

Alex Ruthner

A Guide to the paintings in

Playing the piano to a glass of water

at IBID Gallery

Los Angeles

July 2017

1. *X marks the spot*



150 cm x 150 cm; oil on canvas; 2017

In the movie „Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade“ (Steven Spielberg, 1989) the Actor Harrison Ford plays a History teacher, who tells his students: „ Never ever in the history of mankind X marked the spot.“ Of course he was referring to the widely spread idea of following a line to a X on a map, to dig out a treasure.

He wanted to take the wind out of his students sails, lowering their expectation to find El Dorado on spot.

Of course, in the later plot of the (strictly fictional) film, the teacher will be disabused and „X“ marks the spot - in form of the latin number 10.

The „X“ appears in blue in this work, in form of the clotheshorse’s legs. An open suitcase covers the floor. I often use personal belongings as models in my paintings because they are close to me, and the decision to use them is natural. Behind this setting, on the wall, appears a white lettered poem, like a chant about dying pop-culture:

This must be the place
this must be the place
we will leave no trace
this must be the place

2. *Liebling der Einbrecher und Diebe*



150 cm x 150 cm; oil on canvas; 2017

„Liebling der Einbrecher und Diebe“, the German title of this painting, is an Homage to the constant relation of artsmanship to the subject of halfworldly entities, the subject of „ornament and crime“ by Adolf Loos, which he rather analyzed as reproach and reproof, no matter how you see it (the relation between making art and breaking the law), there is a relation nobody can fully deny.

The utopian idea of an existing parallel society with its own rules and secret codes is not only obliged to small time criminals, and like any other human purpose it's intent is to build and prosper.

The painting shows us a still life-like setting, with draped objects surrounding a centered table. This centered office-table fixes the equilateral arrangement of things:

The orange, fruitcake disks are unused palettes, plastic covers used by the painter to mix colors. Various tools are scattered on floor and table. Immediate attention is drawn to the almost knight-like Highjack-mask, on a figurehead, which is actually is a custom-made by viennese designer RANI BAGERIA, sewn out of finest silk. Below this Head you see a bent black chair, twisted and out of shape, like a modernist sculpture.

3. Algorithm



150 cm x 150 cm; oil on canvas; 2017

I don't know any killers, but i could be lying. I don't take myself to serious.

Ego-shooter is an expression for a sort of computer game as well as an egoist.

To kill somebody is the grandest crime one can commit.

I despise weapons as they are an example of man's ability to develop high end technology (mechanics) for the simple purpose of killing people.

In this (to be honest, not very subtile) image of exercise of power viewers rediscover the bubbling of rudimentary emotions below the surface.

4. *Mystic ecstasy*



150 cm x 150 cm; oil on canvas; 2017

This painting is dedicated to Voltaire's book „Candide“.

Candide, based in the best of all worlds, is the most enthusiastic, optimistic, naive young man there ever was. No matter how often he gets betrayed and ripped off, he still believes in the best of people and never loses his belief in the best of people.

Candide's numerous travels around the Mediterranean is a flow of getting from worse to more worse situations. Candide is kicking away his unearned luck repeatedly like a soccer striker his ball, but why?

In martial arts, especially Muay Thai, after a training lesson, you hold still, close your eyes and repeat the combos in your mind.

The calm aura of „Mystic Extasy“ invites you to meditate about it.

5. *Artificial island*



150 cm x 150 cm; oil on canvas; 2017

This painting is titled after Aldous Huxley's book „Island“.

In „Island“ the main protagonist discovers his very own tropical paradise, but his past outruns him and utopia collapses.

The idea of cocooning, virtually and physically, leads to the establishment of a „Gedankenschloss“, in this King-of-my-castle- situ the „owner“ perfects and idealizes his self reflective image. Sitting in this glasshouse might offer a certain comfort, but it influences perception of reality.

I choose this image because of its dreamy, souvenir like character, resulting from a broken image i made with my iPhone.

6. Unconcius icon



150 cm x 150 cm; oil on canvas; 2017

The jester knows something the others don't, but what is it? I like the idea of disturbing figures, appearing nice, but always plotting and playing with other peoples minds.

Imagination and Intuition (or the other way round) are essential ingredients in making art, especially painting.

Like a sculpture the jester sits awkwardly on a green Eames chair, it almost feels like in the next second he will strike another pose, or won't even be in the picture anymore. Would't it be nice to inhale life to your own painted figures? Or to your chair?

This painting is one of the more reduced, simpler ones in the show. All elements are as important as the other. What if the plastic on the left was missing?

7. Two worlds



150 cm x 150 cm; oil on canvas; 2017

How many worlds are there, you could ask yourself quietly looking out of this window. The total unfähigkeit to comprehend the cosmos of things is deeply engraved in this painting.

Like many paintings in the show this works suggests a certain „Life after people“- Mood (Life after people is a 2008- docufiction series produced by History-Channel). There is no person in the painting.

I kept looking at the drawings of Masamune Shirow: Appleseed, Dominion, Ghost in the Shell. I was fascinated by the incredible detail of architecture in his works. Again(!) i wanted to refuse half abstract/half figurative painting, because in my opinion there is no space in between reality and imagination in painting.

The viewers position is inside a room or house looking through a window outside on a kind of terrace. The Terrace is overgrown with plants. On the window ledge you can easily make out several book, one of them is Martin Heideggers „Time and Being“, referring about the different states of being.

8. *Vibrant vibration*



150 cm x 150 cm; oil on canvas; 2017

In 1788 Francisco de Goya (1719-1808) painted „La Gallina Ciega“ (Blind man’s bluff). Blind man’s bluff, today to most of us just a memory from childhood, was a popular game in 17th century Europe, also because of its erotic implications. Goya’s painting shows men and women dancing in a circle around a blindfolded man, who tries to touch one of the dancers.

In the 1930’s Russian sculptor Romuald Iodko made a sculpture called „The Barmaley Fountain“ or „Children’s Khorovod“. The sculpture is a version of Goya’s painting: Children dancing around a crocodile. The sculpture got famous through various World War 2 photographs, depicting it on its location: Stalingrad, a battlefield.

The dichotomy of dancing children and the horrors of war was the kind of kitsch I wanted to pick up and transfer to the home of a porcelain-figure collector.

9. *Stations of the elevated*



150 cm x 150 cm; oil on canvas; 2017

„Stations of the elevated“ is one of the first (if not the first) New York-Graffiti documentaries, made by Manfred Kirchheimer. Though it was released in 1981, it was actually filmed in 1977, in a time graffiti wasn't even connected to Hip Hop. Kirchheimer uses the music of i.e. Charles Mingus and samples of sounds, like the sizzling of brakes or the squealing of rails, to underline the pictures of rolling cars.

Link to the movie on Youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpqUL8xPP48>

The out-of-focus artworks by legendary graffiti painters are put in perspective, you can almost smell the stones and the metal and the fresh paint.

Brainstorming around such vital creativity opens the obvious problems of achieving something like that through painting. It's static and generally limited to a certain kind of presentation.

The Painting „Stations of the elevated“, as well as all the other paintings in the show, is objecting that. The painter can trigger emotions, pictures(!), connections etc in the viewer through the gaze after them.

The wonders of daily life aren't experienced singular or personal, they are part of a collective, all-society reception. The tableau shows treasures of consumption and escapism: shopping bags for instance and a satyr mask. This picture is a labyrinth, despite nothing happens in it.

10. Anita 1



150 cm x 150 cm; oil on canvas; 2017

A Very important person VIP
Italian quality
Byzantine influence
Saints
Icons
Angel
Leather furniture
Powers
waxed floor
Posing
Real friend
Best friend
Loyalty
Observation
Abyss

11. Anita 2



150 cm x 150 cm; oil on canvas; 2017

Again, Anita.

12. Voiding



150 cm x 150 cm; oil on canvas; 2017

Everything is Drama, as are the fatty fingertips on the wall above your bed. I painted the wall of my bedroom grey so i could sleep better and i don't feel like in an office. My bedroom is in a former office.

I can't fall asleep easily and as i look around in my room, unable to close my eyes i discover ty folds in my curtain. These tiny folds vary in size and depth, as my gaze follows them, they seem to run into each other, touch each other, rub each other, as if they were moving.

There are many tricks you can inflict in a painting, graphic shapes, effects, a little twist. I always thought it could be interesting to share seemingly by-the-way messages in paintings, easily readable, across the image.

Is it still possible to remember images? To think of them? If so, which images are these? Which ones are worth to keep, which ones will be lost in the sea of data-trash?

13. Data Frisbee



150 cm x 150 cm; oil on canvas; 2017

A crossover version of an interior and an image from Stanley Kubrick's movie „2001 A Space odyssey“.

The astronaut's eye appears like an exploding, or rather sparking star behind the innocent pieces of clothing sprinkled across the chair and floor. Everything in this painting leads to the assumption that something just happened or is about to happen, somebody would walk right into the painting and pick up the bag or clean the floor, you name it.

The Data Frisbee is a toy used to shoot across space between individuals, across land and sea, it will always come back; detailed and sharp like a knife.

14. Balance



150 cm x 150 cm; oil on canvas; 2017

„I painted this painting lying in my bed, watching a movie.“

A pair of Japanese running shoes.

A cedar-wooden table with folded shirts.

A „Kleiderstange“ with straight out the laundry suits.

An open door, suggesting an unexpected surprise.

Naming each element in the painting „Balance“ reads like a text by Frederic Begbeider or Bret Easton Ellis, even in a more cynical way.

How can a product like a running shoe reach political dimension?

15. Hanoi



150 cm x 150 cm; oil on canvas; 2017

Named after city and friend, this painting shows us a nature connected on a rooftop. The ornaments (see also 16.) remind to floral patterns or tattooist ibans.

This bias to the superficial, to a demimonde image is scratched into the paintings like this sharp edged pattern.

The importance of a balanced attention in the realm of things is crucial to me, here another shattered attempt to visualize this fact.

16. Pumuckl's death



150 cm x 150 cm; oil on canvas; 2017

Every Austrian and German child in the nineteneighties and -nineties knew him: Pumuckl.

„Der Pumuckl“ was an TV series with an animated Character in it, the so called Pumuckl. Pumuckl depicted a sort of kind dwarf sized Poltergeist in a Pinocchio-Gipetto like relationship with his Host, Master Eder.

The lived together in a woodshop, and Pumuckl made himself only visible to his master, he also had the ability to get invisible.

So everytime somebody came to visit Master Eder, Pumuckl made himself invisible.

Pumuckl was kind of a superhero.