



Martin Eder in conversation with Thomas Girst
Extracted from full interview published in the 'Parasites' exhibition catalogue

Thomas Girst Jean-Paul Sartre once spoke about the fact that a life only makes sense in retrospect, because it is only then that one can connect all the dots. I'd like to talk about how you prepared for this exhibition, how you revisited past images and made a timeline of all the work you've produced up to now.

Martin Eder Everything has a system: a larger concept, a canon. A galaxy and an organism. When I was preparing for 'Parasites', I shut myself up in a hotel at Alexanderplatz for ten days with all of my folders, sketchbooks and photos. I would do ten sketches for each image, storing away those I don't use. I have thousands of portfolios and boxes with collages inside. They're already crumbling from being piled up. I noticed how much is repeated and also how much has changed. I put everything in notebooks in chronological order, and I saw my own biography. Through the pictures, you can see what



you were thinking about. It's like a diary. The images are not arbitrary, nor are the characters in them.

I set out to choose the stupidest subjects in order to fulfil platitudes and create images that everyone understands or is familiar with. When you have the stupidest subjects – whether it's baby animals, nudity or internet porn – things that everybody knows, you have the characters, but it is only then that you can really get started with the scenery, the dramaturgy.

TG For your exhibition 'La vida es sueño' ('Life Is a Dream') in Mexico City in 2016, you showed a completely new body of work, which originated from the female warriors and heroines of the Those Bloody Colours series.

ME Yes, pseudo-religious images, costumes, fantasy worlds, role play. The iconography is right on the border of car bonnet painting and the Renaissance. I really tried to create beauty in the colours, but even then the colour seems toxic to me. I think beauty is toxic for me. And what we find beautiful is constantly changing.

TG In his book **Siegerkunst** (Art for Winners, 2016), Wolfgang Ullrich writes that nowadays it is a status symbol to hang difficult or even distasteful art on one's wall, because it attributes to the collector the courage and sophistication of not simply surrounding himself with beautiful, contemplative works, so that his own environment becomes a validating feedback loop. This would make your paintings, in particular, socially acceptable again – also in terms of your willingness to take risks.

ME What is really ugly is not ugly art, but art that is ingratiating and mediocre, that doesn't want to take risks. What is revolting is conformity and following blindly – silent acceptance of the situation. That is really hellish and it's what we, unfortunately, see on the walls of many artists, collectors and museums. In this sense, my images are extremely minimalistic.

TG Who are the giants of the art world on whose shoulders you stand?



ME In terms of Surrealism, as a creator of images I am less interested in the artefacts they produced, which, as an individual who goes to museums, I enjoy immensely. As with Dada as well, I am interested in the attitudes that arose from that global political situation. For the first time, people questioned what the bourgeois world actually consisted of. It was the prototype for Punk and the resistance, a first inventory and challenge to social justice or injustice and it was similar with Surrealism. For me, Luis Buñuel's **Un Chien Andalou** (An Andalusian Dog, 1929) is still one of the most brutal and important films. He used this radicalism to question everything that had been accepted up until that time. There was rage behind it, 'I have to do this now, no matter what the cost. I have to tell this to others or I will die a sad person.' I admire that. From the very beginning, I have wondered where my rage actually comes from – rage in a surrealist sense. What am I fighting against? The world is wrong. Nowadays it is more wrong than ever. A long litany, from 'fake news' to addiction to 'self-optimisation'. This gives me the impetus to keep going. That's where the question of attitude comes from, from the very beginning. I need to do something that no one before me has done. The images I create are, within themselves, a series with seasons and episodes, but the story has no ending. If the world ever changes, then I can stop painting pictures.

TG A dystopia, not a utopia.

ME A dystopian outlook. The cold force runs through history like an icy wind, up to the present day. Times have not become any lighter. But my images are not directly related to current political events – I don't make paintings about Trump.

TG If I understood you correctly, you said you would stop painting when the dystopia allows us to have a utopian outlook? Or when the dystopia becomes just that: an imagined place.

ME I think so, yes. Then I will have reached my quota, my plan will be fulfilled. I still feel that the things I show have more relevance than many of the things I see. You have to sustain the assault, the affront. My one-man protest has only just begun!

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