

Subversive Reality

Theo Boettger paints and draws, and he is also a musician: an artist, therefore, who practises in various artistic genres, working on large-format drawings and canvases but also on space-consuming installations, as well as arranging jarring, dynamic sound performances in cooperation with tsaworks. These performances are a combination of image projection, post punk, IDM and experimental sounds; due to their principle of fragmentation and overlapping, they demonstrate pronounced formal and aesthetic correspondences and parallels to his visual art work.

Boettger's art is loud and non-conformist, intensely colourful and powerful, provocative and disquieting in its effect. His vividly expressive painting, which consists of representative-figurative and abstract elements – further supplemented by graphic signs and symbols, words, shortened passages of writing or advertising slogans – displays an astonishing affinity to the work of the legendary artist-star Jean-Michel Basquiat of New York. Just as Boettger does, the latter's impulsive art made use of sources of inspiration such as art and cultural history, the mass media, the world of comics and advertising, and the personal and social conditions of his era.

Born in Meißen in Saxony, the artist grew up in Finsterwalde in Brandenburg and now lives in Berlin. He studied at the College of Fine Arts in Dresden and would be one of the first to admit that the tradition of expressive painting as pursued by A.R.Penck and Strawalde, for example, represents a continued stimulus to his art.

He probed the diverse manifestations of international art and its development self-confidently and without bias, subsequently generating his own visual and formal language from the wide spectrum of Expressionism, Art Brut, Neo-Dada, Street Art and graffiti culture.

Theo Boettger is an alert, critical observer with an interest in contemporary political affairs, global networks, and above all in forms of social communication. He uses his art to examine his fellow human beings and their interrelations and to highlight the disorder of social phenomena, capital gains, alienation and isolation, the rifts, pitfalls and failings of modern life, but also everyday phenomena and order, and the chaos in and around us.

Theo Boettger's pictorial world does not show places of yearning, big-city idylls or segments of nature; his scenarios trigger unease and present us with sampled tableaux in which he deals with a wide spectrum of perceptions and observations. Graffiti covering an underground train, spontaneous scribbles on house facades, loose advertising sheets, media information or demonstration slogans may all find their way into his pictorial cosmos. Even

though occasionally they seem to be arranged beside or opposite each other with no direct contexts of meaning, these fragments of reality articulate an unmistakeable contemporariness.

In recent works it is obvious that Boettger has moderated his expressive-dynamic painting, which was implemented as a rule using thick pastose paint, and has developed a pseudo-naïve pictorial vocabulary comprising painterly and graphic elements. *Sucht* (*Addiction*, 2009) involves a drug deal that takes place in a public square in front of a row of monotonous housing-estate buildings of devaluated quality (B). The anonymous handout presumably results in the circulation of dangerous drugs. This ill-omened polarisation of money, greed and profit, intoxication, ecstasy and death causes the scenario of pitiful figures to unfold into an idiosyncratic visual *memento mori*.

Elements of script incorporated into the image may provide clues to a better understanding of the paintings. In *Information* (2010) a seemingly archaic figure with burning eyes, entrapping himself with endless meaningless announcements, is surrounded by innumerable items of information, the significance or inconsequence of which is hardly discernible amidst such overabundance. *Unknown* (2010) examines the problematic sphere between the real and the virtual world; the frivolous game with self-created identities in the world wide web, where characters can be selected freely and altered arbitrarily, and dependable contours are becoming less and less distinct.

In his plastic works and space-consuming installations, Boettger makes use of a primitive and occasionally raw materiality. He creates his installations from used everyday objects, packaging, paper, cardboard boxes, paints or refuse, which he assembles with deliberate calculation, thus lending a new artistic context of meaning to the remains of our throwaway, affluent society.

Boettger's installations are usually bursting with visual artistic elements and they energise aggressive potential. This is certainly true of the space-creating work, *Redner* (*Speaker*, 2009), an immovable figure in a pugnacious pose astride an excessive backdrop of text and sentence fragments. Here, words become demonstrative messages reflecting ideas, demands, moods or fears.

By contrast, in *Capture the Flag* (2010) we encounter a platform which may be understood as an echo of both the real, traditional strategic wide game and the virtual game of the same name, which is one of the most popular team-oriented computer shooter games. The confrontation between the tank-construction idiosyncratically manned by a "Blue Helmet" and the opponent's cannon tower, which suggests associations with the Statue of Liberty with its

accentuated statuary presence, inevitably culminates in references to current world politics and the question of good and evil, or just and unjust wars. In a figurative sense, here Boettger refers to the ambivalent in games and reality, to the adventurous manoeuvres of the fighters with victors and losers, which merely simulate an emergency in the game and so blot out the actual drama of chaos, destruction and death.

The prominent Gera-born artist and sociocritical realist Otto Dix intended his art as “strikingly contemporary” and made every effort to “arrive at the meaning of our age” through his paintings. For Dix, painting was “an attempt to create order.” And in this sense the two artists demonstrate a close kinship.

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