





Publishers of Art, Anthropology, and Aphrodesia

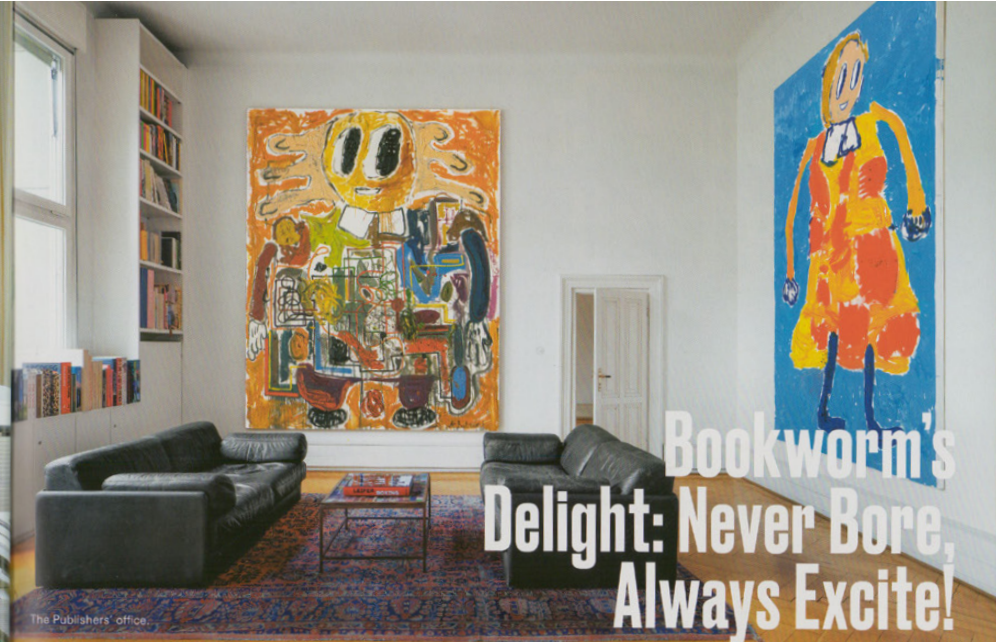
TASCHEN's take on
a conference room
featuring art by André
Butzer as part of the
exhibition *Works from
the Taschen-Collection,
2000-2021*.



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**TASCHEN
Is Good for
You!**

A small stop for book-kind.
Editorial office

André Butzer

Paintings from 1999 to 2021

Planetary Wanderer

André Butzer painting one of 25 covers for an Art Edition of his TASCHEN book, Berlin, 2021.



FUSING EUROPEAN EXPRESSIONISM with American popular culture, André Butzer started painting his way through the artistic and political extremes of the 20th century. With wide-ranging influences including the likes of Friedrich Hölderlin, Edvard Munch, Walt Disney, and Henry Ford, he developed a fictitious universe centered around the space colony NASAHEIM. There dwells the Peace-Siemens, a friendly head shape that combines utopian ideas with the economical thinking of budding mass consumerism, while a figure like the Wanderer offers romantic projections, or the Shame-Human reflections of the political past. This universe lends thematic depth to the canvases, with the characters acting as protagonists of paint, surrounding the N-House, home of all colors, in the style the artist has termed "Science Fiction Expressionism."

Some years into the new millennium, the colors took on a life of their own and grew into abstract paintings of lines free-wheeling across the canvas. Moving closer to the limits of painting, from 2010 on Butzer explored the fundamental dimensions and potentialities of painterly expression in the seemingly black surfaces of his N-Paintings. At this point, Butzer relocated to California in 2018, painting outdoors year-round. The resulting works brim with colorful freshness, an extended family of lines and figurations with new attitudes refined by their experiences at the far edge of abstraction.

This is the first book to span the full range of Butzer's oeuvre from 1999 to 2021, the works' progression gaining an almost musical drive of development, return, and new beginnings. The plates are interspersed with contemporary quotes from the artist that illuminate his idiosyncratic stance as a background to the work, as well as photos from his archives. The introductory essay, written by Hans Werner Holzwarth, investigates the different work phases, and places the artist's ideas in a wider discourse of abstraction and figuration after the end of either genre. And, most important, the book's pristine, huge-format illustrations fully evidence the finesse as a colorist that have made the artist one of the internationally most recognized painters of his generation.

Untitled, 2015
Oil on canvas





FEW LEFT

Edition of 75
Screenprints
Untitled 1-9, 2021
h 50 x w 70 cm
(19.7 x 27.6 in.)
€12,000/\$25,000

Two different Art Editions
of the TASCHEN book
André Butzer:

SOLD OUT

Edition of 100
Pendant light, painted and
signed by the artist
Diameter 34 cm (13.4 in.)
€12,500/\$15,000

SOLD OUT

Edition of 25 (not pictured)
Unique book cover in
clamshell box, painted and
signed by the artist
h 33.7 x w 28 cm
(13.3 x 11 in.)
€12,500/\$15,000

TASCHEN booth presenting
Art and Print Editions by
André Butzer, Art Cologne,
2021.

Science Fiction Expressionism

The Paintings of André Butzer

André Butzer with the 100 pendant lights individually painted for an Art Edition of his TASCHEN book, Los Angeles, 2020.



14 TASCHEN MAGAZINE

BIRTHDAY

The first paintings come out of the dark. In *Ex-Menschen* (1999) the figures are shadowy and ghostlike, negative images drawn over remnants of a dark-gray cubist background. The front figure wears a crown, the next one a star on its coat (not a sheriff or a Jew, as the star has five points like a starfish). These insignia suggest they are "ex-humans," apparitions from the past. *Verloren* (1999) offers a sort of companion piece. "You are lost..." a head in the lower right speaks into the picture plane, which a standing figure on the left answers with a confident, underlined "No." This figure appears assembled from spare parts of different styles, symbols, and objects.

And then the paintings practically explode with colors, hardly able to contain the light. *Geburtstag* (1999) offers the point of departure, a group of hardly decipherable figures dissolving into glowing chromatic chords. Partly playful, partly painful, as the title both associates a joyous children's party and actual birth pangs as the fields of color strive to connect into dubious-faced creatures. In *Schutztod* (1999) the figures seem to be in sinister states of deconstruction; they wear their limbs like prosthetic gods. Death protects them from "nuclear assault," as an inscription at the bottom reads. All these titles and motifs suggest the perspective of a child growing up during the Cold War of the 1970s. André Butzer's work draws from scenes of a friendly occupation, the human condition in West Germany under US cultural protectorate. The new gods have brought Mickey Mouse, Coca-Cola, potato chips, Star Wars. They also bring the promise of death by atom or blood sugar. And yet their promise appears irresistible compared to the continuities of life "after Auschwitz" that drove the German economic miracle after the war. Questions of a collective guilt have to be answered by every boy and girl, while the new, presumably lower culture offers new avenues of shame in the eyes of the old guardians of values.

The childlike figures confront the viewer, staring out of swaths of color, cartoonish, funny, misshapen, barely holding themselves together, guarding the threshold of the painting surface. Yet one could not read them from the pictures alone. They stand beside each other like gothic figures, with their attributes in their titles, which lend a more concrete resonance to their fragmented moods.

CREATION

"But how to create?" Butzer asks. His answer: "Often through myths themselves." At the turn of the new millennium, the paintings' threshold opens up and behind it a new kind of pictorial space evolves. The characters connect into a quasi-mythological cast. The figures slowly take a more definite shape, as can be seen in a series of paintings named *Friedens-Siemense* (Peace-Siemenses, 2000–2001), a title combining utopian wishful thinking with the industrial company founded by Werner von Siemens in the mid-19th century, whose washing machines and TV sets are ubiquitous in German households. The first of these offers a positively littered picture plane, where marks, color fields, and seemingly random words including "love" and "pigs" and various company names almost smother a motley figure rising from the ground. In the second, which is held in a remarkable range of grays, the figure is reduced to something resembling a head, with its nose a memory of the earlier picture and two displaced shapes interpretable as eyes. In the third, the face becomes clearer, happily smiling into the void. By the tenth version, the head resembles a bunch of friendly asteroids wandering the heavens.



Untitled, 2020
Acrylic on canvas

While the shape of the Peace-Siemens's head recalls a childlike abstraction, its lumpy articulation asks for some empathy. The artist has called these creatures "an embodiment of the generally prevailing deformation, which relates to an idea of a future image of man, body, flesh, and of potato chips. It is an image of man that one often encounters in everyday culture." As pictorial space becomes outer space, our bodies move like planets. Instead of depicting a person, the brushstrokes themselves become the object of identification. This resembles expressionist strategies, and yet in Butzer's painting expressionism is not directed from an inner self outward. The artist instead suggests the term "Science Fiction Expressionism," which designates more than his subject matter: "I move about the novel field of 'Science Fiction Expressionism.' I perceive expressionism as a machine that processes the past into the future, visually." Painting is always utopian, as the threshold to a place that does not exist, and as such directed toward an unknown future.

Around these figures the artist builds a world. Its earthly base is Anaheim, a slightly Germanified spelling of the city in which Walt Disney founded his first theme resort. Here H-Humans (whose name recalls the German for long-life UHT milk, H-Milch) and Shame-Humans have their homes. While this again references a postwar world between two cultures, home is not an actual space: "Home repeats itself. Only home is life as, conversely, life is only home. All images are dreams of that homelike world that is everywhere and nowhere." Out in space lies the partner colony NASAHEIM, a different home from home: "NASAHEIM is a word creation. The term brings together what consti-

tutes the pictorial in itself. Namely, proximity and distance. These two terms are then pulled together into a non-place which is NASAHEIM. This is not a private mythology, but an impossibility of a very universal kind, a dimensionless locality without a place, whose essence is the threshold or the frequency. Thus, a very vibrating matter—but still almost imperceptibly vibrating, like a sound." And somewhere unknown stands the N-House, a space where all the colors are stored.

N-POINT

"Every image is an abstraction. No matter what's on it."
André Butzer

Similar arguments to the above were first used by the pioneers of abstract painting to defend their work, and then, once abstraction had taken over, by figurative painters to deflect from their narrative content. Meanwhile abstract painting has written its own history: from the early modernist race for abstraction to its role after the Second World War in rebuilding the culture and defining a new individualism, and beyond to more recent conceptual approaches. If we are familiar with its language, an abstract painting isn't just that, abstract, but also a representation of an abstract painting that wants to be seen according to historically defined parameters.

The N-Paintings start with *Ich will erstmal 'ne Cola* (2010; the title translates as "I want a Coke first"), a shimmering gray ground



Raw Milk, 2021
Oil on canvas

that carries the outlines of two black rectangles—which, in fact, are neither rectangular nor geometrically constructed: a horizontal form hovering sideways above a vertical one. Historically, this could be identified as monochrome colorfield painting of a minimal, existentialist persuasion. Except where it isn't. The seemingly square lines are too loose, the brushwork too dry to carry that amount of conviction. Tongue firmly in cheek, Butzer has said about this painting: "This image becomes an almost untouchable monolith, without refraining at the same moment from its self-proposed pictorial questioning and from its modesty as a whole. The Coke-Painting could thus be more than an indication of what is to come artistically for mankind after the long end of Pop Art."

As the series develops, the horizontal and vertical shapes change orientation and then solidify, the ground lightens into white for a starker contrast. The artist obsessively works on the formula while each painting requires an individual solution to its subtle differences in weight and shape. In architectural terms, the two-part construction would topple over; it can only exist on the picture plane. (Though there is an inspirational connection to the real world, as Butzer explains: "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.") The construction stays on the threshold offered by the painting, but now this threshold is no longer inviting: "The N-Paintings are also utopian images of vision itself," Butzer says. "But they cannot be entered. They are no place for us to dwell. That's why I couldn't stay there any longer and had to save myself, otherwise I would have faded away, burned up by this contrast."

The entropy further increases until finally a mere scratch in the dark ground remains. For Butzer, this is the outer limit which he needs to explore: "The black paintings are decisive: they are the utmost limit from which I had to return. Never can any image undo the borderline experience I had and still have with the black paintings. One does not simply jump back from the boundary; instead everything returns, but differently. They, the black paintings, are the foundation of all images before and after. They are the place my paintings come from. Place of birth and place of death, beginning and end, but set into one."

RESURRECTION

And then the faces return. They look familiar, and yet they are different. The features are refined, their smiles more direct, they make immediate eye contact. And they bring new experiences to the table: of abstraction, of the edge, of life on the picture plane. Now they appear more clearly as themselves, like exaggerated states of mind whose meaningful elements appear in hierarchical proportion. The abstract lines, too, are more clarified and secure. "The picture plane triumphs in any case over the lines (in painting)," Butzer writes. After "the long end of Pop Art" he gives us no surface icons; the surface has deepened to offer a home to the lines and the figures. We can enter the pictures again, but they remain aloof, aware of their own state of mind.

Excerpts from the book essay
by Hans Werner Holzwarth

"Titian said
painting is about
flesh and water,
and I say it is
about flesh and
lemonade."

André Butzer

ANDRÉ BUTZER
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pendant light, each signed by the artist.

