

**In conversation with David Schutter
Turps Banana Magazine #20, July 2018**

We are two artists whose paintings, for some years now, have been mistakenly identified under the category of ›Monochrome Painting‹. I use a spartan yet full palette that uses historically conventional colours; each very stable. I mix these across the colour wheel not in order to make grey sludge but to make chromatically relative greys. Blue into orange, red into green. That's one way I try to make space in a picture. Your recent paintings have a sense of immensity about them and a richness of space that defies the term ›monochrome‹. Do you have the same resistance I do to this word? I see so much colour in your paintings.

Yeah, I like the word ›monochrome‹. It has so much potential and is basically an honest word of true phantasy. I love all colours, and yes, they all seem to have this monochrome tendency. Seeing them all together is like seeing the golden team. It's about the good vibrations part. Colour is about fear. It's the non-melancholic and non-hysteric part of painting, and of life if you know what I mean. They go together. Yes, they do. I must say that I love blue, red, and yellow so much. It's the genetic groove and funk they bring up.

Monochrome is a phantasy. Because the term speaks for the painting as if it is free of the world, free of reflection, free of all the other colours of the world that hold painting in view. We've talked about the funk before. In German, funk is a few things at once, right?

The funk is the shit. Well, people know that. It's ecstatic, or not. It sounds stupid, but it's about the colour brown, and therefore, about the potential of gold to inhabit that brown. This brownish sound is the most promising event in painting. It's about the earth, the soil, the ground. It's what Demeter points to, as the corn goddess that she is, in her very Greek way. What is fertility? Is there a cycle of creation? Yes, there is. The brown funk and the brown secret tone is the transmitter of fertility. Fertility is the potential capacity itself. It's connected to light and to honey. The matrix is giving birth to fruit (and therefore not only to still life paintings), but also to life and light in painting and in overall existence. A close call. There is death nearby, simultaneously. Always.

I see what you mean. I think of the funk as this regenerative thing – this primordial stuff – but I also see it inextricably connected to death. Cornel West talks about this when he says that being born, we are each born ›in stank and stench – the funk. We are introduced to the funk of life in the womb and to the love-push that gets us out!‹ He points to how very close to death we are in that birth. We've talked before about how dumb conversations on the death of painting can be. One reason for this would be that if you think about the funk the way we're talking about it, painting is not just a metaphor for these notions of life and death, it literally is made of ›the stuff‹.

After all it's rhythm. We are very close to death. A whole life long it's within us. To be aware of death. To feel the pulse. To see the beam. To see it hovering. Balancing. To see it moving, but almost motionless.

Your savings that brings to mind an obvious connection to your N-Bilder (N-Paintings).

It even sounds like you are physically describing them.

No, I am describing paintings in general. Maybe it's hidden in all kinds of paintings. Do you think your paintings hide something?

Not deliberately, like I'm burying something. But I do try to allow for hidden layers to speak through the depths of the painting. Sometimes through veils of colour, sometimes in the way light will catch the raised pentimento, it depends on the painting. I think there are hidden traces in all kinds of paintings that give them their secret value, ones that can't be extracted or even indicated. They are underneath somehow. Matisse's L'Atelier Rouge is a painting that always bewitches me that way when I see it.

Your layers are true, each one of them. Where is the truth? In your paintings, there is fusion everywhere. Not in terms of a fusion containing a diversity of gestures or layers, but in terms of a pictorial force and unpredictable power that has integrated something rather invisible into something even more invisible. That thing – and it's not an object – is located neither within your layers nor on the surface of the painting. It's neither hidden nor obvious. It's collected and gathered in. Also, these paintings do have something like a ›function‹ on another very promising level. This might be about a suspension of time. This is the biggest opportunity of all that they are offering. Rejuvenation.

These hidden traits that we are talking about, sometimes I think about their relationship to light. Recently, in your studio, we looked at a painting of a single large female figure with golden hair. We ended up in a discussion on light and Piero della Francesca. I felt that there was a light emanating from within the figure (not like a halo or penumbra around the figure, but rather from within the figure like a lantern). That is a kind of hidden truth in the work. Are you looking for this light?

Yes, it's the light. It's coming from there. It's good news for everyone! This news is about the option to live. It's deep, post-graveyard light. It's healing light, as well as it is tender, warm, bright, and sunny. It's the light that knows. Second light.

I'd like to stick with Piero here for a second because I see real correlations between you both. This lantern light shining from within the figure, having the qualities of warmth and tenderness that you point out, possesses a stark and unsettling truth, like that found in the beautifully-lit volumes of Quattrocento painting. Piero was the son of a dry goods merchant, who cut his teeth in the world by measuring scoops of beans in the demand of an open-air market. He understood volume instinctively after such boyhood labour. So, what I'd like to point out is that Piero, whose figures have an uncanny volumetric presence, also have this strange interior lighting, an emanation. Where this light comes from is anybody's guess. But more to the point, how much light can a figure endure? Think of his Madonna. I see a similar volume and light in your recent figures. I've spent the last two years engaged with distinct sources, namely the German painters Max Liebermann and Adolph Menzel, but you seem to have an ongoing and open contention with Italian painting.

Italy is good. Venice. All the colours. There are clear days when you can see the Alps a bit north from there. The inner light coming from there is the light of wisdom, too. The

snow, seen from far away, is exactly that. It's self-lit. Painting is a source of light, in the same way, that painting is a source of life. I am a big fan of Raphael. His roundness and his light are an overwhelmingly sympathetic cure.

When you visited me in Rome the year I was living there, that was a really nice time, we went to Raphael's tomb in the Pantheon, and it was a true pleasure talking about Italian painting with you.

You would have never done those *Spolia* drawings without Italy, although they're very Cézanne. Do you ever see a chance to paint like you draw? Or, in other words, do you already paint as you draw? Is there a reason why drawing is supposed to be always a skeleton towards an all-over mass extinction? I feel there is much left to do and there is a big time coming where art will be over and, as art, done. This might be the coming era.

Were it not for Italy, I wouldn't have spent a year at the drawing board. Spending long days in Rome's drawing archives taught me so much. I know there is a rift between my drawings and my paintings. That rift is a productive zone to think through things at the moment. I do feel them getting nearer together in recent years. That rift is lessening. Maybe drawing is a good place to end for now, as it is the beginning of everything. What is drawing to you?

I might stop painting. I will do some more watercolours, but on a more hobby-like basis. There, I will try to make some more or less easy-going vertical brushstrokes that open within the whiteness of the paper like a specific, but limited, spectrum of tones that are like returning echoes of paint.

**In conversation with Michael Slenske
Garage Magazine / VICE, Los Angeles September 11, 2017**

What made you return to LA for this show?

I met Nino through my dealer in Berlin, Max Hetzler, and he called me and said, »You should do a show with Nino.« And that was it. I met him a little later and found out that he'd collected my work. I was proud to meet someone who'd supported my art even though we'd never met.

Where did the show start for you?

Originally, I wanted to show only black paintings because I thought this would be the right way to come back to the city, with paintings nobody knew.

What do you call this female character you've been painting recently?

This is a »golden woman«. But I've made many paintings of women before.

Is it fair to say that the grey paintings led to the »N-Paintings«, and that the »NASAHEIM« works led to the appearance of this female character?

Yes, I always try to find the pictorial origin of what I do. But finding an origin is like trying to go back to a place that you've never actually visited.

Where did your very first images come from?

When I first started out I made colorful impasto paintings featuring alien figures with cartoonish expressions. I really overdid what I thought an extra-terrestrial expressionist painting might be. But I also integrated all kinds of other topics, motives, titles, references to art history, brand names ... It took me a long time to get away from these things, and then to rebuild them.

It's almost as though you took narrative out of your paintings.

I would say I maximized the pictorial forces. But pictorial forces can appear only if pseudo-narrative is absent. I don't think any narrative is part of image making, but I allowed for it in the early paintings because I had to find out what to throw out.

Who or what made you want to become an artist and start to build this world? Your family?

My father worked for IBM, but he was sick with multiple sclerosis almost his whole life. He worked in semiconductor development and I later used lines derived from images of semiconductors in my grey paintings. My father's tragic circumstances made me decide, as a young man, not to follow his path by working for the same company. This was in Stuttgart, the home of Porsche. It's a nice city, but it's very industrial.

What was your first exposure to art?

I think when we went with the school to the museum in Stuttgart, when I was 14. I saw a Fontana, a Baselitz, and some other things that I didn't like straight away, like a Gerhard Richter seascape. I had no contact with any kind of art through my family, but I felt I could do something different from what my father got sick from, that I could save myself from this tragic tendency of industrialism. Painting was a way for me to heal, but also to attack. When I was a little older I understood that I had to go where the enemy was and not attack from the outside. I had to embrace negative things and integrate them into my art, allow it to come in and then find ways to throw it out.

The earlier Sci-Fi Expressionist paintings seem to embrace this narrative, this chaos and sickness. Do you feel like you're a hitman of sorts?

I do feel like I've tried to erase those things. For eight years now, I've made almost only those black paintings. I've tried from time to time to paint a figure painting, but I wasn't ready to accept it. Now I feel free. In my previous paintings there is a certain power that's unsure of itself, a little blind.

By stripping your paintings down to sober gestures, you can amplify what's truly necessary.

Yes, things become elemental. The »N-Paintings« remind me you have to control the totality of the painted field. Before I started to make those works I was like the drunken young guy running crazy against the world. That's over now.

Do you consider your early paintings political?

I would say post-political, because I was never on the side of good or bad. In art you can't be moralist. So, I wouldn't call them political because politics is about evaluation. I can't change things immediately but I still have to go on, so I believe in the power of art. Art's never obvious. Truth is always something that's always partly hidden. Painting has no surface at all in general. It's about depth and something in between, but not about the surface. It's also not about motivation.

Do you think it's hard to be a painter right now, in this politically fraught moment with its powerful corporate culture and creep toward fascism?

I think it should always be hard. I want it to be hard because I want people to think it's not just something they can do like a job. But I have nothing against more and more people becoming artists. Maybe it'll save the world, maybe it's part of the world being destroyed, nobody knows. But for me it's not easy, it's not a »fun job.« I feel very unsatisfied and insecure because I don't have a consistent perspective. One minute I like a painting and the next I'm depressed.

Try being a writer ...

I do try to be a writer in between things. I write little poems. But I do it on a totally

different basis, at home, not in the studio. Just before I came here I made a text. A magazine in Berlin asked me for something, so I made a text that reads like a philosophical essay, but it also like a prose poem. They took it but they changed it. It was a nightmare. Reality strikes back ...

Returning to the »N-Paintings«, where are you now with the series?

I'm at some kind of new beginning. I was trying to find the so-called destructive element, and to begin again from there. The destructive element is a very positive element. It has to do with balancing out life and death. It took time, but I can say I'm kind of a beginner again. Painting has to be about light, revelation.

So you've freed yourself by not having to think about making the moves, you just make the moves.

Yes, it's not about thinking them out. There's a rule in painting: light has a proportion. Without it, a painting would be proportionless. And it allows you to begin.

So, by painting black paintings, you've taught yourself to see the light?

In a sense yes. But it's a dark light. It inhabits the painting so that the painting itself becomes a source of light. It's the creator of light and a hint at the origin of life. Life and light are deeply connected terms. I'm a big fan of this overdetermined term *matrix*, because *matrix* loosely translated is *mother*. I think of painting as the origin of life. We're always inheriting, but you can't just take on influence for free. There has to be some thankfulness.

Who are you thankful to?

My thanks go to Giotto, Titian, Rembrandt, Veronese, Tiepolo, Mondrian, Matisse ... But then I'm very quiet about things after Matisse.

What about Albert Oehlen?

I'm thankful to him because I know him on a personal level. I helped him in his studio for a while in the mid-nineties, and he was my first collector. He's a very intelligent guy, and not only because he bought my paintings! I think he's a great artist, but I wouldn't thank him for his painting. I can't.

Why not?

I'm very critical of contemporary painting. It's an era that I don't really believe in. I'm in it as a living person but I don't feel part of it.

Can I ask you about the »NASAHEIM« series? Didn't that come from a visit to Disneyland?

The title »NASAHEIM« is an invention, but it did come from the name Anaheim, where

Disneyland is. When I was there in 2000 I thought it was great that it was so far away from home, but had a name with »heim« in it, because *heim* means home in German. The city is a mess, but I was interested in Disney. My friend the sculptor Björn Dahlem and I decided it should be called »NASAHEIM,« like the next frontier, because it's got the frontier spirit and it's on the west coast. To say »NASAHEIM« in German is funny. It's like saying there's a home where NASA is, or a shack with NASA inside. It's interesting too because you have NASA representing cosmic travel and *heim* representing closeness, warmth, and also maybe something hidden, like the truth.

It's interesting that Disneyland was based on Tivoli in Copenhagen. I was actually just there and made a joke to one of the ride operators like »They wouldn't do that at Disneyland,« and she shot back at me »We're much more evil than Disneyland!«

Disney is almost like a second death, or a prolonged life in death.

This was debunked, but it was once thought that Walt Disney was cryogenically frozen, and there's a notion that living on in that way is basically life in death, or like being a zombie. You're creating a sort of hell ...

That's reflected in my view of LA. It's like death in the sunshine.

Do you like LA?

I've become a stranger to it because I haven't been back in seven years and the city's changed. I live an hour south of Berlin in the countryside in Rangsdorf, and I've been there for 11 years. I have several buildings and one I live in. And I have 140 trees. I counted. So, it's a good place and it's still close enough to Berlin if you want to go. But I stay home.

What are you working on next?

A big show for a museum in Japan, two hours outside of Tokyo. I'm showing black paintings only.

Do you plan to make any more figurative work?

I'll try. The figurative paintings teach people to love the black paintings more than they would without. It's strange because the female figures in them are like witnesses. They witness the light in the black paintings and they show it to the viewer. They know about truth because they're part of it. Women know more about the origin of life than men.

It's serendipitous that you're showing these paintings during the eclipse.

I was there. I went to Oregon.

Of course, you can't look at an eclipse directly, you need a filter. Perhaps it's the same with your paintings. You can't take them in in at a single glance.

No, you have to find a context. I felt the moments before the eclipse were the best, when

the light became unnatural and brown. We were alone in a field and while we had total darkness, at the same moment we could see the sun reflecting off the glacier on Mt. Hood. That was a good moment. It made so much sense to me that this happened along with my so-called LA comeback. I'm thankful because I'm not alone. As an artist you can't be alone.

Has this experience in LA changed anything for you?

Yes, I'm trying to be optimistic. I have a tendency toward depression but I think I will go on and be happy.

In conversation with Daniel Mendel-Black
Exhibition catalogue, Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin 2013

PART 1: THE NUMBER

The holiness of the pictorial field is connected to a measurement. Is that true, and if so, how do you measure it?

I'm not looking for a mathematical answer such as the Golden Ratio. The solution probably isn't 1.6180339887 ... Pythagoras, Euclid, Leonardo of Pisa, Kepler, and many others tried to quantify beauty, to discover a secret universal formula in numbers. Neither, as with the Golden Mean, do I search out the answer in ideology. I doubt that beauty is somehow located in the perfect balance of moral extremes, that the place where ethics and aesthetics touch is in any way average. These philosophical belief systems may provide elements of truth, certain clues, directions to pursue, others less fruitful to avoid, but they alone cannot contain the whole answer.

That's right. These numbers are wrong and don't exist. Though, I myself believe in the holy thing. So there is a number in terms of relation, but unknown. It's just something very close to the holy thing. It says: here I am, I can't be counted.

*Newton's devotion to the discovery of the Philosopher's Stone is a good example. He spent hours on end locked away in his dark dormitory experimenting with alchemy. Then, one day, he dons his powdered wig (the fashion of the day) and emerges into the light of morning with the manuscript of *Mathematical Principals of Natural Philosophy* tucked under his arm, miraculously reintegrated into his academic community – except in one key regard: he refused to take the holy orders. Why? Because he rejected the trinity. He was apparently pretty sure the secret number wasn't 3. Perhaps I am less concerned with which number than I am with the notion that, whatever it is, it declares itself, insists on its existence.*

I don't know anything about existence. For me, it's a dream. I have to destroy only. I have destroyed the ready-made. We paint for churches only. Every painting destroys endlessly anything else. I am alone and I can see a proportion of light. We are half man, half god, or no one. We cannot create. I wait for the holy thing, and I have seen it already in perspective. It will come again. It has to do with death and destruction. It has nothing to do with the human being, because no art has anything to do with the human being, or it is closer to the frequency of non-scientific DNA, or it is destroying this frequency and replacing it through another frequency of light.

The destroyer is a common figure, but I do not believe there is an end without a beginning. I imagine it as the two-faced god Janus. The Janus Hole I call it. On one side it is like a black hole, an unimaginable nothingness that sucks the universe into its swirling vortex of emptiness, but on the other side it is a fiery new star. There is the wet dream of the indestructible superman, and the nightmare of performance anxiety and powerlessness. Are you saying that a painting is the terrible result of the confusion of these opposing forces?

The destroyer is not us. The beginning is always there – it's all in all only about the beginning in fact. It's a permanent endowment. It's the most peaceful thing to destroy or to let it happen that >it< destroys because it's about the beginning anyway. That's classic. I am classic. All is one. I will dream one in one. My church is classic. The gods must come back in order to send back rhythm to this permanent endowment called proportion of light.

I believe there is a holy number, but it might not be the same for everyone. My number is the two that is one. It is the androgynous figure, both male and female, the number of love. Division is vision divided. Everywhere the secret math awaits discovery. The destroyer is incomplete. He or she tries to complete him – or herself in the other. I don't wish to complete myself in my paintings.

You are right. We are not part of the paintings. In fact it's hard and not easy for a lot of people to understand that their task is to erase themselves out of their work. They should cut off their hands or at least their fingers in order to delete themselves. That's what I did and now I am classic and nothing is about me.

Science is the religion based on the worship of math. Painting is different. Science is essentialist. It is always looking for the smallest part, smaller than the atom, or the biggest part that is the total of everything. A painting is its own universe with its own integrity. The painter gives up everything for the multicolored body of the painting. We must learn when to get out of its way.

Exactly.

PART 2: ROUNDNESS

What is round?

Not straight. Not graphic. Roundness is the life that fills the body. It is the body that's filled with light.

I do view inside the round perspective. I do feel undesignated, the round itself, and I know that what is round is near something else which is not round, but almost round. The perspective prevents it from being just round. This is something heavenly, but it's not blue, and our paintings are heavenly, too. The round comes from the highest contradiction of laws and is no general flesh. It's a sequence of roundness, a warm tone within others, or all other sunny tones and easy repetitions go into each other's vast circuit in order to vibrate there broadly or slowly, without any speed or air. I don't know. It's not about knowledge. But it can be about something readable. There is a strong connection to the body everywhere, everywhere you look is body. If there is a place without body, there is something missing.

Roundness is what touches me. Through my contact with roundness energy is transmitted. It is the spirit that has no face, it jumps from century to century to fill us. When I am touched by this spirit I am filled with enthusiasm, it is like life, but not life. This is because

it is immortal. When I make a painting, I want to touch you, I want to fill you with my enthusiasm, but I do not wish to do so by literally touching you with my fingers. I touch you through my painting, from a remote distance. I touch you by telepathy. I'm not sure roundness is readable or knowable in a conventional sense. It is more like clarity, or surety. One senses it, one is made aware of its presence, it enters unannounced, comes from any angle other than straight on, a cat burglar in the night, hidden in plain view, never expected. When it is found, it should not be where it is, and is gone before you are fully aware of it. Ninja roundness.

I am classic. Like 500 before Christ. I am comparable to Albrecht Dürer and Raphael. I was born to be classic and it happened on the day when Friedrich Hölderlin died that I was born. I am supposed to be alone. I live on a windy mountain.

Roundness is the curl of the wave that crashes against the shore, it is the warmth on my face that comes from the sun, I hear it in the wind that blows my hair back, in the bird song of the pelican, mystical vibrations, music box magic of a computer mind that talks to me. It tells me that it does not communicate from the past, it communicates from the future. It tells me it has been here since before time. My eyes are filled with scales, it says. If I could only see, I would know that the straight line is an illusion. If I could only see, I could look through the illusion, and know the beauty of roundness. In the meantime, it is enough to know it is there, it has always been there, it waits.

In conversation with John Newsom
Flash Art, 280, October 2011

Knowing that in 1994 you encountered both Asger Jorn's »Green Ballet« (1960) at the Hamburger Kunsthalle as well as posters of abstract paintings by Gerhard Richter in a local Burger King restaurant in the St. Pauli district's Reeperbahn. How did these two viewing experiences affect and inspire you early on?

Well, Richter at Burger King was first ... then I went to the museum to check out some of his pieces in real, which was a bit disappointing for me in comparison to the posters. I saw the Jorn painting on an upper floor of the museum as part of the Guggenheim collection that was on display. All of these things then got mixed up in my head: the fast food place, the reproductions, the so called originals, the fancy sound of the name Peggy Guggenheim, the Donald Duck face I saw in »Green Ballet«, and the emptiness I saw in Richter. These things made me decide to try it on my own.

For those readers who aren't familiar, what did the formation of the Akademie Isotrop in Hamburg offer to you in your development? And would you explain its relevancy in defining a particular school of thought in counterpoint to what was going on in Leipzig at the time?

This came a bit later. This group, or, if you want, this school, was very important to me. I am still thankful for the opportunity that I had there to meet people who I could talk to, have conflicts with, and could compete with in a playful but also a serious way. On the other hand, Leipzig was, and still is, not on my map. We didn't know anything about the young people there trying to restore something in painting or in art that was worth overcoming during the previous decades, let alone even during the centuries before. But art is a free country!

When you began your in-depth study of Cézanne, was it for your affirmation in the definitive nature of abstraction? Or was there a different attraction for you there?

Cézanne was always someone I was totally afraid of, and in a way, I am still very afraid of him. Then I realized that my fear of him was caused not only by his general and obvious greatness but also by his closeness to what I wanted to do more than a hundred years later in a very different situation. Twentieth-century art made people learn how to look at so called »abstract art« in a way that they were originally taught to look at naturalism. This is the moment when I came into this tricky and desperate situation, and my will was, and still is, to destroy and annihilate this agreement.

Well said. There seems to be a lot of laws that you implement within your painting practice – rules and logic. Do you set perimeters before the beginning of a work, or series, and then conduct the space within that framework?

No, all I do is follow them. I mean I follow the paintings. It feels like I started with the end, and one day I went on painting towards a new beginning from where they came from in the future. I slowly started to get rid of things I first needed in them, things like spray-

cans, funny faces, living skulls, titles, thick paint, colors in general, etc. The last thing is not true, as I consider myself a colorist, I will always be a colorist, nothing else. The available and producible palette of visible colors had to be revealed as a naturalism of its own, though. A color is always, and only, representing itself as a color in conjunction with other colors. So, my vision is to create this endless colorism through the absence of naturalist ready-made color. Visual art is an optical utopia, so anything visible has to be erased; the depository of anything visible is not the work of art, but the work of art is a projector of the depository.

I find the »N-paintings« really wonderful and terrifying at the same time. Why the »N« and what does it mean? Are these figures forced to wander in a perpetual state of limbo forever? Is there, or will there ever be, the hope of liberation? Possibly realized in another series, for these paintings are truly forceful and elegantly brutal. Thoughts?

What do you mean by the figures? I see nothing in those paintings ... as they are without any reason, theme and motif, although the matrix that repeats itself was originally related to bodies of flesh: a living vertical body carrying a dead horizontal body. Cézanne had this Luca Signorelli print in his studio. I can only see through or with these paintings – in a way you see a threshold. This relates to the projection that I mentioned above. »N« is a holy, probably golden number or letter for me, that is a help for artists to create or find their way through their canvases. »N« is its own ruler and knows no earthly measurement and degree.

»Figures« meaning the little girls and goblins who are depicted in the landscapes outside of the houses with the »N« portrayed above the non-existent entrances. But let's talk about the color gray. Obviously this is an important subject for you. What is grey for you? What is its importance to your practice?

Gray is the great potency of all colors. It's obviously not compared to what people have tried to make it out to be, the color of nothing, the big zero or something stupid like that. No, it is the destination of color, like gold, flesh and silver are destinations of color, and all of these together, they combine and preserve color in order to let it really shine.

Most of your earlier work revolved around a surface structured of very thick impastos. How important is the idea of finesse and virtuosity to you in terms of navigating such large amounts of paint? Especially, because the majority of impasto painters are very flat-footed, clumsy and wasteful.

I am so happy now without all of that stuff on my paintings. I had to find my way through all of that mess. Although I already saw myself as the master of control over all of this delicate stuff and highly dangerous material, I had to get rid of it. I have learned a lot about physical color; now I merely dream of color.

How conscious are you of the implications of national identity within the pictorial narration in your paintings?

Very conscious, so that I am able to abuse my own consciousness. I want to paint, and painting is no storytelling business, so some think there is an aspect of narration here, but

there isn't. I took Heinrich Himmler, Adolf Eichmann and who else ...and painted them as paintings. They will pollute the canvases until I die, and I am the one to endlessly clean my canvases in front of the audience, but I can't. They will stay contaminated.

You often speak of modern industry and have a fascination with iconic American industrialists such as Henry Ford, Walt Disney and, might I add, Andy Warhol. Why the fascination with these achievements?

Same answer, same contamination, different conclusion. I love seriality, but I have never made a real series. I do change over to the ›death side‹ everyday, in order to get congruent with those who live there. But I bring a different message with me, which is not a text, and I will place it from the inside: this message is »N«.

I've noticed, within painters of our generation at least, that historically we Americans tend to be in awe of certain modes of Germanic channels of representation and that you Germans have a strong interest in our American viewpoints of representation. Is this something you notice as well? Why is this?

I don't know. For most people this seems to be a question of Pop, and how you place yourself within this given framework of possible world fame and world success. That world changed, this is for sure. This axis of domination is destroyed, and that's good. There is too much art with English titles anyway.

That's a very diplomatic way to put it. You've mentioned to me before that your protocol for painting a work begins with the rise of the sun and ends with the setting of the sun. Your work has a radical mood to it. How is this enhanced or diminished with the fluctuation of natural light?

I almost never use artificial light to paint. There is no better light for me than a setting sun. In the meantime, in order for a work of mine to get finished, it needs a lot of those sunsets in a row, changing natural light and shadows.

In your recent exhibition titled »Der wahrscheinlich beste abstrakte Maler der Welt« [Probably the World's Best Abstract Painter] held at Hannover Kestnergesellschaft, Germany, the use of the word ›Probably‹ is very smart. It lands the reader's mind somewhere in the future. Is the cheekiness of this title meant to be taken literally? Or is the literalness of this title meant to be taken as cheeky?

It's a major concession to the audience; it seems to weaken what I and a few others believe in, but it helps to create a friendly and entertaining atmosphere for people to start finding their own stance on what I do.

One of the new additions to your repertoire over the past few years that I've noticed is the use of industrial paint as ready-made, particularly in the colorful abstract paintings, and color on gray grounds. This is an interesting contradiction, juxtaposing the nondescript quality of ›straight-from-the-tube‹ application with the seemingly wild abandonment of gesture. This question may seem more of an observation, but I would like for you to expand on this recent exploration of yours.

Here again, I was aware that this was something to get rid of as quickly as possible – in the end it took me more than ten years. I started with this form of application in the late '90s and it always felt non-organic, at least to me, and I needed this aspect so badly. I saw them as cables, electric wires, straws and machinery. They were excuses for what happened in other parts of the painting. Gesture is a word that I do not understand to this day, and I will probably never understand what it is. There is no gesture. A gesture might speak of an individual who produces authority behind such a trace or mark, but what I do is not about me.

In expanding on this somewhat formal material question, these new monumental gray paintings with the two floating black linear rectangles are heavyweight paintings. How did you arrive at these, or how did they arrive at you? They seem a particularly strong series of works, especially in relationship to some heavy tenor moments of compositional arrangements by the likes of Rothko, Matisse and Mondrian.

They came up when I wanted to replace the ›straight-from-the-tube‹-parts. In fact, the machinery part itself was to be replaced in its most fundamental way; a black line that came out of a tube had instead to be painted with a brush. Sounds like a downgrade at first, but then I felt: »Now you can start painting!«