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## An interview with André Butzer

By Ross Simonini

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This interview was conducted in 2013, revised in 2022 by Butzer, but never previously published.

*This painting seems to be made deliberately, like you had a particular idea and then you executed it.*

I am painting without any ideas, I have said this often, but still, it's true. I only can follow. This painting here is a painting that followed others and all my paintings follow paintings that I have made or others have made before me. I am following 1000 years of painting. Plus, I am following my brainless vision of destiny.

*If you're following history, are you painting in response to historical ideas?*

I try and paint in permanent response to the already executed history of painting and to its future, as I see the future. »Historical ideas« don't sound right to me. The concept of idea in general doesn't sound right to me. I do not know why, but it feels wrong to me. It feels right to me to perceive the history of art or of painting as available signals of practice which we can »listen« to, comparable to a sequence of coded, recurring information, like a heartbeat, sound or light from very far away. I believe that there is a repeating frequency of creative information in art. Unreadable information about the origin of life.

*Does working without ideas mean working without intentions?*

My intention would be to take part in the scenario above. It's nothing heroic, though. I need to abandon myself for this. It has nothing to do with a method, either, nor with the psyche.

*Did the idea come from any kind of source material?*

Of course not. I am the expressionist yet to come. I rarely make sketches afterwards, almost never. Photography doesn't exist for me and all painters using photography as source material should immediately stop and take photographs only. No, sorry. I can only speak for myself.

*You feel strongly against source material.*

That's a media problem. People tend to see painting as a medium, connected to other media. And therefore, some say all that connection is the topic. But for me, it isn't. Any tendency of reproduction or doubling is in the opposite direction of what may be enlightened about painting or other disciplines.

*How long did it take you to make this?*

Looks like a 3- or 5-minutes painting. Maybe longer. All in all, it took me 20 years, though. This question is often asked by people who think of spending money for art. Art is priceless, though.

*Do most of your paintings take a very short time?*

Really hard to measure. But if I don't give a measurable answer, the readers or you might think they all go fast. Obviously, my works »look« all very different and already judged by their look, one might realize that they might take very different amounts of actual time to »produce«. I remember painting one for like 4 months, every day, not on the weekends, without doing anything on other works that were also present inside the studio space. And finally, it looked as if I had painted on it for 2 or 3 hours only. Some others were done in half an hour and the result was not worse or better.

*What is your relationship to skill and technique?*

I have no relationship to skills and technique as such. I don't know how to paint. That's why I paint. Most people paint because they know how to paint.

*Do you have a criteria for finished work?*

I know when it's done. I am not the one to claim that there is no result and that it's all just a process. The painting knows when it's ready. The painting knows when it's starting to be familiar to me. Then it's new. Anything else looking just new, isn't new but unresolved.

*Do you have to be in any particular state of mind to make a painting like this?*

No. It's mindless painting. I think all day of things connected to creation in general and while painting I go on thinking about creation in general and I don't think of the painting as something unconscious but the decisions I have to make there on a canvas are beyond my thinking capacity.

*What do you think this brainlessness allows for in your work, visually?*

The paintings do have their own brain.

*Do you think about any kind of story surrounding this painting?*

Stories don't belong there. A painting simply doesn't have to know anything about stories. If a painting would know stories it wouldn't be able to be aware of its own status as an image born through light. Painting is about proportion and measurement only, I have seen.

*I have only seen this image on the internet. Does that ruin my experience of its proportion?*

I didn't mean the proportion you might think of. Do you mean the size of the canvas? Or do you mean proportion in terms of proportion and relations »within« the work? I wouldn't say looking at paintings in the internet is bad. But looking at them »in real« is still very recommendable. But especially talking about the thing I meant to say with »proportion«, I think it doesn't matter what you look at. It talks to you or not.

*If you have no story and no ideas and no thinking about this work, how do you arrive at an image of four people, as opposed to pure abstraction?*

Good question. I am very confused myself and often I do not know what it is I do. I can't accept the term »pure abstraction« nor the conception of having four people painted on top of a canvas, as if this was the motif of the

painting. What helps me is the ever-lasting peaceful conception of the image itself. In German we say »Bild« which is something like an entity, but it's no object itself. There is nothing painted on top of that entity, if it's an entity, or in other words, if it's a Bild.

*Why is the conception of the image itself peaceful to you? Are all images peaceful?*

Unfortunately, not. Most of the images and paintings that we know aren't peaceful at all. It's easier to make war, obviously. Some very famous painting though, like Raffael or Cézanne is peaceful.

*Are you interested in painting the way children paint?*

No. It changes all the time, what they do. And it's almost always great.

*Do you believe that they have no ideas or stories?*

Of course, they have all this! I have three of those kids at home.

*Do you look at other art when you're at the studio?*

Not too often, I would rather go to my library and sit there, which is in another building. But, if so, I only allow those books in the studio that contain art that is evidentially peaceful and doesn't threaten me to death. Plus, I am having one poster high up on the wall in the studio showing a Raffael.

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