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## Social media's creation: The pretenders

Bernhard Buhmann's paintings illustrate how a lot of people have 'lost themselves in the struggle to keep up with modern society'

By Jyoti Kalsi Special to Weekend Review  
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Image Credit: Supplied

Fig.13 (Heinrich)

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In his latest show, “The Pretenders”, Austrian artist Bernhard Buhmann reflects on the pressures of living in a time of rapid change and uncertainty. The characters in his colourful paintings are a curious mix of human figures, machines and animal-like features. The masked hybrids appear to be in a state of flux, morphing from dancers or clowns to futuristic warriors and glamorous divas; and their eyes and body language express a spectrum of moods and attitudes, all at the same time. The paintings speak about the many roles an individual plays, the multiple personalities that reside within every human being, and the different personas we show to the world. The show is essentially about people who have lost touch with themselves amid the constant charade of being somebody else, and are searching for their true identity.

“These people seem to be dancing and joyful. They represent the ‘selfie’ kings and queens, who constantly change their profile pictures on social media. But they are like screaming grotesque figures with masks that they do not dare to take off, or perhaps do not even know they can take off. You never know what they are hiding, and whether you can trust what they choose to show. They are like actors playing different roles, and they can switch their roles and masks in a second and be someone else. They enjoy the freedom of being able to alter the way they are perceived, but how long can they keep up with this, and what is the price they will have to pay? These figures depict our rapidly changing modern society, where one has to be always ready to change, where people project different perceptions of themselves on social media, and where they are sometimes forced to pretend to be something they are

not. These 'pretenders' have lost themselves in the struggle to keep up with modern society, and are engaged in the age-old human search for their true identity," Buhmann says.

The artist has used a palette of strong colours in this series to highlight the fact that these "pretenders" are desperately seeking attention. And the many layers of paint he has used invite viewers to delve deep and explore the myriad emotions and personalities hidden beneath the surface. The process by which he creates these amorphous, androgynous and conflicted characters is quite interesting. "When I start a painting I have no idea what will emerge. I begin by putting colours on the canvas and using abstract forms to create some kind of narrative. After that it is a process of conversing with the painting with an open mind, and going where it leads me," he says.

Buhmann, who has a masters degree in sociology, says that he approached this body of work as a social study of the search for identity. "I gave numbers to each figure because I wanted to link this work with a scientific process. Some of the figures also have names, mentioned in brackets, because they reminded me of people I know. I hope viewers will find their own connections with these characters, and that these paintings will make them reflect on their own relationships and roles, and their own approach to living in modern society," the artist says.

Jyoti Kalsi is an arts enthusiast based in Dubai.

"The Pretenders" will run at Carbon 12, Al Quoz, until October 28.