vokabular seiner abstrakten Phase verwenden und trotzdem auf eine ganz neue Art malen.

AH Aber seine Kollegen und engen Freunde dachten, er sei verrückt geworden! Auf der ersten Ausstellung seiner figürlichen Arbeiten hat er einen seiner Künstlerfreunde nach dessen Meinung gefragt. Angeblich ist der Typ einfach weggegangen, und sie haben nie wieder miteinander gesprochen. Es muss schwierig sein für Künstler, sich derart selbst herauszufordern.

JK Das bringt mich auf einen anderen Gedanken: Ich habe mal ein großes Diptychon über politische Gewalt gemalt, es hieß *four men with table*. Ich war so wütend über die politische Situation im Land, dass ich dazu ein Kunstwerk machen musste. In gewisser Weise hatte ich also ein Publikum im Hinterkopf. Aber Protest kann nicht nur im Atelier stattfinden. Er muss auch irgendwo hinführen.

AH Das ist gerade sehr aktuell, mit „Black Lives Matter“ hier in Amerika und dem Fokus auf Polizeigewalt. Es ist so unfassbar, wie weit verbreitet die Gewalt in unserem System ist.

JK Das Bild, das ich damals gemalt habe, sieht fast aus wie ein Tanz zwischen einer Person, die am Boden liegt, und den Polizisten, die auf sie einschlagen. Alles ist in Bewegung.

**„Ich habe Künstler immer bewundert, die sich selbst neu erfinden und sich nicht darum scheren, wenn Galerien und Sammler sich darüber ärgern, dass die Arbeiten plötzlich nicht mehr ihren Erwartungen entsprechen.“ – Hall**

AH Vor etwa 20 Jahren wurde ich vom Gelegenheits- zum obsessiven Sammler. Überschneidungen von Malerei und Fotografie haben mich schon immer interessiert – und deine Bilder haben mich wirklich begeistert. Ich fing schließlich an, deine Arbeiten zu erwerben, auf Kunstmesse, bei Galerien und Auktionen. Ein Foto zur Grundlage eines Gemäldes zu machen ist natürlich nichts Neues. Man denke nur an Francis Bacon. Bei der Entwicklung seiner Bildsprache griff er stark auf Fotografien zurück, auch wenn man das seinen Bildern nicht unbedingt ansieht. Da ist etwas in deiner Arbeit, das mich an Bacon erinnert.

JK Es gibt ein wunderbares BBC-Interview mit ihm. Er sprach davon, beim Malen die Sensation der Realität rekonstruieren zu wollen, die er bei der ersten Betrachtung eines bestimmten Bildes hatte. Ich habe mal ein kleines Diptychon mit dem Titel *Stich* gemalt. Beim Fahrradfahren war mir eine Wespe ins T-Shirt geflogen und hat mich in die Brust gestochen. Das hatte ich im Kopf, als ich das Bild malte. Gefühle kann man vielleicht nicht malen, aber man kann versuchen, eine Intensität zu malen, die derjenigen nahekommt, an die man sich in Verbindung mit dem Gefühl erinnert.

AH Im Vergleich mit Bacon geht es dir bei einer Fotografie also nicht so sehr um das Bild, eher um die Idee, das Bild eines Bildes hervorzubringen. Ich denke, so ist es auch bei Gerhard Richter oder Malcolm Morley.

JK Ja, möglich. Ich mag Morleys Spätwerk. Ich habe ihn einmal persönlich getroffen. Er erschien mir als ein riesenhafter, sanfter Mann. Er hat mal ein Bild von einem Dschungel gemalt, mit mehreren Frauenbeinen, die von oben herabhängen, ein ganz wunderbares Bild. Ich selber versuche mich mehr von der fotografischen Vorlage zu lösen, aber das kollidiert mit meinem Unglauben an einen persönlichen Stil, und ich glitsche wieder zurück. Aber für mich sind das keine fotografischen Bilder. Eher Erscheinungen.

AH Du meinst, dein Stil wird gerade malerischer?

JK Ich suche nach einem direkteren und einfacheren Weg zu malen, sodass die Farbe selbst ein Gefühl oder eine Atmosphäre transportieren kann.

AH Deine Farbpalette scheint sich ebenfalls stark verändert zu haben.

JK Früher habe ich viele dunkle Farbtöne verwendet, aber irgendwie hat sich das weiterentwickelt, und ich male heller. Ich sehe die Dunkelheit nicht mehr, oder ich kann sie nicht mehr malen. Es spielt aber keine Rolle, etwas kann sehr beängstigend oder unheimlich sein, und dabei doch ganz hell, taghell, weiß.

AH Du hast gerade die Adjektive „beängstigend“ und „unheimlich“ verwendet. Genau das denke ich oft, wenn ich deine Arbeiten betrachte. Da ist etwas Beunruhigendes in der Art und Weise, wie das Bild präsentiert wird. Ist das Absicht?

JK Ich bin mir nicht ganz sicher, aber Absicht ist es nicht. Ich glaube, es hat zu tun mit dem besonderen Gefühl von Raum, Rhythmus und Farbe, das jeder Künstler besitzt. Denk doch zum Beispiel an Bacons Umgang mit dem Körper und dem Porträt. Das ist furchterregend, aber gleichzeitig ist da ein warmes Moment, eine gewisse Weichheit in der Brutalität. Lucian Freud ist viel härter, kälter. Seine Bilder scheinen mir konventioneller, aber die Art und Weise, wie er seine Gegenstände betrachtet, ist echt brutal. Die Bilder von Georgia O’Keeffe auf der anderen Seite sind sehr

distanziert, sie malt wunderschönes Licht. Meine eigene Arbeit ist irgendwie unheimlich, verzerrt; und vielleicht ist das der Grund für meinen mehr oder weniger altmodischen Umgang mit der Malerei. Meine Bilder sind realistisch, aber da ist auch etwas, das man nicht sieht, das lediglich durchscheint. Vielleicht ein tief verwurzelt Misstrauen gegenüber der Realität? Ich höre oft Sätze wie „Wow, diese Person ist ja übel zugerichtet!“ Ich aber sehe nur die Farben, die Magenta-, Grün- oder Lilatöne. Der Effekt ist da, aber beabsichtigt ist er nicht.

AH In unserer Sammlung befindet sich auch ein kleines Bild von dir aus dem Jahr 2006, *Portrait of Julie*. Es zeigt das Gesicht einer auf der Seite liegenden Frau. Es sieht aus, als sei es blutüberströmt ... Ein anderes Bild – es erinnert mich an ein Gemälde von Jenny Saville – zeigt eine Frau, die auf einem Bett liegt, das ist auch verstörend. Aber du sagst, das sei alles unbeabsichtigt?

JK Ich habe keine Ahnung, warum diese Bilder sind, wie sie sind. Wie ich schon sagte, ich denke, Atmosphäre hat damit zu tun, wie wir die Dinge sehen, oder wie wir auf die Realität reagieren. Das *Julie*-Bild hat mich über lange Zeit hinweg beschäftigt. Ich habe mal ein Video gedreht, das auf einer Szene von Quentin Tarantinos Film *Reservoir Dogs* basierte. Der eine Typ stirbt, und der andere beklagt sich darüber, dass ihm das Ohr weggeschossen wurde. Der Sterbende sagt: „Fuck you, fuck you. I am fucking dying, shut up!“ Diese Szene habe ich für meinen Kurzfilm *Six Seconds of Popular Violence* verwendet, das aus einer Wiederholung dieser Filmszene besteht. Ein paar Jahre später habe ich das Ganze in Frankreich mit einer echten Schauspielerin nachgestellt, eine Performance in Echtzeit. Ungefähr eine Stunde lang hat sie diese sechs Sekunden geschrien. Und damit es jedes Mal gleich aussah, habe ich sie immer wieder mit Kunstblut übergossen. Das war ziemlich krass. Die Farbe, das Geschrei ... Und daraus habe ich dann später das Bild gemacht.

AH Verwendest du das Medium Video häufig?

JK Eine gewisse Zeit lang ja, zwischen 1997 und 2004 etwa. Dieses gerade erwähnte Video fand großen Zuspruch, es wurde im PS1 in New York gezeigt, in der Presse diskutiert. Aber mir ist klar geworden, dass Videokunst nirgendwo hinführt, und dass sie in diesem Sinne wirkungslos bleibt. Also habe ich mich mehr und mehr auf die Malerei konzentriert. Diese Berliner Kunstszene Mitte der 90er-Jahre begann sich damals irgendwie aufzulösen. Videos waren Teil dieser experimentellen Zeit, jeder hat sich an allen möglichen Medien versucht; Film und Musik gehörten dazu, Malerei eher weniger. Wir haben dabei sowohl uns selbst als auch die Orte, an denen wir uns trafen, aus den Augen verloren, und ich wurde in meinem Atelier immer einsamer. Die Malerei wurde für mich dann wieder zum Rückzugsort. Und das Angeln natürlich, das mache

**„Gefühle kann man vielleicht nicht malen, aber man kann versuchen, eine Intensität zu malen, die derjenigen nahekommt, an die man sich in Verbindung mit dem Gefühl erinnert.“ – Kahrs**

ich seit meiner Kindheit. Es ist das genaue Gegenteil von Arbeit, Studium oder Familie, von Menschen und von der Stadt. Man muss sich zu den Flüssen aufmachen. Man versucht, die Strömung zu verstehen und die Stellen zu finden, an denen die Fische sich aufhalten. Man fühlt die Erde, das Moos, den Lehm, den Sand und die Steine an den Ufern. Man schaut die ganze Zeit ins Wasser, das meist kristallklar über Steine, Kies und Sand fließt. Man beobachtet die Uferschwalben, die Art und Weise, wie sie zwitschern und in Schwärme von Eintagsfliegen hineinstoßen. Man sieht Wiesel an den Ufern jagen, Bussarde kreisen, verkrüppelte Birken und kleine Blumen, die sich am Boden ducken. In Mittsommernächten hört man Vögel die ganze Nacht singen.

AH In unserer Sammlung gibt es eine weitere Arbeit von dir, die ganz anders ist als die anderen, weil das Bild eben überhaupt nicht bedrohlich wirkt. Es heißt *man in the sun* und zeigt einen Mann in Badehose. Ich habe es von Luhring Augustine gekauft. Wir besitzen ein Haus in Florida, und viel von der Kunst, die wir dort haben, hat mit Sonne und Strand zu tun. Deshalb dachte ich, dass dieses Bild perfekt für Florida wäre. Vor einem Jahr waren wir dann irgendwohin unterwegs, und als ich am Flughafen durch den Duty-free-Shop laufe, bemerke ich eine Werbung von Dolce & Gabbana mit dem Model David Gandy. Ich sehe also dieses Foto von ihm in Badehose und denke: „Moment, das kenn ich doch!“ Es scheint wie ein Spiegelbild deines Gemäldes.

JK Wow, das ist echt verrückt, dass du das erkannt hast! Es ist genau diese Werbung gewesen, die ich für das Bild verwendet habe. Das Foto zeigt einen Mann, der auf einem Boot liegt. Das Bild ist sehr merkwürdig, denn einerseits hat es etwas Homoerotisches, andererseits aber gehört zu der Anzeige noch eine zweite Seite, und die zeigt eine Frau. Ich war total fasziniert von der Zweideutigkeit des Bildes und von diesem massiven Körper. Er sieht aus wie ein Steak, wie ein riesiges Stück Fleisch – das nenne ich eine wirklich gelungene Werbung!

AH Ein Freund von uns, ein bekannter Kunstkritiker, ist früher jeden Winter runter nach Florida gekommen. Einmal zeigte ich ihm und seinem Partner unsere dortige Sammlung. Und als wir so von einem Bild zum anderen gingen – er kannte jeden einzelnen Künstler –, sagte er: „Das ist eine echte Heten-Sammlung.“ Ihm erschien die Sammlung sehr heterosexuell geprägt,



mit nackten Frauen und so weiter. Und dann blieb er vor deinem Bild stehen und sagte: „Bis auf das hier!“ Das war witzig, weil es sich ausgerechnet um das Bild von David Gandy handelte, mit einer Frau auf der zweiten Seite, die man lediglich nicht sieht. Es zeigt, wenn man Dinge aus dem Kontext nimmt, kann man sie völlig neu definieren.

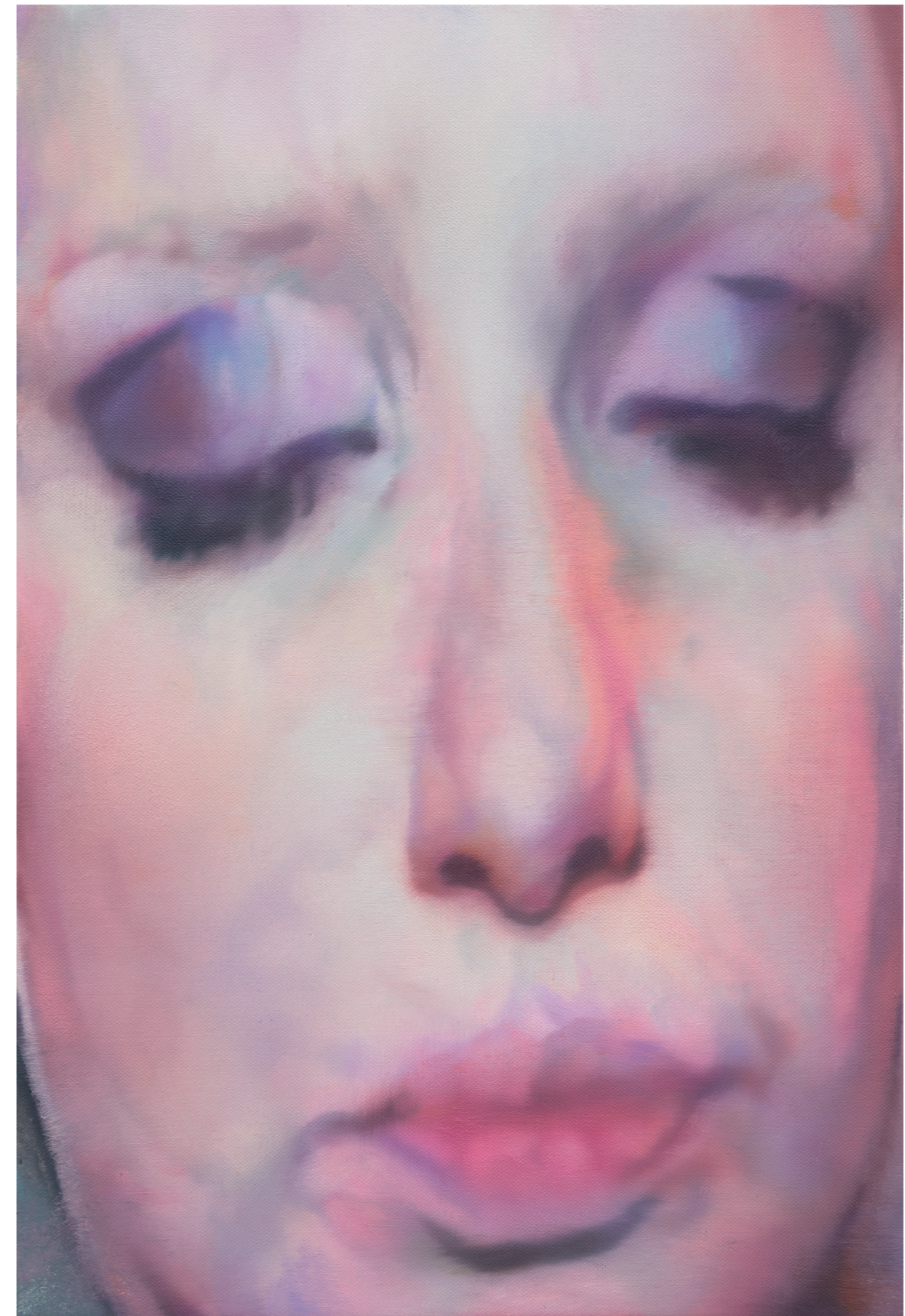
*Kahrs nickt, denkt nach ...*

- JK Ich habe auch eine Frage an dich. Ein Freund von mir hat neulich meine Bilder angeschaut. Er holte tief Luft und sagte: „Warum muss die Welt immer so dunkel sein in deinen Bildern? Kannst du nicht einmal was anderes, was Schönes malen?“ Wenn ich an meine Bilder denke, die sich in deiner Sammlung befinden, dann sind da mit Sicherheit einige dabei, die es einem nicht so leicht machen. Die Leute wollen manchmal, dass ich etwas Helleres, Leichteres mache. Du aber scheinst damit kein Problem zu haben. Hast du keine Angst vor der Dunkelheit?
- AH Ich finde, Kunst sollte mehr sein als nur schöne Bilder. Sicher, viele kaufen Kunst, um damit ihre Wohnungen zu dekorieren, und vielleicht wollen sie sich keinen gezeigten Körper an die Wand hängen. Aber ich sammle, weil es mir Spaß macht, und weil ich so etwas wie ein verhindertes Museumskurator bin. Ich hätte wohl nie einen Job als Kurator bekommen, aber ich kann einer sein, indem ich mir mein eigenes Museum schaffe. Und ich kann den Menschen Ausstellungen zeigen, die ich selbst ausgewählt habe. Vielleicht ist das eitel, aber es gibt mir die Möglichkeit, auszustellen, was ich anregend finde und was mich anspricht. Vielleicht sammeln wir deshalb ein bisschen anders als andere Sammler und sind offener für anstrengende Kunst. Ganz davon abgesehen: Einer der bedeutendsten Künstler der Welt ist Francis Bacon, und dessen Bilder sind ja auch nicht gerade leichte Kost.
- JK Genau daran habe ich auch gerade gedacht. Aber ich finde seine Arbeiten tatsächlich überhaupt nicht brutal.
- AH Na ja ...
- JK Nein, man muss nur ganz genau hinschauen. Wenn man das Figurative mal beiseitelässt und mehr auf die Farben und die Komposition schaut, wird die Sache eine ganz andere.
- AH Genau deshalb mag ich Baselitz so sehr. Es war sehr klug, wie er alles auf den Kopf gestellt hat. Klar ist da ein Bild, aber er zwingt den Betrachter, sich ihm unter anderen Vorzeichen zu nähern.
- JK Manchmal habe ich, ehrlich gesagt, Angst vor den Betrachtern. Auf Ausstellungseröffnungen fühle ich mich oft eingeschüchtert und habe den Wunsch, einfach wegzulaufen. Meine Bilder gehören dann nicht mehr mir. Sie werden plötzlich brutal, dunkel und

düster, und ich bekomme Angst vor den Emotionen, die sie offenbar auslösen. Wenn ich in meinem Atelier bin, ist alles in Ordnung, und die Bilder sind für mich immer gut genug. Aber während der Eröffnung beginne ich plötzlich, zu grübeln und alles infrage zu stellen.

- AH Es braucht wohl sehr viel Mut, um Künstler zu sein, man muss alles offenlegen und sich dem Urteil stellen.
- JK Wirklich ernüchternd ist, wenn man an einer Sache über ein Jahr gearbeitet hat, und dann guckt jemand sechs Sekunden lang drauf und sagt: „Ach, das ist wertlos.“
- AH So darf man nicht denken! Du malst ja nicht für diese Leute, sondern für die, die deine Bilder kaufen und mit ihnen den Rest ihres Lebens verbringen. Manch einer kommt nach Hause und macht den Fernseher an, ich komme nach Hause und schaue mir ein Gemälde an.
- JK Das ist eine schöne Vorstellung. Als ich klein war, hing an der Wand unseres Esszimmers ein Gemälde aus der Hand meines Vaters, auf der gegenüberliegenden Seite meines Platzes. Jahrelang habe ich diesem Bild gegenübergesessen. Ich wusste nie, was es war, und trotzdem hat es mich sehr beeinflusst.
- AH Aus der Hand deines Vaters?
- JK Ja, er war Maler, Fotograf und Musiker, aber schlussendlich leitete er die Bremer Steuerbehörde und wurde Finanzsenator, spezialisiert auf europäisches Steuerrecht.
- AH Er muss großen Einfluss auf dich gehabt haben.
- JK Das Haus war immer voll von Musik, Kunst und Literatur, und das war gut so, weil es vom „Familienleben“ ablenkte.
- AH Welche Künstler haben dich in der Jugend beeinflusst?
- JK Ich war beeindruckt von Künstlern der 80er-Jahre. Da war ich gerade an der Kunsthochschule, aber alles war riesengroß und gigantisch, und ich habe eigentlich nach etwas anderem gesucht, nach einer Intimität. Später haben mich Vija Celmins, Luc Tuymans, Richard Prince, Bruce Nauman, Larry Clark, Mike Kelley, Georgia O'Keeffe, Joan Mitchell, Monica Bonvicini, ach, ganz viele Künstler und Künstlerinnen interessiert. Da war beispielsweise auch ein kleines Bild von Tuymans auf der documenta, eine Gaskammer.

**„Manch einer kommt nach Hause und macht den Fernseher an, ich komme nach Hause und schaue mir ein Gemälde an.“**  
– Hall



*Untitled (wasted)*, 2018  
Öl auf Leinwand  
49,1 x 33,4 cm





Untitled (man in the sun), 2010  
 Öl auf Leinwand  
 90 x 67,5 cm

Werke dieser Strecke:  
 S. 14-16; 23-25: Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerpen  
 S.18-19: Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerpen / Luhring Augustine, New York

Damals hat mich das sehr beschäftigt, gerade die physische Wucht, die von etwas Kleinem ausgehen kann.

- AH Deine und Tuymans' Arbeiten verbindet eine gewisse Rätselhaftigkeit, gleichzeitig aber sind sie von sehr unterschiedlicher Sensibilität. Deine Arbeit hat eben diese Dunkelheit.
- JK Ich finde Tuymans' Kunst beispielsweise nicht sehr sexy. Für mich allerdings ist Erotik ein wichtiger Faktor, und ich denke, bei Luc gibt es sie nicht.
- AH Ja, er ist irgendwie verkopft.
- JK Er ist fasziniert von Machtstrukturen.
- AH Ich finde, seine Bilder verlangen oft nach einer Hintergrunderzählung, deine hingegen brauchen das nicht. Wie dein Bild *Stich*, über das wir gesprochen haben. Es funktioniert gut, auch wenn man nicht weiß, was passiert ist.
- JK Dieses Bild ist irgendwie faszinierend, es hat keinen Kopf, wirkt fast enthauptet und ein bisschen wie Jesus am Kreuz.
- AH Als ich es auf der Art Basel Miami Beach gekauft habe, zeigte ich es dem US-amerikanischen Kunsthändler Tony Shafrazi, der Basquiat ausstellt und den Francis-Bacon-Nachlass vertritt. Wir waren uns einig, dass etwas von Bacon in deinen Arbeiten steckt. Ich glaube, Tony hat das andere Bild von dir gekauft, das auf der Messe angeboten wurde.
- JK Fantastisch!
- AH Hast du selbst viele Künstlerfreunde, oder bist du dir eine eigene Insel?
- JK Na ja, ich habe viel zu tun und brauche viel Zeit für mich. Es gibt Freunde für unterschiedliche Lebensphasen, manche bleiben bei einem, viele aber nicht. Ich mochte die Freundschaft, die ich mit Eberhard Havekost hatte. Er hat mir immer sehr geholfen.
- AH Oh, wir haben viele seiner Arbeiten!
- JK Ja, er war viel kommunikativer als ich, das war toll. Aber wir haben den Kontakt zueinander verloren.
- AH Das ist schade.
- JK Allerdings.
- AH Ich versuche, mir Berlin vor 20 Jahren vorzustellen. Es muss sehr viel Konkurrenz gegeben haben, mit all diesen großartigen Malern in der Stadt.
- JK Nun ja, es gab keine Galerien, auch keine richtigen Museen. Wir machten alles selbst. Anders als in Düsseldorf oder Köln gab es damals in Berlin noch keine Kunstmarktstrukturen. Es war eine gute Zeit, um dort zu sein. Aber es war letztlich auch ein Gerangel, und ich habe viele Leute zur Seite geschubst, um das zu bekommen, was ich damals wollte.

**„Ich war total fasziniert von der Zweideutigkeit des Bildes und von diesem massiven Körper. Er sieht aus wie ein Steak, wie ein riesiges Stück Fleisch – das nenne ich eine wirklich gelungene Werbung!“ – Kahrs**

- AH Bist du heute bescheidener?
- JK Sehr sogar! Ich denke, das ist eines der guten Dinge am Älterwerden.
- AH Ich glaube, das geht uns allen so. Wenn ich darauf zurückblicke, wer ich vor 30 Jahren war, dann denke ich auch oft, dass ich ziemlich schrecklich gewesen sein muss.
- JK Manchmal fühlt es sich heute friedlicher an, und natürlich auch ein bisschen langweiliger. Ich halte es in diesem Sinne mit Friedrich Hölderlin: „Friedlich und heiter ist dann das Alter.“



# TRANSLATIONS

## Alice Anderson

p. 4–5

Through dance rituals, Anderson puts the body at the center of her work as a vector of humanity in a contemporary world committed to technology. Using precise movements to activate chosen objects, Anderson “memorizes” them with copper-colored wire, a symbol of digital connectivity. In 2014, a Ford Mustang 1967 was “memorized” through daily collective performances with the public during four months at the Wellcome Collection, London.

## Katharina Grosse

p. 6–13

### Introduction

The Austrian author Kathrin Röggla and Katharina Grosse are connected with one another in various ways—both are part of the non-profit alliance “WE DO THAT” and are engaged members of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin. They might each be interested too, as Röggla speculates, in both enormous dimensions and “questions of spooky effects over long distances.”

Here the author writes about spaces, movements, and encounters.

### 7 Point 5 Movements Through Katharina Grosse’s Spaces (*Prototypes*) by Kathrin Röggla

What do you do when a space gets too big for you? You make a phone call. She’s been watching him for a while now, walking around and saying: “Give me a ball-park figure, come on! Just a number to get the ball rolling... anything between one and 5000, we’ll meet somewhere in the middle... never mind, I can deal with it.” The latter was more whispered than spoken but she’d still heard it clearly—no one could fail to hear it anywhere in the room, and it seemed like a declaration of war against what was going on around him. The real-estate agent appeared to think he was in with a chance—what else could he be but a real-estate agent? It was them who carved up spaces by scaling things down, coming up with bets. Every bet begins with a gesture of division, that much she knew. And she’d thought it was a joint viewing they’d arranged. A preliminary conversation. A moment of common exploration of the situation. And now she knew he would never enter into a conversation with her, either, without a number up his sleeve.

“Give me a ball-park figure, come on!” Had he really said that? She seemed to sense, at any rate, that conversations that start that way need to be abandoned ASAP. Not a lot changed in her face for the moment. “Are ghosts bad?” came her answer after a while, as if he’d hinted at something along those lines. Not that he had. Certainly not. Not at all. Hadn’t even addressed the subject. Perhaps she wanted to create some distance, make some space? “That is: depends what they look like.” His answer had been slightly too witty, so he added: “You think...” Now they both stared straight ahead. One point for her. The surface ahead of them wasn’t moving. He was sure of it. It just looked like it was. “Tell me,” she interrupted the newly arisen silence, “where does your work actually begin and where does it end?”—“If only I knew! Hard to say,” he attempted to joke, “I’m starting to think the same myself.” Then they stood silently again. A whole lot was suddenly playing out in front of them. All the movement came from a group of school kids simply taking possession of the hall, as if they’d been there all along.

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“Sir... sir... can I help you?” the woman in the entrance area called after the man walking in, who had simply strolled past her towards the middle. “Who’s saying ‘sir’ here?” the child wondered, three meters away from her, a child who never usually wondered about anything. “You can’t just walk in, you know!” the woman added, beginning to work her way out from behind her desk. The guy didn’t seem to know, saw the child who never usually wondered. He simply walked on. She had reached him by now: “It’s better if I take you back, back to the entrance. Otherwise you might...” heard the child that certainly never heard wrong. She knew how misguided it was to assume that the way out of certain spaces was just as easy to find as the way in, a mistake common among adults and classmates who were already elsewhere. They simply made a plan to enter a hall and then leave it again, taking the door area as a simple interim goal, and then they got stuck after all. Something always got in their way, as could be observed. A difficult conversation, a radio appointment, or the damn school calling to make a complaint. The child already knew certain diversions to take, by no means all of them, so to be on the safe side she stayed on the margins from where she could observe everything, so to speak. E.g. that there was no straightforward middle, towards which the man had allegedly walked. Colors prevailed there, the child said to herself, which she could only now start to engage with. They came her way.

“Can you stop moving so frantically? I’m trying to take your photo!” Here in this exterior area, they had finally got to a fairly suitable situation, a shot that looked promising. It wasn’t working, though. He knew it wasn’t his fault; it was the background. Besides, he’d been standing still for some time. If you looked straight ahead there was that magnificent green, yes, the magnificent green had opened up the game, with a yellow and a red. That is: it hadn’t opened it; it was already there, a ghostly presence, in this exterior area where radical colors were not to be expected. But that was the whole joke of it, as the photographer had put it. Colors in places where they definitely didn’t belong didn’t make for a good background after all, the man to be photographed now proclaimed: the colors were just too big. “Too big?” she asked back. In terms of expression, the colors were in the majority, so to speak. “Majority?” He didn’t know how better to phrase it. Meanwhile, the magnificent green didn’t stay still either, moving on and on. “The background is distracting.”—“No, no, it’s you! You’re moving too much.” He couldn’t move less than he already was. Let her get blurred shots in front of this exterior area, then, he thought—it is called exterior area, the space outside the halls, outside the interplay of color?—all of a sudden he didn’t care. He’d only had ten minutes for the appointment from the very beginning, and why should that change now? It was changing, he’d notice, it was changing. The focus would catch up with him eventually: “It comes over time.”

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—Listen, she started imitating you a good while ago. (The one guy)

—You just didn’t notice. (The other guy)

—I didn’t notice? (She)

—Yes, since a good while ago. (The one guy)

—Really, I saw it too. (The other guy)

—And the two of you want to save me from her? (She)

—It’s up to you... (The one guy)

—It’s really up to you what you do about it, but she won’t stop of her own accord. (The other guy)

—No, she really won’t. (The one guy)

—Have you seen this before? (She)

—We’d rather not talk about it. (The one guy)

—No, better not to. (The other guy)

—And now please mind out of our way. You’re stealing our time. (The one guy)

—Yes, we’ve got better things to do. (The other guy)

...

—Where’s she gone? (The other guy)

—Vanished into the green? (The one guy)

—Into the yellow and white! (The other guy)

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He couldn’t help turning around. Being stared at like this was actually a breach of all conventions—they didn’t know each other—but he stood up to the stare. A racist? He knew those looks all too well. This one here was too absent, though, staring straight through him. Vacant. “On a scale of one to seven, how would you rate the time you spent with us?” he heard the guy not far from the long barrier ask promptly. Only now did he realize the guy had a pod in his ear; he was on the phone and fixing his gaze on him; that is: he wasn’t seeing him. Whatever he was seeing, it wasn’t him. “Can you give me a more precise ETA?” The person on the other end of the conversation didn’t seem to be able to answer that, either. Saying when you’ll really be somewhere. It’s tricky, isn’t it? Some part of arrival always goes beyond the estimated time. Some part of oneself always gets left behind. The man being stared at wanted to switch sides of the room, gradually. Even though he wasn’t meant to, that stare bothered him. It meant he wasn’t quite there either, and he didn’t want that. Impossible to tell if the other man registered his departure. He headed for an object he thought was a room divider. The stumbling left him no time. Now he was there.

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“Are you wearing makeup, ma’am? Are you wearing a little bit of makeup now, maybe, miss? Because you looked different before. Just a minute ago... you look quite young now, like an indefinable twenty-five. Yes, twenty-five. And that can’t be right, can it? You look as if you could extend that age in you, pull it and pull it... it’s a little bit spooky, yes, that’s it, it’s uncanny—oh yes, I forgot, no one’s supposed to speak to you, you’re preparing for your interview, but it’s given you such a shiny surface, I couldn’t help it, and the color, I mean the color of your makeup, it goes beyond your face, it goes on, the color goes on without you, how can that be? I’ll tell you something, you’re only human like everyone else, don’t you forget that—so...

you don’t need to think you... yes, there really is something left on you from the space, the preparation room, I mean while you were getting your mind set for the hour to come. You absorbed something of your surroundings and now you can’t shake it off... but I forgot, no one’s supposed to speak to you, you’re busy, I know, you have to get moving now, to the appointment you’ve been waiting for, you really ought to get a fixed appearance for it, really now... yes, go ahead, sure, walk right through me!”

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So the round-table meeting is going to take place. We organized it over the past few weeks and now it’s really going to happen. The simplicity of its happening surprised us organizers, the fact that all parties really would be present: the agricultural representatives, the individual farmers, gardeners, public bodies, conservation groups, foundations, and academic institutions. They’ll be aiming for a catalogue of measures, setting their sights on a fifty-point plan. “Nobody leaves the room before it’s done,” my colleague just joked, the woman you can see on my right. “The constant objectification of the talk’s content will be on the agenda.”—“Hm.” She sighs: “Yes, that’ll be the main task.”—“You’re good at that, though.” We already know how the meeting will begin. One guy will say, “And why are you here?”—“Because you’re here!” another woman will answer. They’ll be there to keep tabs on each other; not for the content, that still has to be introduced. “Gotta be done!” The result won’t be an end result, of course, far from it; it will be a recommendation for policymakers, for the time being. “But it will be a reality. An initial reality.” Yes, that was her, my colleague. We’re not certain at the moment what the space will look like. We’ve been looking for one for a long time. The air circulation has to be right, the temperature changes, it has to absorb a whole lot of movement, be able to deal with a whole lot of abstraction. How ought a space to look in which the extinction rate is calculated in units of species per minute? It’s already 150 a day.

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“Are you wearing makeup, ma’am? Are you wearing a little bit of makeup now, maybe, miss? Because you looked different before. Just a minute ago... you look quite young now, like an indefinable twenty-five. Yes, twenty-five. And that can’t be right, can it? You look as if you could extend that age in you, pull it and pull it... it’s a little bit spooky, yes, that’s it, it’s uncanny—oh yes, I forgot, no one’s supposed to speak to you, you’re preparing for your interview, but it’s given you such a shiny surface, I couldn’t help it, and the color, I mean the color of your makeup, it goes beyond your face, it goes on, the color goes on without you, how can that be? I’ll tell you something, you’re only human like everyone else, don’t you forget that—so... you don’t need to think you... yes, there really is something left on you from the space, the preparation room, I mean while you were getting your mind set for the hour to come. You absorbed something of your surroundings and now you can’t shake it off... but I forgot, no one’s supposed to speak to you, you’re busy, I know, you have to get moving now, to the appointment you’ve been waiting for, you really ought to get a fixed appearance for it, really now... yes, go ahead, sure, walk right through me!”

That thought calls for a response: how should a space be constituted to think about high-output agriculture when its efficiency logic has to be circumvented and yet simultaneously served, so as not to put off the farmers. A space in which they’ll always stay in the same argument and yet go beyond it—“In the long run you’ll all lose!”—a space in which thinking can’t take place in the rhythm of legislative sessions. And in the end, the question mustn’t be: who’s governing? The color or the object? The shape or the surface? We know only one thing: there must not be a reverse gear for that kind of space.

## Johannes Kahrs and Andy Hall

p. 14–25

### Are You Not Afraid of the Darkness? by Anneli Botz

Fifteen years ago, the career of German painter Johannes Kahrs (b. 1965) took off toward a later high when museums like The Pompidou, Hamburger Bahnhof, and MoMA started collecting his work. With multiple shows around the globe and art from Berlin very much in vogue, the former HdK (Hochschule der Künste) student’s paintings grew higher and higher in demand. As part of this ‘scene,’ Kahrs and his contemporaries enjoyed the unbridled liberties of a changing city, without the usual economical conventions and ties of the art world.

Around the same time, art collector Andy Hall came across Johannes Kahrs’ work at Art Basel Miami Beach. Intrigued by their photographic quality and existential sensibility, Hall began to seek out Kahrs’ work, adding piece after piece to his growing art collection.

Now both worlds will unite at Schloss Derneburg in Lower Saxony, Germany. The Schloss was acquired by Hall and his wife from none other than artist Georg Baselitz, and has become home to the Hall Art Foundation, an important center for contemporary art. With a big solo show of Johannes Kahrs’ work opening there in the fall, it seems timely for the artist and collector, who have never met, to have their first conversation.

**Andy Hall:** About fifteen years ago, we bought the entire German art collection of Georg Baselitz including quite a few paintings by Jörg Immendorff. One of them has a text across the top of it. It reads: “Pose these questions to the artist and insist on answers.” The two questions, in German, were: *“Für was, für wen?”*—“For what, for whom?” So my question is, why do you paint, and for whom? Is there a specific audience you have in mind?

*Kahrs takes a long pause to think.*

**Johannes Kahrs:** That is a tough question. I think I just paint for myself, nowadays. There was a time when everything I made as an artist was sold. And that was rather tricky, almost dangerous. In a way, too much success is not always a good thing. It hinders the artist experimenting. Instead you run the risk of repeating yourself in your art, because you know that something has worked before. So maybe I was subconsciously working for an audience back then; an audience that I knew my work would appeal to.



AH: What changed that?

JK: I was working with Luhring Augustine at the time and that relationship ended. This was a real shock, because—like in any relationship—these endings are hard. It threw me into a crisis. It was hard, but also helpful. Suddenly, I did not care about the outcome anymore and began to try out different things. I thought if it does not work anyway, I might as well have some freedom.

AH: I have always admired artists who reinvent themselves and do not care that galleries and collectors push back because it is no longer the work that they expected. Philip Guston is a great example of that. He abandoned abstract expressionism and turned to cartoonish figuration.

JK: It was fantastic what he did. He could use the vocabulary of the abstract time and realize paintings in a new way.

AH: But his colleagues and close friends thought he had gone mad! At the first show of this figurative work, Guston asked one of his artist friends for his opinion. Apparently the guy just walked away, and they never spoke again. It must be difficult for artists to challenge themselves in that way.

JK: Actually, I once made a big diptych about political violence titled *four men with table*. I was so furious about the situation in the country that I had to make an artwork about it. So in a way, there was an audience in the back of my head. A protest can not only be in the studio. It must go somewhere.

AH: That is very topical now, with Black Lives Matter here in America and the focus on police brutality. It is so outrageous how endemic it is in the system.

JK: The painting I made is almost like a dance between the person lying on the ground and the policemen beating him up. Everything is in movement.

AH: About twenty years ago I went from being a casual collector to being an obsessive collector. I had always been fascinated by the intersection of painting and photography and your paintings really intrigued me. I began to actively set out to acquire your work, from art fairs to galleries and auctions. Of course, it is nothing new to base a painting on a photograph. Take Francis Bacon for example. He relied a lot on photographs to construct his imagery, even though you do not necessarily see that in his paintings. There is something in

your work that reminds me of Bacon.

JK: There is a beautiful interview on the BBC with him. He spoke about how he wants to recreate the sensation of reality when he looked at a certain image for the first time. I painted a small diptych named *Stich*. A wasp had flown into my shirt and stung me on my chest while I was biking. That's what I had in mind when I painted it. Maybe you cannot paint feelings, but you can try to paint an intensity which comes close to what you remember the sensation to have been.

AH: Compared to Bacon it is not so much about the image in the photograph for you. It is rather about the idea to produce an image of an image. I think that is also true for Gerhard Richter, or Malcolm Morley.

JK: Yes, probably. I especially like his late work. I met him once, what a giant gentle man. He once made this painting of a jungle, with some female legs dangling down from the top. I also want to get away from the photograph more and more.

AH: You are saying that your style is becoming more painterly now?

JK: I look for a more direct and simplistic way to paint, so the paint itself can transport the feeling or atmosphere.

AH: The palette you use seems like it has evolved quite strikingly.

JK: I used to use a lot of dark tones, but this somehow evolved and now I want to paint more light. I don't see the darkness at the moment or can't paint it. You can make something scary or spooky, but it can be light, complete daylight, white.

AH: You just used the adjectives scary and spooky. Which is what I often think of when looking at your work. There is something unsettling about the way the image is presented. A deliberate choice?

JK: I am not sure, but it is not deliberate. I think it has to do with the special sense of space, rhythm and color, which every artist has. Take Bacon's approach to the body and portrait, for example. There is something horrible, but at the same time a warm touch, a certain softness in the brutality. Lucian Freud is much harsher, colder. The paintings seem to me more conventional but the way he looks at his subjects is really brutal. A painting by Georgia O'Keefe on the other hand is distant, she paints beautiful light. My own work is somehow uncanny,

distorted; and maybe that is also the reason for my more or less old-fashioned approach to painting. The paintings are realistic, yet there is something you cannot see, and it shines through. Maybe this is a deep-rooted mistrust in reality? People often tell me something like "Wow, this person is really beaten up!" But I just see the colors, those tones of magenta or green or purple. They have this effect, but I do not intend to do that.

AH: We own a small painting by you called *Portrait of Julie*, from 2006. It is the face of a woman lying on her side. It looks like her face is covered in blood... And there is another one of a woman lying on a bed—it reminds me of a Jenny Saville painting—which is also disturbing. But you say that this is all unintentional.

JK: I have no clue why they are the way they are. Again, I think the atmosphere has to do with the way you see things or react to reality. The Julie image interested me for a long time. I once shot a video, based on a scene in *Reservoir Dogs*. One guy is dying, and the other guy is complaining that his ear was shot off. So, the one that is dying says: "Fuck you, fuck you. I am fucking dying, shut up!" I used this scene for a short film called *Six Seconds of Popular Violence*, which is a repetition of the scene in the movie. A few years later I restaged the whole thing in France with a real actress, as a performance in real time. For about an hour she was screaming these six seconds. And in order to make it look the same every time, I would pour this artificial blood over her. It was quite intense. The paint, the screaming... And then I made a painting of that later.

AH: Do you use video as a medium a lot?

JK: I used to for some time, maybe between 1997 and 2004. This one was received well, it was shown at PS1 in New York, made it into the press a lot. But I realized videos do not lead anywhere and so they were utterly unsuccessful in this sense. So I just focused on painting more and more. And this Berlin art scene of the mid-nineties that you described started to somehow disappear. The videos had been part of this experimental time where everyone was exploring all kinds of mediums; film and music, but not so much painting. We lost each other and the spaces where we met, and I became lonelier in the studio. Painting became my retreat. And fishing of course, which I have been doing since my childhood. It's the opposite of the work, of school and family, of people and the city. You have to find your way around the rivers. You try to read the current and the places a

fish might swim. You become aware of the soil, moss, clay, sand, and rocks beside the river. You look constantly into the water, which flows mostly crystal-clear over rocks and gravel and sand. You watch the bank swallows, the way they chatter and dive into swarms of mayflies. You see weasels hunting along the bank, buzzards hovering and crippled birch trees, small flowers ducked to the ground. You hear birds singing through the nights of midsummer.

AH: We have another work in the collection, which was the exception to the other pieces as the image does not seem threatening at all. It is titled *man in the sun* and shows a man in a bathing suit. I bought it from Luhring Augustine. We have a home in Florida, and a lot of the art we have there relates to sun and beaches, which is why I thought that this work was going to be perfect for Florida. And then a year ago, we were traveling somewhere and catching a plane at the airport. And as I am walking through the duty-free store, I see this advertisement for Dolce and Gabbana with the model David Gandy. I see this image of him in a bathing suit and I think: "Hold on, I recognize this!" It seems like it's the mirror image of your painting.

JK: Wow, that is crazy that you saw that! It was exactly this ad that I used for the painting. The photo shows a man lying in a boat. The image is very strange as it has something of the homoerotic, but in fact there is another side to the ad, showing a woman. I was so fascinated by the suggestiveness of the image and by this huge body. It looks like a steak, like a massive piece of meat—it's truly a successful advertising ad!

AH: A friend of ours, a renowned art critic, used to come down to Florida every winter. I was showing him and his partner our art collection there. When we walked around—he knew every artist—he said: "This is a very *het* art collection," meaning it was a very heterosexual collection, with female nudes and things like that. And then he stopped in front of your painting and said: "Except for this one!" Which was funny, as in fact it is this picture of David Gandy, with a woman on the other side whom you don't see. When you take things out of context, you can just completely redefine them.

*Kahrs nods, pondering...*

JK: Actually, I also have a question for you. A friend of mine recently looked at my paintings. Taking a deep sigh, he asked: "Why does the world always have to be so dark? In your paintings? Can't you make something different and

joyful for once?" Now, when I look at the paintings of mine that you own, there are certainly some that are not so easy. People sometimes want me to make something lighter. But you do not seem to have the same issue. Are you not afraid of the darkness?

AH: I think art should be more than pretty pictures. Certainly, a lot of people buy art to decorate their homes, so maybe they do not want to have a flagellated body on their walls. I collect because I like collecting and because I am a frustrated museum curator. I could never get a job as a curator, but I can be one myself by having my own museum. And I can present exhibitions to the public that I choose. Maybe there is some vanity in that. But it allows me to present what I find stimulating, what I find engaging. So maybe we do collect a little differently from other collectors and are more open to more challenging art. Having said that, one of the most sought-after artists in the world is Francis Bacon. And his paintings are not exactly easy either.

JK: I was just thinking about that. But I do not find his work brutal at all.

AH: Well...

JK: No, you must really look at them. If you step away from the figuration and see the colors and their composition, it becomes another thing.

AH: That's why I like Baselitz so much. He was very clever with turning everything upside down. Of course, there is an image there, but he is forcing the viewer to confront it on different terms.

JK: I sometimes fear the viewer. At my openings, I often feel shy and would like to run away. My images are not my images anymore. Suddenly they become brutal and dark and somber and I am afraid of the emotions they somehow seem to create. When I am in the studio everything is fine and the paintings are always good enough. But during the opening I start to worry, I question everything.

AH: It must take tremendous courage to be an artist, because you are exposing everything and putting yourself out there for evaluation.

JK: What is really devastating is to work on something for over a year. And then someone looks at it for five or six seconds and says "Oh, this is nothing."

AH: But you must think about it differently. You are not painting for these people but for the

people who will buy your paintings and will live with them for the rest of their lives. Some people come home and turn on the television, I come home and look at a painting.

JK: That is a good thought. When I was a child, there was a painting by my father on our dining room wall, across from where I would eat. For years, I would sit across from that painting. And I never knew what it was, but it affected me a lot.

AH: A painting by your father?

JK: Yes, he was a painter, photographer and a musician, but finally he headed the tax department in Bremen and was the Senator for finance, specializing primarily in European tax law.

AH: He must have had an enormous influence on you.

JK: The house was always filled with music, art and literature, which was a positive thing as it drew attention away from "family life."

AH: What artists influenced you when you were young?

JK: I was influenced by the artists from the 80s, as I was a student at the academy then. But everything was massive, people were doing huge paintings, and I was actually looking for something else. Later, watercolors of wounded soldiers by Otto Dix, The Uncanny by Mike Kelley; work by Vija Celmins, Luc Tuymans, Richard Prince, Georgia O'Keefe, Bruce Nauman, Velázquez, Goya, Lucien Freud, Larry Clark, and Monica Bonvicini, to name a few. One day I came across a small painting by Luc Tuymans at documenta, and it had quite an impact on me. I realized that you can make small paintings and create a huge effect. It was a little, crooked painting of a gas chamber.

AH: There is a similar enigmatic quality to your work and Tuyman's, but at the same time it is a very different sensibility. Your work has this darkness.

JK: I do not find his art very sexy. For me on the other hand, eroticism is an important factor, and I think Luc does not have that.

AH: He is somewhat cerebral.

JK: He is fascinated by power structures.

AH: I feel like his pieces often need a backstory, whereas with yours it isn't necessary. Like



your painting *Stich* that we talked about. It works well without knowing what happened.

**JK:** There is something intriguing about this image, it has no head, seems almost decapitated and a bit like Jesus on the cross.

**AH:** When I bought the painting at Art Basel Miami Beach, I showed it to (American dealer) Tony Shafrazi, who showed Basquiat and represented the estate of Francis Bacon. We both agreed that there is Bacon in these works. I think Tony bought the other work of yours that was available at the fair.

**JK:** Fantastic!

**AH:** Do you have many artist friends, or are you an island to yourself?

**JK:** Well, I have so much to do and need a lot of time for myself. There are friends for different times and some of them stay, but many do not. I liked the friendship I had with Eberhard Havekost. He was helpful.

**AH:** Oh, we have a lot of his work!

**JK:** Yes, he was a lot more communicative than me, which was great. But we fell apart.

**AH:** What a shame.

**JK:** Indeed.

**AH:** I am imagining the Berlin from twenty years ago. It must have been competitive with all these great painters around.

**JK:** Well, there were no galleries, no real museums. We were doing everything ourselves. There was no art market structure, like in Düsseldorf or Cologne at the time. It was a good time to be there. But it was a hustle and I pushed many people away to get what I wanted, then.

**AH:** You are more humble now?

**JK:** Much more! I guess that is the good thing when you get older.

**AH:** I think that happens to us all. Looking back at how I was thirty years ago, I also often think I must have been very obnoxious.

**JK:** Sometimes it feels more peaceful today and of course a bit more boring. In this sense I keep up with Hölderlin: “*Friedlich und heiter ist dann das Alter*”—“Old age will be peaceful and serene”.

## Basim Magdy

p. 26–39  
by Anneli Botz

The Egyptian artist Basim Magdy understands the world as an archive of possibilities and impossibilities. It is about apocalyptic prophecies that never came true, but also about new realities and social patterns of behavior. Thus, chatting animals become humorous placeholders for human power differentials. Meanwhile, the artist himself moves virtuously between painting, film, and photography. The declared goal here: escape from the world itself, including dead ends and closed portals.

## Alicja Kwade and Jose Dávila

p. 34–39

### Introduction

At first glance, some of the works of German artist Alicja Kwade and Mexican artist Jose Dávila seem to resemble each other—comparable materials are used, such as robust stone, metal, and glass. However, behind such formal similarities are very different concepts, as curator Pedro Alonzo explains.

Between January and August 2020, Alonzo conducted alternate conversations with Alicja Kwade and Jose Dávila on the topic. All the quotations in the text originate from these conversations.

### Intersecting Practices

by Pedro Alonzo

The practices of Alicja Kwade and Jose Dávila are both broad and distinct. Each artist has ventured successfully into an array of mediums: video in Kwade’s case, and painting in Dávila’s; but it is in sculpture, the discipline that perhaps they are both best known for, that their œuvre intersects. Furthermore, the aesthetic crossover occurs in their use of specific materials such as glass, stone, concrete and steel. What is most interesting about the formal similarities are their contrasting approaches to dealing with said materials, the manner in which each artist handles space, and the concepts behind the work.

Also of great interest is how the artists converge in terms of scientific references, intention, and stimulating the viewer’s senses. The similarities and distinctions became clear as I had the pleasure of curating both artists’ first exhibition at Dallas Contemporary. The exhibitions took place successively in the same space, Gallery 3. In September 2019 Kwade presented *Moving in Glances*, followed by Dávila’s

*Directional Energies* in January 2020.

It was during the customary gallery talk with Dávila at Dallas Contemporary that the contrasts between how markedly Kwade and Dávila handle and display materials began to emerge. Dávila spoke of the I-Beam as a universal element used in construction across the globe: “they are always the same,” he explained. Other than painting and cutting the I-Beams, Dávila displays them in their original state. The same is true of the rocks that complete the sculptures: they are untouched. Dávila displays the uniformity of the industrially fabricated I-Beam in relation to the singularity of the primal, natural stone. He uses a similar approach in works consisting of compositions of concrete cubes and rocks, such as *The Weaker has Conquered the Stronger I* (2019). The industrial concrete cube looks perfect and smooth when seen next to the singularity of the rock.

Whereas Dávila builds artworks with existing elements, Kwade is compelled to transform and combine materials, pushing matter to the limit of what is possible. In the work *Force* (2017), she displays a bent I-Beam and a copper pipe resting against a curved tablet of sandstone. Both materials appear to be melting as they support each other. For Kwade the original state of matter is the starting point, then it must be stretched to the limits of what is possible, pushing against its intrinsic characteristics, where hard stone appears to softly bend and metal begins to liquify. In an example of large-scale transformation and custom fabrication, Kwade responded to the former hedge maze at the Crane Estate in Ipswich, Massachusetts with *TunnelTeller* (2018). The immense site-specific structure, composed of concrete walls, was placed on the remains of a former maze. The walls were intersected by mirror-polished stainless-steel tubes and surrounded by a series of blue stone spheres of varying sizes. Unlike standardized I-beams, the stainless-steel tubes—which ranged in length from four to eight meters, and in diameter from twenty to 120 centimeters—were custom made by steelworkers, then hand polished using specialized tools. Polishing required extreme skill and unique implements, as it is nearly impossible to polish the interior of a long and narrow tube. The naturally chalky and angular *Azul Macaubas* stones, found in Brazil, were shaped into perfect spheres, transforming the material into Earth-like orbs.

It is important to point out that Kwade and Dávila possess significant similarities, particularly in terms of the purity of their materials and the symbolic meaning behind their selection. It is essential for both artists that the material itself be real, not simulated, regardless of the shape or process. Kwade chose concrete and steel as the primary ingredients for *TunnelTeller*

because they are used to construct our cities, “our reality.” Dávila describes concrete as “man-made rock.”

Perhaps the works that are most physically similar are those that are made simply using sheets of glass and cut stone but have distinct conceptual origins. Kwade’s series *Hemmungsloser Widerstand* (2018), roughly translated as “uninhibited” or “unrestrained resistance,” is a play on words to describe a force that is simultaneously unstoppable or uncontrollable. The title refers to the socially transgressive and primordial act of letting go by throwing a rock, as well as to the relationship between the materials as they come into violent contact. Here Kwade deals with the time-honored tradition of protesting by throwing rocks and breaking windows. There is a specific reference to the annual May Day protests in Berlin where protestors dig up the cobblestones in the street to throw at the police. *Hemmungsloser Widerstand* is composed of three stacked rocks forming half an arc. The rocks are intersected by two sheets of glass at an angle creating a sense of motion. Surprisingly, the glass does not break as it is penetrated by the cobblestone.

Dávila takes a different approach in an *Untitled* work from 2020, in which nine rocks are segmented by square sheets of glass. Like Kwade, the glass panes rest between cut rocks. Dávila shows progression by increasing the size of the glass sheets. Consequently, the rocks grow in size from a technical perspective, with larger stones needed to hold increasingly bigger panes in place. The inspiration for incorporating the materials is quite different: the progression references conceptual art pioneer Robert Smithson’s iconic *Mirage No. 1* (1967), as well as works like *Gravel Mirrors with Cracks and Dust* (1968). The materials are shown together as a means to highlight their “opposing qualities”: dense/brittle, transparent/opaque, organic/inorganic.

Kwade also explores progression and transformation in a series of works inspired by Fibonacci numbers. *Trans-For-Men 8 (Fibonacci)* (2018) is composed of eight sections separated by mirrors. Each section features a volume of distinct materials including copper, brass, bronze, bronze with patina, granite, sandstone, marble, and concrete, all resting on the floor. The progression and transformation takes place in the changing shape of the various materials, which are simultaneously divided by the mirrors and unified by the reflection. The sequence starts with a milled granite stone, a replica of a natural stone in the center of the work, and then progresses to show the varying states as it mutates into an eight-sided copper polygon at one end and a granite sphere at the other. Following an algorithm based on Fibonacci

numbers, which determines the shape of the material blocks, the facets increase and decrease from the granite starting point, each shape becoming more rounded in one direction and angular and multifaceted in the other.

Both Kwade and Dávila are exceptionally adept at using simple means in their artworks to awaken the viewer’s senses and provoke a phenomenological experience. At Dallas Contemporary, Jose Dávila placed four I-Beams ranging in length from six to eight meters. The bright colors were inspired by Donald Judd’s palette. One end of the beam was raised perilously off the ground, the other attached to the concrete floor with custom-made hinges. Small boulders sourced at a local quarry functioned as the counterweight, connected via thin steel cable which kept one end of the beam aloft. As one entered the exhibition, diagonal lines of bright color energized the space. There was a sense of hazard as one approached the precariously balanced sculptures. Any change in the conditions, and the beam collapsed. This shows the way Dávila goes to great lengths to remind us, through eliciting a primal experience, of the power of gravity—a force of nature that for the most part we largely ignore and take for granted. The elevated beams demonstrate what could happen if gravity ceased to exist.

Kwade’s approach to stimulating the senses can be seen in *Changed* (2016), in which a rock and its cast, along with a reversed aluminum replica, are separated by a large, framed, double-sided mirror. When seen from the correct angle, the two objects defy logic by appearing to become one; the reflection unifies rock and aluminum. The effect is fascinating. Kwade, who is skeptical of the gratuitous use of mirrors in art, is a master at incorporating reflection as a tool to activate the object. However, much like in the Fibonacci sculpture mentioned earlier, “the viewer must be in motion to make the work visible.” She describes the experience as “performative.” In effect, the viewer completes the work by the performance of navigating around it to see it properly.

It is in questioning established canons and human conventions that Kwade and Dávila share the intention and conceptual underpinnings of their work. Both look to science and our limited understanding of natural phenomena and ourselves to reveal what Dávila refers to as “cracks in the system.” In the elaborately balanced sculpture *Newton’s Fault* (2020), Dávila reminds us of the discovery of gravity which took place in 1665, while Newton was on leave from his studies at Cambridge due to an outbreak of the bubonic plague. This elaborate work combines a hanging I-beam with a balancing metal structure, both of which are counterbalanced by a pair of rocks. The centerpiece is a red apple that references Newton’s famous

myth of the fruit falling on the scientist’s head while he contemplated the universe. Although there are no historical records specifying that an apple fell on Newton’s head, he was driven to ponder the phenomenon of gravity when he observed the fruit falling straight down instead of falling sideways or even going up into the sky. During the installation of *Newton’s Fault* in Dallas, Dávila mentioned his fascination with the myth of Newton’s apple as an ideal vehicle to propagate his theory. Dávila suggested that a simple anecdote can be a more effective means to convey a complex idea than scientific theories accompanied by incomprehensible mathematical equations. Perhaps his real genius was creating a narrative that the public could relate to at a time when scientific observation conflicted with religious doctrine.

In addition, Dávila takes us one step further by going beyond mere representation of scientific ideas and putting them into practice. Balance, force, tension, friction, gravity, as well as the cornerstone of the scientific method and the arts—trial and error—are all at play. There is no artifice, the work is carefully balanced: although one would think it must be secured, it is not. Just ask the startled visitor who intentionally knocked *Newton’s Fault* over in an attempt to dispel the illusion.

Curiously, we live in a moment when scientific discoveries are constantly challenged, misinformation runs rampant, and inconvenient facts are easily discredited. As humanity struggles to regain trust and establish a sense of control and order, works like Kwade’s *All at any Time* (2019) remind us of the limits of our senses and the impossibility for humans to fully comprehend or control reality. Consisting of a series of deep black ceramic forms that appear fluid and in motion. Standing side by side the figures fit into each other without touching. They appear to hold power over each other’s shape, “an endless cycle of reciprocal influence.” Kwade points to a fundamental aspect of cosmic reality: “What is the universe?” If the universe is everything, then by definition there is only one.

However, if our universe is only what astrophysicists can see 14 billion light years away, and originated with the big bang, then there are most likely many universes. The point is that we are incapable of knowing or as Kwade likes to say it: “There is no truth. Just points of view and agreements.”