

## Monster Shows and Masquerades

### Erik Andersen's dialectical Dream (and Nightmare) Sequences

*In the living world  
and in the future world  
a single drop of dream resolves the thunderstorm...*

Jacques Baron, from: *Au dessus de mon front il y a un soleil* (1927)

Out of nocturnal black and turquoise depths luminous shapes and figures spread and swirl profusely: an intertwining of amorphous elements, which only gradually, on closer study, become recognizable as merging and interlocking animal and human forms. In the series of paintings entitled *Monsterschau* (Monster Show) which he has been working on since 2006 Eric Andersen stages bizarre events in the manner of a theater production. As if a Pandora's Box inhabited by infernal beasts had suddenly burst open, in the artist's *Monsterschau* compositions an explosive color-vibrant anarchy reigns - a wild array of apparitions from the sphere of dreams and nightmares.

His chimera-like figures are reminiscent of Breughel's hell creatures, of James Ensor's dances macabres and masquerades, or of surreal phantasmagorias, but also of Hitchcock's *Birds* or of characters from horror cartoons and movies. Andersen taps into the time- and place-less spaces of subjective imagination as well as into the repository of publicly accessible images, which he filters out of magazines, the Internet, and other medial sources, later recontextualizing and deconstructively transforming these up to the point of unrecognizability in his paintings. Art-historical references are generally resonant in his works, without these, however, being clearly definable.

The *Monsterschau* series reveals a number of central procedures practiced by the artist who, born in Freiburg in 1977, has been residing in Berlin since 2006. A major aspect of his work, which also encompasses sculpture and drawings, is the dialectical interplay of opposed principles: abstraction and figuration are conflated into a hybrid pictorial language in which concrete figures dissolve into gestures of color which are diffusely blurred, drawn expressively across the picture plane or, vice versa, gain shape out of abstract areas of the painting.

Repeatedly the artist's portrait, concealed or painted over, appears in the pictorial space. With this, Andersen takes on the role as dreamer/originator of the chaotic nightmare visions and products of individual and collective imagination – partially with hands anxiously clasped before the eyes, as if the spirits that he called had taken on an unpredictable life of their own as in Goethe's ballad "The Sorcerer's Apprentice." At the same time he thereby reflects the artistic act and the question of his own conception of himself as a creator of parallel fictitious realities. And furthermore links onto some of the fundamental themes, which up to now have been prevalent in his work: for example the gulf between rational consciousness and the hidden driving forces of the unconscious.

The latter dichotomy finds expression in a group of works which – in an allusion to E.T.A. Hoffmann's (doppelgänger) stories and other literary works of so-called "Black

Romanticism” leading into psychological abysses – deal with the conflict between sexual desire and regulated chastity, the states of madness and seeming lucidity. Indeed, Hoffmann’s complex tales of horror served Sigmund Freud in his famous treatise on “The Uncanny” from 1919 as an exemplary text for expounding his thesis that the experience of the uncanny resulted from something familiar that had been repressed and come to light again, or from the slight shifts rendering something familiar strange.

Before this backdrop Andersen’s *Monsterschau* works may also be read as a confrontation of hitherto concealed components of the self that have come to the fore, or – taking a broader view of society – as a reflection of those subversive aspects of collective existence that run counter to the (western) civilizatory or moral order systems, while being simultaneously inscribed in these as in the instance of the “heterotopias” or “other spaces” described by Michel Foucault

There where private and collective fields of meaning overlap Erik Andersen’s works release their specific tension. The semantically charged, pre-found visual fragments serve the artist as raw material for alchemical transformation processes via the means of painting. Thus, for example, erotic images from the virtual flood traversing the digital net become the starting point for a highly abstract female depiction with pronounced monstrous features, which evokes Willem de Kooning’s legendary abstract expressionist *Woman* series from the 1950’s, at the same time displaying its very own, distinctive aesthetic impetus.

In *Monsterschau II* (2006) a sketchy outline of the artist’s persona is to be seen in the lower third of the painting below a cluster of fantasy beings. The head of the figure is hidden behind a hand that is squeezing a tube of paint. Through this form of self-reflection in the pictorial space Andersen establishes a connection to the “here and now” of the studio situation, bringing together the different levels of reality. The sometimes highly dominant impasto application of the paint and also the generation of compositional structures through the alternation of a rendition and removal of visual information have an almost “sculptural” quality.

Erik Andersen’s artistic roots in fact lie in sculpture, the spatial object, whereas his paintings in turn unfold deeper dimensions in the terrain comprising the landscapes of the soul, archetypical images, dreams, and visions. The artist works on this terrain against the background of today’s worlds of experience preconfigured by the media. Drawing from the various sources, he conceives surreal, sometimes also grotesque scenarios in which the monstrous and the abysmal, the dynamics of the conscious and the unconscious, the tangible and intangible phenomena of individual and societal perception of reality converge, mutually charging each other with energy.

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