

Exhibition  
Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig

April 18 – August 15, 2010

Neo Rauch

HATJE  
CANTZ

Paintings

## Foreword

Born in Leipzig in 1960, Neo Rauch is undoubtedly the most internationally significant and most discussed German painter of his generation. His paintings are like a *theatrum mundi*, overlapping scenes that gradually lend a surreal aura to their formal verism and their narrative. Following the political changes of 1989 and the ensuing great socio-political upheavals in East Germany, Neo Rauch primarily produced images of the rebuilding of the landscape and the dismantling of an economy that, until then, had been kept alive artificially. Shortly thereafter, his focus shifted to researchers, artists, and paramilitary-looking service personnel. Whereas his work until the late nineteen-nineties was oriented around aspects of drawing, thereafter, the characteristic style of his painting and a more markedly colorful palette gained the upper hand. Moreover, Rauch expanded the personnel of his paintings—dispersed English-landed nobility; Biedermeier aesthetes; activists equipped for an expedition through somnambulistic worlds in which actions and spaces merge. Ultimately, it remains obscure which goals the figures pursue, and we can see them as being closely related to robotic beings or toy figurines.

Rauch's works belong to the tradition of the Leipzig School, at whose center Bernhard Heisig and Arno Rink were active for two generations. It abandons classical iconography for subjective forms, and leads viewers via the trail of the narrative into the field of the mysterious, where they have to watch out for their own signposts to find their way through the interlocking pictorial zones.

Neo Rauch's unmistakably, individual painting stands in a line of art historical tradition for which Titian, Tintoretto, and El Greco can be named as precedents. The artist himself has identified Beckmann, Bacon, Beuys, and Baselitz as modern points of reference. Neo Rauch's oeuvre reflects the complex moods of our time, an age in which an intense self-confidence with regard to what is doable encounters a deep uncertainty in difficult global circumstances, where euphoria over and disgust with the media describe a schizophrenic picture, and where fear of terror and catastrophe feed a need for security and contemplation.

The Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich and the Museum der bildenden Künste in Leipzig are dedicating a comprehensive retrospective exhibition to Neo Rauch that will be shown in both venues simultaneously. The particular form this cooperation has taken is an expression of the artist's art historical significance. Neo Rauch calls this project *Begleiter* (Companions), and this exhibition title is as open as the title of his paintings. *Begleiter*—the word can signify compiled personality types, certain historical witnesses, fellow

travelers yet to be identified, or supporters, but they could also be less identifiable feelings, positive or negative, guardian angels, or recurring nightmares of a life-path that, in the meantime, has covered fifty years.

A total of 120 paintings are on view in Leipzig and Munich. Selected in close cooperation with Neo Rauch, the works are taken from a period that began around twenty years ago. Many of the paintings, some of which are large-format works, have never been shown before in Germany. Strong demand led to a paradoxical situation in which the paintings ended up in private hands almost as soon as they were finished in the studio. Both parts of the exhibition deliberately dispense with a strict chronological order for the works. Rather, they are subdivided according to “atmospheric” aspects, which enable the characteristic, oft recurring themes, motifs, and artistic conceptions to emerge all the more clearly.

Neo Rauch first appeared before the public in a large exhibition in 1997. At the time, he received a prize from the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, which, together with the Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig, had organized his “personal exhibition.” Neo Rauch's biography as an artist is characteristic of those associated with the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig. Like Bernhard Heisig, Werner Tübke, Sighard Gille, Arno Rink, and many others before him, he was active at this academy as a student, assistant lecturer, and professor. His oeuvre is rooted in a tradition practiced there of the storyteller and arranger of myths with a distinct mastery of the craft. The end of his teaching activity in 2009 has therefore been interpreted, not without reason, as a caesura, and as the end of a historical chapter in his education and career as a teacher.

The first large retrospective of Neo Rauch's works was held exactly ten years ago and it was also organized in a close collaboration between Leipzig and Munich. Back then, it was the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig that cooperated with the Haus der Kunst in Munich as part of an exhibition tour. Thus, Neo Rauch is not unknown to the public in Munich. A few years later, shortly after the Pinakothek der Moderne opened, Rauch was also shown there, in a dialogue with the sculptor Manfred Pernice, who was almost exactly the same age. At around the same time, PIN: Freunde der Pinakothek der Moderne, acquired the first Neo Rauch painting for the museum. *Wahl*, a work from 1998, is the symbol of the current exhibition for the Munich portion of the show whereas Leipzig is advertising with a coronation scene it purchased in 2008, which is being shown here publicly for the first time.

Without the many lenders to this show, many of whom are private parties, it would not have been possible to offer such a comprehensive, multifaceted survey that reveals

an evolution in the artist's work that was formulated with great mastery. We are sincerely grateful to all of them. Such an exhibition project could not be realized without the help of third parties. In this case, we have to thank, above all, the Sparkassen-Finanzgruppe: for the support of the exhibition in Leipzig, we are grateful to the Ostdeutsche Sparkassenstiftung together with the Sparkasse Leipzig; for the sponsorship of the exhibition in Munich, we are indebted to the Bayerische Sparkassenstiftung, the Kulturfonds of the Deutsche Sparkassen- und Giroverband, as well as the Sparkasse München. Their combined generous commitment made it possible to implement these two exhibitions. Our gratitude also goes out to VNG—Verbundnetz Gas AG as well as to the associations of supporters of both the Förderer des Museums der bildenden Künste Leipzig and PIN: Freunde der Pinakothek der Moderne for their active support.

Bernhart Schwenk in Munich initiated the project and was responsible for curating it. Simone Kober was responsible, in close cooperation with Claudia Klugmann in Leipzig, for transportation and insurance. Jörg Dittmer and Sylva Dörfer conceived the publicity campaign and marketing in Leipzig, which was handled in Munich by Tine Nehler and her colleagues. Dietmar Stegemann and his team in Munich, and Torsten Cech and his team in Leipzig handled the installation of the exhibition at the respective venue. Conservation was in the capable hands of Rüdiger Beck and his team in Leipzig as well as those of Irene Glanzer and Kerstin Luber in Munich. Steffi Klopsch and Robert Kirchmaier directed the administrative activities of this anything but ordinary cooperative project. As representatives of all those who contributed to the project, we owe them our thanks.

The present bibliophile exhibition catalogue documents both parts of the exhibition and supplements their selection of works with additional illustrations. We are grateful to Annette Kulenkampff of Hatje Cantz Verlag for her commitment to this book as publisher. In collaboration with her team, Maria Magdalena Koehn, a reliable partner in dialogue with Neo Rauch regarding all questions of aesthetic communication, produced an extraordinary design for the book. Descriptions of the works by art historians, critics, and fellow artists, such as Michaël Borremans, Hartwig Ebersbach, Jonathan Meese, and Luc Tuymans, provide very exceptional access to this oeuvre. The essay by Uwe Tellkamp, written especially for this occasion, offers a unique approach to this oeuvre. We are deeply indebted to all who contributed to the success of this publication.

To Gerd Harry Lybke and his team from the Galerie Eigen + Art, Leipzig/Berlin, we would like to express our thanks for coming to our aid on numerous occasions. Neo

Rauch supported the exhibition and publication with great sensitivity from the outset. His personal contribution of publishing two lithographs especially for the exhibition venues deserves our utmost appreciation. We are therefore extremely grateful to the artist and his wife Rosa Loy.

HANS-WERNER SCHMIDT  
director, Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig

KLAUS SCHRENK  
general director, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich

“I don’t fit in your system,  
but you fit in mine”

Dreams and memories are resources of artistic production interwoven with a pronounced density of subjectivity. Having slipped into images, they remain instances of reassurance for the artist; they testify to a primal impulse and the step-by-step working out of those particles of the image that determine memory, both fleeting and over time, and that need to be fixed in juxtaposition in the course of self-reassurance (Selbstvergewisserung). Neo Rauch provides a very graphic description of this process: “These half-awake moments in which the flotsam accumulates in my catch basin and rearranges itself to a new organization are the essence of my painting . . . This is why I believe that I can view painting as the continuation of the dream with

other media.”<sup>1</sup> These expeditions in the transitional zones between the unconscious and the conscious are borne in Neo Rauch’s works by a strong self-assertiveness—one that approaches reactions to these expeditions offensively, one that inserts the adversary, as it were, into the pictorial staging and direction. The following remarks explore this.

The medium of painting, which is like an elixir of life for Neo Rauch, is a recurrent theme in the artist’s work. He is interested in both the genesis of paintings as well as their public reputation within a context that, today, is thought to be described, most aptly, as the “operating system art.” Titles like *Museum*, *Unerträglicher Naturalismus*, *Malerei*, and *Abstraktion* bear witness to an aggressively waged debate surrounding a medium to which features of the anachronistic and life-prolonging measures have been attributed repeatedly by a conservative clientele whose discourse has been dispersed, particularly in the past five decades.



Museum, 1996, oil on paper on canvas, 159 × 204 cm / 52<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 80<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.

In a conversation in December 2009, Neo Rauch and I pondered a ten-year stretch of his oeuvre, making stops at fifteen works that address the subject of painting and how to approach it.<sup>2</sup>

Neo Rauch exhibited at the Overbeck-Gesellschaft in Lübeck in 1995, and one year later, at the Kunstverein in Düsseldorf. He also painted *Museum* (p. 7), a work that, with its depiction of large-scale halls, is hardly a reflection his personal exhibition experience at the time. Neo Rauch speaks unequivocally of the dream that visualized such spaces for him. In looking back, he refers ironically to a capacity for prophecy, for such cubic volumes only became a reality in the new Museum der bildenden Künste in Leipzig, which opened its doors at the end of 2004.

*Museum* is one of those paintings from the mid-nineteen-nineties that do not define a compulsory pictorial space but rather, an agglomeration of the fragmentary via a variety of vanishing points, and the concurrent potential for new groupings of pictorial zones. The left segment inside this structure shows the idea of that large-scale exhibition space, with sculptural works, a large monochrome, and an attention-grabbing painting in the center. Even though this painting has only been provided with the qualities of impression, for reference purposes, Rauch does manage to conjure a Velásquez, admittedly, one diagonally faced by a massive lead plate, taken from the gamut of materials Anselm Kiefer employed. Two great masters meet on this

canvas: Kiefer strengthens the grandeur of a Velásquez, and this, under the direction of Rauch. The museum benches have an expansiveness that lends the furniture as a whole the quality of a “seating landscape”; inside this landscape, Rauch has placed a barracks construction with a cross-shaped ground plan. This establishing of a foundation (Fundamentierung) derived, as it is, from architectural language, specifically, the uniform alignment toward all four points of the compass, is ennobling and causes the temporary, makeshift architecture to lose its provisional character—much like the spherical forms in the bottom-most zone of the image stand, each one individually, for changeability while, at the same time, representing equalizing correspondence and thus, stability within the system. Deep in the center of the image, we discover a monstrous snake finding its way in its semi-hidden circumstances. It represents a potential for unrest in the overall structure, referencing the earth’s energetic, yet unpredictable forces amongst the interlocking zones of museum scenery and indefinite bivouacking.

In *Museum*, Neo Rauch designates the dream as bearer of the museum landscape. In *Der Durchblick*, however, it is images of memory that are seen emerging from the zones of darkness. The scene unfolds in a large-scale, rear-view mirror that has been embedded in variously textured fields. Neo Rauch completed his military service with the National People’s Army between 1978 and 1981, and in *Der Durch-*



Der Durchblick, 1997, oil on canvas, 110 × 203 cm / 43¼ × 79⅞ in.

*blick*, the memory image of the “Gefechtsark” remains alive—those maintenance halls erected for tanks in which, during the winter months, large-scale Bunsen burners were placed under tank tracks to bring the machinery to operating temperature. In *Der Durchblick*, we see sculptures, in which the forms of air and floatation vehicles have been fused, standing on platforms with scissor-shaped substructures. In the foreground, a Bunsen burner on a giant steel plate realizes its heat—as it apparently has done many times before, for on the walls surrounding the sculptural ensemble we see additional plates displaying traces of fire having become form. The memory image of the tank maintenance hall, the burner workshop for heating up military potential, has become a museum showroom in which paintings preserve traces of energy realization. A reference to the works of Jannis Kounellis is certainly justified here. The work at the rear accentuating the end of the hall has an internal structure that matches that of the image’s base zone, which has been left in a rough state. Rauch, thus, points to abstraction as raw material—raw material for which the artist is specially suited (Sonderer), to confront in order to convert into figuration. Artistic energy is deployed in a goal-directed way in order to reach the physical state of fixing form, raising it from the flow of the constellations of possibilities. The “*Durchblick*” (look through) is a *Rückblick* (look back) that shapes point of view under the sovereignty of memory in matters of form.

Two different authors have felt compelled to consider *Sucher* in this catalogue.<sup>3</sup> The painting can be described as follows: A canvas has been placed on an easel, in front of which are two buckets of paint, as if called up for action. But without brushes, how is the paint to get on the canvas? The “seeker” has turned his back on these things. Instead of the tools of a painter, he wields a probe and via headphones, concentrates on its deflections; as a result, he fails to notice the beam of energy that comes from above, out of nowhere, and that “impregnates” the canvas as if an act of annunciation. The artist has removed himself from the event, abandoning the action space to magic. Rauch is thus satirizing Sigmar Polke’s ironic treatment of creative inspiration, the idea of the artist as a medium of higher powers, for example, Polke’s *Höhere Wesen befahlen: rechte obere Ecke schwarz malen!* (Higher powers command: paint the upper right corner black!, 1969), whose title is inscribed into the work itself. Despite seismographic alignment, the “seeker” has turned away from the canvas and lost contact to the work surface—a surface on which he as painter should, in dialogue with mental images and their projection, strike it lucky in terms of an instance of self-reassurance (Selbstvergewisserung). In Rauch, the site of the canvas becomes a crystallization point for all those images that circulate in



Sucher, 1997, oil on canvas, 60 × 45 cm / 23⅝ × 17¾ in.

the pictorial memory without boundary or restraint and that form ever new constellations as they await dramaturgical rendering.

The title *Unerträglicher Naturalismus* (p. 10) references a confrontational situation between artist and art critic. In this painting, the much-criticized painter doesn’t exactly hold back in his choice of means for countering such a critical attack. Having exchanged his brush for a rifle and by constantly reloading, he riddles his target with bullets, the paper tiger of criticism.<sup>4</sup> The artist thereby goes about settling a score with the art critic and nothing throws him off course. The artist finds his steadfastness, his sturdiness—in Rauch, always emphasized via pronounced leg muscles—in the cut-out section of the kidney-shaped table placed in front of him, the command post, as it were, in the living room setting. In this scene, the artist is both destructive and constructive. As marksman, he perforates the critic while, at the same time, the bullet holes float through the space like extracted discs that grow larger and larger. One such shape finds its way onto the canvas, where it leaves its image as a cast shadow. The painter takes on the role of the performer and thus, counteracts the “insufferable

naturalist” shortcoming of which he is presumably accused. Additional people on benches—criticism in the guise of a school group—follow the artist’s confrontation with his critic, observing, as the artist incorporates the latter into his terrain by way of disassembly, in free adaptation of Ernst Jünger’s “I don’t fit in your system, but you fit in mine.”<sup>5</sup> In a second scene, the artist approaches the canvas with the power of two smoke stacks; in front of the canvas, the circle from the critic’s body follows its trajectory. And so, “insufferable naturalism” is incorporated into both naturalistic settings and plays its role as directed by the much-criticized artist.

Likewise, the painting *Wahl* takes us inside a studio. The painter stands on a stepladder working on two easels. A bundle of cables feeding into the studio from the outside and a crowded collection of paint cans, stocked with brushes, point to a energetic, labor-intensive site of production. But here, artistic work is subject to the act of repetition. The brushwork follows the guidelines of a stencil. The infantilized face, also a reflection, is being mass-produced

in paint—and finds its way from site of production to site of presentation in a seamless transition. Rauch’s painter is, however, two-faced. While one half has taken on the physiognomy of the mindless schematic painting, the second head, its delicate features giving the head a thoughtful and sensitive character, seems to want to break away from the massive painter body. While in this figure, an imminent split seems preordained to incubate, as it were, the studio is already coming apart at the seams. The image of nature forces its way inside, exposing the site of alleged creativity as nothing more than a set of shifting backdrops. With *Wahl*, Rauch delivers a new conception of that classic mythological fork in the road—the crossroads at which Hercules had to commit to a programmatic direction. *Wahl* forces the artist to decide between adhering to the conventional, approved pattern or opening the floodgates of his atelier to “insufferable naturalism.”

In *Front*, Rauch brings together the strands of *Unerträglicher Naturalismus* and *Wahl*. The round face, with its hint at playing-card ornamentation, has found its place, as if a creative

accessory, inside the “showroom.” An attendant, wearing an armband as profession of his commitment, stands for the primacy of meaning in a self-referential system of production and transmission. Rampantly growing, inflated-balloon trees—images of impetuous artificiality—flank the succession of exhibition spaces. The only thing pointing to a power supply in this contrived system is the fluorescent wavy line, next to which Rauch has placed the artist; in a restrained manner, his rifle shouldered, he stands facing the representative of the system from which he has been excluded.

In *Malerei*, the medium of painting makes an appearance as an armor-clad technoid giant who, shut away in a heavy frame, is denied all range of operation. *Malerei* resembles a museum dinosaur that gives a group of four sunglasses-wearing figures cause for discourse. But the speech balloon hovering above the interpreting heads remains blank. Feeling obliged to discourse, the figures fail to notice that their shadows—more the reflections of their bodies—are in the early stage of dissolution. Banished painting has its fun with the critics by dissolving the same in paint. As in *Unerträglicher Naturalismus*, the one being criticized prevails, transplanting his adversary into his medium. In *SUB* (p. 12), we reencounter *Malerei*, here icebound; a man from the

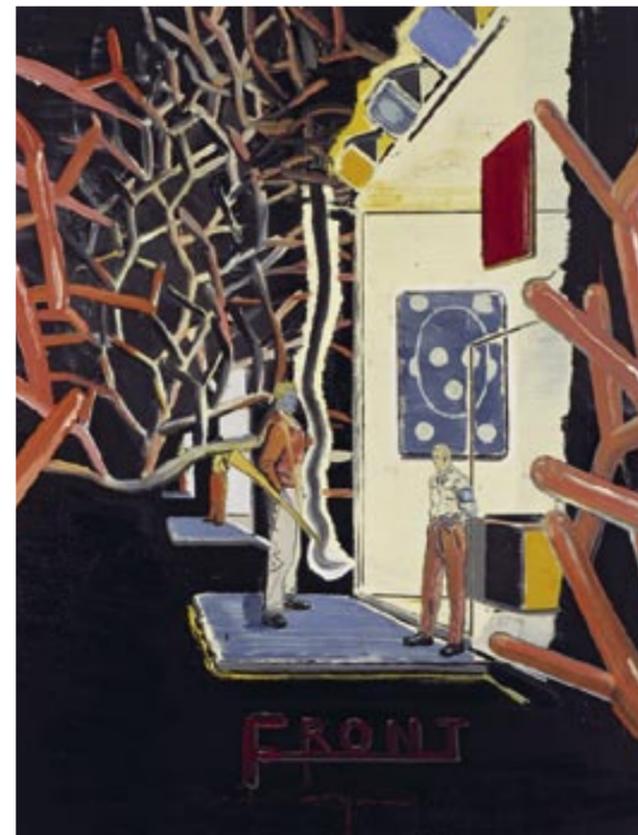
underground seems, however, to be readying for a “liberation strike” with an ice pick—in a setting of instable homeliness, where a television-fireplace provides only virtual warmth. The man, identified as “SUB,” turns up again in a drawing from 2009 as an inhabitant of a reed fen. His terrain is the transitional zone between water and land that in Rauch’s language is equivalent to a passage between the unconscious and the conscious. Meanwhile, outside the SUB pavilion, a search commando is on the move—and this attracts the attention of the fur-vest man, who becomes a regular in Rauch’s staffage. Around 2000, it looked like the art of painting at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig in Leipzig—which critics of the time contextualized in a fur-vest and red-wine milieu—was going to have to bundle up if it was going to overwinter the gathering media storms. And Rauch gives caricature-like features to his painting-milieu-proxies as if he were admitting that the critics were right: The small head stands for poorly developed intel-



*Unerträglicher Naturalismus*, 1998, oil on MDF, 160 × 105 cm / 63 × 41<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



*Wahl*, 1998, oil on canvas, 300 × 200 cm / 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



*Front*, 1998, oil on canvas, 120 × 90 cm / 47<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 35<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



*Malerei*, 1999, oil on paper, 118 × 72 cm / 46<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 28<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



SUB, 2000, oil on canvas, 250 × 200 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Abstraktion, 2005, oil on canvas, 270 × 210 cm / 106<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.

lectualism, the ax for an insufficient ability to intellectually dissect, or rather analyze, and the heavy footwear represents a restrained freedom of movement.<sup>6</sup> The fur-vest man makes the rounds in this caricatured form as criticism of the critics' projections. Staged guilelessness seems like the right response to a point of view that has ensconced itself splendidly in prejudices. And yet, this fur-vest figure is alert enough to focus his attention on the search commando outside, which shows the way out of the staffage. In *Fell* (p.117), the small-headed giant makes his grand entry: as man of action with ax, as seeker who consults his palette—his fur—and as enraged figure, who thrashes the bespectacled and egg-headed critic in order to then, in *Teer*, reinstall him, post-beating, in the art world.

A tarry mass rises out of architectural models as though out of baking tins. In creative hands, it finds its way to a form resembling the roughly-treated art critic. Left to expand freely, *Teer* forces open its container and towers upward, like a flickering flame—to then be immediately reproduced as image. The inclination to schematic pattern infiltrates the creation, making it a reflection that, in turn, begets the series. A large-sized standard bears the schematic image of effecting forces, which, oriented as they are, circulate within themselves without exiting the radius of possible movement. Discourse makes no progress.

Seven years after painting *Unerträglicher Naturalismus* in 1998, Rauch took up the subject of another art-language term filled with ideological connotations: *Abstraktion*. In a characteristically Rauch setting, where architecture and model-like sets exist side-by-side in rigorous fracture of the hierarchy of proportions, two men cross swords. Occurring alongside this martial act is another duel: A painter has paused in front of two parallel lines on his canvas and crosses his brush with the pointing finger of his critic companion. Meanwhile, in the foreground, a woman pours out the artist's paint supply, offering it to the crows as feed. The scenes could be said to track a debate about art that moves sequentially from aggression (duel), then stagnation (debate), to nihilism (paint destruction); meanwhile, in the background, a young painter reproduces a landscape on canvas, allowing himself to be only momentarily distracted by the dispute surrounding painting and reproduction under the fixed star of "abstraction."<sup>7</sup>

The dispute surrounding *Malerei* between reflection and dogmas positioning themselves confrontationally also finds continuation in *Pergola* (p. 14), though in a more relaxed atmosphere of conversation. The studio in this work resembles an open-air enclosure in a vacation-like landscape. A visitor offers the artist three busts—authoritative, old-master-like creations—that leave the painter speechless. The artist's work is hidden from us. The canvas stands between



Teer, 2000, oil on canvas, 134 × 192 cm / 52<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 75<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.

signet-like abstractions on the wall, the heads on offer, a phallic sculpture—a cross between organic growth and creative intervention—and the expanse of the landscape with its great variety of forms.

*Der Vorhang* (p. 15) separates two scenes. Two black African men carry an enormous swordfish and are received by half-asleep military personnel located behind the curtain. A scene opens up that is once again a fusion of studio and exhibition space. The artist counters an austere Neo-geo-image with a show of intestines. Numerous paintbrushes swim in a sea of blood inside of a slit-opened swordfish—brushes that, powered by the current of the life-giving fluid, want to paint from life, so to speak.

Sparkling crystal and criss-crossing antlers above the artist's head seem to be enlightening and energy-charging the intently monitoring master in this high dose of alchemy and the trophy-cult. By contrast, things are more leisurely in the background of the painting. A bearded man in casual sportswear wanders past an abstract painting; this same

exhibition-goer turns up again within this complex of interlocking images: In the foreground, he is kneeling before two young women, who hold bookish knowledge in front of him, threatened of being administered the cane. In Rauch, the educational museum conversation is converted to an indoctrinating drill.

And so, over a course of ten years, Neo Rauch addresses the "operating system art" in his work. That which is propagated as legitimate expression is positioned opposite what is presumed anachronistic by a theory that requires reflection, yet operates within the annunciatory auras of a pontifical dogma, flanked by Swiss Guards. Motivation is nourished by the perspective of becoming, marginally positioned in terms of estimation, and by the feeling of "being-wounded" (*Unerträglicher Naturalismus*)—nourished to be a supreme killjoy who suffuses the liturgy of discourse with the devices of the grotesque and of caricature and in intensifying the mask-like participates in an unmasking—and all this is accomplished in the medium of painting. The "half-awake

moments” find themselves in a repertory in which the director trusts the mightiness of the image and is not afraid to leave complexity in a state of mystery—for the riddle constitutes a greater communication resource than the message aimed at clarity.

*Das Blaue* (cat. Munich, pp. 20/21) stages the art world as a circus, even if a monochrome one. A self-imposed color-diet allows the artist to concentrate more sharply on drawing and to take a contemplative break between the color dramaturgies of other works. There are two zones in *Das Blaue*. At the left, a man in military garb puts a resisting man in an arm-lock and presses him up against a dumpster. Sitting on the dumpster is a jester who, in a back courtyard, shows his art to a beautiful woman. She responds with a variation of the Veil of Veronica; instead of displaying the face of Christ, however, it features the familiar, stylized “moonfaces” from works such as *Wahl*, and *Front*. The infantile schema is presented in the Veronica reflection as the direct likeness of reality. At the right, beneath a proces-

sional banner, covered sculptures wait for a rabbit-eared master of ceremonies to perform the act of presentation. The artist himself, proudly sporting a feather in his hat, has long turned his back on all this and takes to exploring his destination on the nearby hill by foot. No chapel offering a place of contemplation is to be found; rather, an observatory tops the hill—as site for reassuring perception in a state of focusing observation.

*Der Rückzug* (p. 16) is likewise a form of reassurance. Clownish men in uniform take possession of energy supplies while colleagues in the background carry out an execution. *Der Rückzug* disposes of all civilizing conditions and cultural values, creating a passage free of morals. A vicious monster straight out of a *Lord of the Rings*’ zoo attacks a drummer, whose rhythmic guidelines are rendered incapable of providing orientation, while a torchbearer in short pants loses sight of his goal. A chapel is open and draws visitors despite—or perhaps because of—the desolate surroundings. Two works by Neo Rauch are found inside: *Plazenta* and



Pergola, 2005, oil on canvas, 210 × 270 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 106<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Der Vorhang, 2005, oil on canvas, 270 × 420 cm / 106<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 165<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.

*Saum* from 1993. The round shape of the two tondi corresponds with that of the drum. The latter remains silent unless someone beats it. It takes great effort to make the hollow circle into an instrument of acoustic self-reassurance (Selbstvergewisserung). In *Der Rückzug*, Rauch conducts a search for clues in the course of his own oeuvre. It is certainly no accident that of Rauch’s early round paintings, it is *Plazenta* that is so prominently placed in the image—the placenta being the organ mediating the exchange of substances between mother and embryo. And so *Plazenta*, as a representative of the artist’s early phase of painting, and updated and placed as quotation in the shrine of the auratic chapel, remains fertile ground for Neo Rauch’s body of painting. *Plazenta* is the authority in the field of the disparate that heeds the battle cry of chaos.<sup>8</sup>

“I don’t really want to celebrate breakdown, the total emptying of meaning, the maximum extreme inside the square of the canvas; rather, I want to find a formula that enables us to have complete control over the incomprehensible, the horrible, without it being our undoing. Painting is a grand, controlling gesture. I’m trying to establish control over the uncontrollable things of this world.”<sup>9</sup>

HANS-WERNER SCHMIDT  
director, Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig



Der Rückzug, 2006, oil on canvas, 300 × 420 cm / 118 1/8 × 165 3/8 in.

## Notes

1 Alison M. Gingeras, “Neo Rauch. A Peristaltic Filtration System in the River of Time,” *Flash Art* 35, 227 (November / December 2002). Excerpts in *Neo Rauch: para*, exh. cat. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Max Ernst Museum, Brühl (Cologne, 2007), p. 64.

2 Bernhart Schwenk was the first to touch upon this topic in his essay, “‘Night Work’ in Defense of Red, Yellow and Blue,” in *Neo Rauch: Randgebiet*, exh. cat. Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig, Haus der Kunst Munich, Kunsthalle Zürich, Zurich (Leipzig, 2000), pp. 19–25.

3 Tim Sommer and Ulf Küster.

4 The art critic has appeared as a caricatured figure since the Romantic period. Adolph Menzel gave him donkey ears in one prominent place—the title page for Athanasius Graf Raczynski’s *Geschichte der neueren deutschen Kunst*, 1836.

Gabriel von Max portrayed the caste of art critics as monkeys. Criticism of Neo Rauch’s work, not infrequently, has a fundamentalist strand of the old-fashioned, for example, those directed at his designs for six book covers for the Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt (Felicitas von Lovenberg, “Auf dem Umschlagplatz,” in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 22, 2009, pp. Z1/Z2 and Peter Richter, “Das ungeliebte Meisterwerk,” in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* / Sunday, September 27, 2009, p. 23). The filling of his position at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig is also to be seen in this context, which played out like a factional dispute (to cite one example from the press, “Ein Superstar macht sich Luft. Neo Rauch kritisiert seine Nachfolge an der Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig” (A superstar vents his feelings: Neo Rauch criticizes his successor at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig), *Informationsdienst Kunst*, 434 (August 20, 2009), p. 1 and pp. 5–8). These forms of public conflict force Rauch to rearm when standing up to criticism of his painting, by means of painting.

5 Rauch considers Ernst Jünger an inspiring collaborator: “I owe him a lot. He took a direct hand in my work in the early nineties, when I was in danger of sinking into a kind of semi-abstract commonplace space and becoming like a thousand Sunday painters, when I was trying to find out what really characterizes me,

he was a guiding voice.” Quoted in Wolfgang Büscher, “Deutsche Motive,” *Die Zeit*, December 1, 2005, pp. 65–66. English translation as “German Motifs,” in *Neo Rauch: para* (see note 1, p. 68).

6 “There are always transient visitors from the realm of caricature on my canvases and some are even permanent. It would perhaps be more accurate to talk of a comic-like element rather than caricature. That’s actually always around.” “Wolfgang Büscher in Conversation with Neo Rauch about his Graphic Oeuvre,” in *Schilffland: Neo Rauch, Works on Paper* (Munich, 2009), p. 99.

7 Looking back, Neo Rauch takes an unequivocal stand in the Baumeister-Hofer debate, which, having occurred in the early nineteen-fifties, amounted to a proxy discussion between freedom and lack of freedom in the two political systems that led to the division of Germany—with the objectionable shortcut that abstraction stood for freedom and figurative naturalism in the twentieth century the mouthpiece of the totalitarian: “If you see a Hofer alongside a Baumeister these days, it’s easy to say who will still have something to say in future centuries, and who can probably only be associated with a certain design preference from a specific decade.” See note 6, p. 84. The Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig inaugurated its new building in 2004 with the exhibition *Begegnung der Bilder: Willi Baumeister – Karl Hofer*.

8 And by incorporating *Plazenta*, Rauch once again gives a word-oriented work a central place in a pictorial structure. “But occasionally a word can trigger a painting. It can happen that a word develops an incredible atmospheric undertow in the direction of a painting that produces itself, where my only duty is to assist. Such moments are precious, and they bring me even closer to my mother tongue, for it is only here that such experiences can occur.” Neo Rauch in Gingeras (see note 1).

9 Neo Rauch, quoted in Jordan Mejias, “Neo Rauch: Malerei ist eine herrschaftliche Geste,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 22, 2007.

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Ausschüttung, 2009, oil on canvas, 210 × 300 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Oktober, 2009, oil on canvas, 250 × 300 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Seewind, 2009, oil on canvas, 250 × 300 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Diktat, 2004, oil on canvas, 270 × 210 cm / 106¼ × 82⅝ in.



Rauner, 2009, oil on canvas, 160 × 120 cm / 63 × 47¼ in.



Kommen wir zum Nächsten, 2005, oil on canvas, 280 × 210 cm / 110¼ × 82⅝ in.

NEO RAUCH, “SAINT JUST”  
 SERVICE INDICATION—  
 ALWAYS AT YOUR SERVICE  
 —SERVING art as NEO does it:  
 Well!

NEO RAUCH has Saint Just’s right glove. With this object of DISTANCE, everything can be painted, like metabolism. NEO RAUCH employs the transparent = hermetic hand of ~~the~~ Saint JUST, and like Vincent Price, trusts in the game of things, great, great, great. NEO RAUCH prepares for painting everyday by making a soup du jour of meat from a terrine, duck breast, oysters, and beans. During off-hours, everyone changes clothes for art in the anti= antique changing rooms. The serenade before and during that leads to the dance in the ballroom: There is no timidity, happily, and the marble skin of the animal children in the hands of the indecent game children shows the ultracolor: BLOOD RED. NEO

RAUCH paints everything with the PULSE HAND of SAINT JUST, the armor of the animal world, the animal babies of nature’s industry are grateful to NEO for it. NOW they can play, just as the anise girls of the serenade, ballroom dance past the opening bars of loss of democracy, for only the ballroom blood on the velvet glove of Saint Just de Neo is acknowledged as the TOTAL COLOR. Keep painting it, like syrup; those who are devoted to art will live totally, grazie NEO, grazie, always in service too, BABY MEESE ( MAN IS THE TOY OF ART, great , great , great , very good , NEO ).

△□○∞ jmeese 09

JONATHAN MEESE  
 artist



Ordnungshüter, 2008, oil on canvas, 250 × 300 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.

## Ordnungshüter, 2008

No certainty—not anywhere. Neither at the end, let alone the beginning. *Ordnungshüter* (pp.36/37) is one of those puzzle paintings by Neo Rauch in which time, which in antiquity was described as a moment of eternity, stops breathing. The ensemble of figures in this painting—visible at a glance, clearly subdivided, a rather vexing group—was placed in a trance by the painter in 2008, a trance from which it is hoped no one will ever awaken.

Trance state notwithstanding—you could also call it torpidity—there is plenty going on in the 250 by 300 centimeters of canvas. Eight figures are distributed about the painting. Catching our eye, virtually hovering over a bar counter or pulpit is the *great agitator*—a *preacher of evil*—in midoration... Behind him, similarly serious-minded, is his clean-shaven alter ego, like a head waiter in an upscale bar, through its windows you see lights glimmering in the distance.

On the viewer's right, a bit of a conspiracy: a contemporary William Tell, who is not just fun and joy, even in Schiller, with shouldered crossbow. He, on the point of marching off to new acts of liberation, is also stopped in motion. His two pals, man and woman, study plans of future combat zones. Or, are these three perhaps nothing but harmless city-dwellers in search of liberating mountain air, and the men's crossbows nothing but pickaxes for conquering hills...

... the young woman is in a flatteringly stylish hooded outfit. Her companion is a youthful-patriarchal figure with goatee and windblown hairstyle, the latter bringing to mind the horns Michelangelo gave his famous Moses figure, the result of inaccurate information. It is not only art history that is sometimes based on false reports and crazy ideas. At any rate, this is a threesome reminiscent of *Deutschland im Herbst*.

The *great agitator's* object(s) of desire were placed by Neo Rauch in a room within a room—delimited by bulged curtains that allow the space to be interpreted as a baldachin or a sacrificial site. *Once again, three bizarre figures*: a goateed female holding paintbrushes in her right hand, which, with a little imagination, merge with the curtain to form a flag; joining her, a broad shouldered fellow; and a bearded man, forced between the two, whose naked upper body is graced with a double-rowed belt of metallic pink, blue, and green cans. *What's the play being performed here?* Has the one man drunk himself unconscious and is now being propped up and hailed by his companions... or is it a descent from the Cross... or is another Isaac to be sacrificed this time maybe for real? For a saving angel is nowhere in sight...

... just this *preacher of evil*, who, armed with “holy books” and a baseball bat, partakes in the training of a suicide

bomber in a bacchanalian scenario of violence... And so we get to the heart of this panopticon of horror....

In *Ordnungshüter*, Neo Rauch has assembled his painting's figures in a wicked burlesque of terrorism and fanaticism. It is a central work of political painting whose coded subject is the *catastrophic world* with its civilizing disruptions. The tatters of *Ordnungshüter* are, in real life, tatters of people...

RUDIJ BERGMANN  
film-maker and author

## New Roles for Space

Rauch's people are almost always busy with tasks the reasons for which remain unclear to us (and to them?). They move in a climate of conspiracy, yet no one seems to know the code of behavior that points the way. We are used to searching for the mysteriousness of these narrative paintings in a plot that does not progress linearly, but interlocks as a knotting of episodes, each episode having, in turn, its specific mixture. Picture puzzles are one thing, paintings another. It is therefore worth our while to *not* esotericize the secrets of painter Neo Rauch, but to question the artistic methods in which he packs them. His spaces are his packaging.

The Cézanne-line of modernism incapacitated the third dimension, put it out of commission, and stripped it of its self-given authority. It was only the Surrealists who actively reinserted space into their pictorial calculations, using it as a zone of fluctuating consciousness, without, however, restoring the continuity with which central perspective had endowed it for centuries. They composed their paintings from spolia, from still-life-like iconostasis-like walls of images (Max Ernst, *Vox angelica*, 1943) or display cases (René Magritte, *On the Threshold of Freedom*, 1930).

Rauch wants nothing to do with such assembled polyfocality. Even his first multi-spaced paintings were intricate interlockings of segmented spaces, for instance, the deserted gas station where different views interlink with Piranesi-like intensity. The axial system already contains the cells of space in which Rauch will accommodate his “disrupted narrative.” These spaces have no stereometric autonomy, but rather, the dynamic force of quotations partitioning the entire space among themselves. The painting *Neue Rollen* (pp. 40/41) articulates this spatial circumstance in its title. Its Rauch-ian trademark leaps out at us immediately: a simultaneous image (*Simultanbild*) of different plots. There are no cloisonné cells within this being-for-itself (*für-sich-sein*), but instead, suites of passages filled with incommensurable stage props, for instance, the three flowering branches, the one at the front right merging into a massive houseplant that darts and flickers toward the man standing and swinging the Phrygian cap of a 1789 revolutionary like a butterfly hunter. He calls the tune—but which one? By this time, we have probably noticed that shell game operators, summoned by the painter, are at work here. Everything is interchangeable—individual things and relationships alike. The enormous window is the only secure possession of our perception. Behind the standing man, however, the window wall is being demolished by a cross-beam—not for long, however, for a piece of the room's

ceiling, crumpled like paper, puts up resistance. Behind this, a tent-like opening, whose blue flaps terminate in dragon mouths, provides access to a new space. The diminutive form of this “tent” is the architectural model being explained to the young boy.

The guillotine might cause the viewer to recoil were it not for the spatial interlocking that abruptly turns the gravity of the action into a theatrical event being applauded by three audience members, apparently theater professionals. The conglomeration of spaces proves to be a giant sham, as indicated by the objects placed at an angle at the very front of the image—cardboard props of a ridiculous compulsion to improve appearances. Even the group at the window plays a part in the completely fictionalized scene: They rehearse new roles.

The potential for confusion is set in motion surreptitiously. Rauch composes his pictorial spaces from stage scenery, screens, moveable room partitions, and set pieces. And thus, they seem provisional and revocable. This spatial disposition is not a formalistic joke luring us into labyrinths, but rather, a metaphor for the people who are acting or are acted here. The spatial episodes give their existence insularity, dictating their probationary acting and manipulating, the grim determination of which bears no relation to the more than questionable results. The way Rauch deploys these teams on the sites of his paintings has them basically playing guest roles. They are nothing but fly-by-nighters, whose pseudo-constructs offer no home; in fact, they provoke that very perplexity with which Buster Keaton famously turns and faces us: “Wer jetzt kein Haus hat, baut sich keines mehr...” (Who has no house now, will never build one...—Rainer Maria Rilke).

WERNER HOFMANN  
art historian



Filmstill from *One Week* with Buster Keaton, 1920 38 / 39



Neue Rollen, 2005, oil on canvas, 270 × 420 cm / 106¼ × 165⅜ in.



## Morgenrot, 2006

The scene has an apocalyptic feel: enter an angel, dressed in red, androgynous, with black hair and black and yellow wings holding a (glass) sphere. A man standing in front of a low, overgrown wall works amoeba-like forms—a more precise identification is not possible—on a black anvil. Between these two protagonists, in the middle ground, another man stands holding a sort of shovel, waiting and seeing. There is a profusion of greenery; house roofs and gables, lit and unlit windows, and a construction chute all suggest a town. Two comic-like symbols in the foreground don't seem to belong in the painting. In the background, a front of red clouds opens to reveal a brightly illuminated cloud mass.

There is no direct contact between the protagonists. Their gestures and gazes fail to connect; they seem to take no notice of one other; they are withdrawn and their actions self-absorbed. The figure dressed in red, a corporeal presence and yet incorporeal, hovers in the (pictorial) space, lacking a fixed position, even though she is clearly anchored, both compositionally and scenically. The scene fragments are positioned toward and against each other, via pictorial axes, perspectives, and painting technique. Illusory space is suggested and then withdrawn. A language of comic symbols appears alongside a downright, baroque-seeming, painterly gesture and a section of painting reminiscent of socialist realist imagery. Thematic references are illuminated in just as fragmentary a way: the title *Morgenrot* evokes associations with the Greek goddess Eos, her Roman counterpart Aurora, the Christian cult of the Virgin Mary, but also with Dawn, Iran's 1983 spring offensive against Iraq, in which both sides suffered severe losses. Joining these references is the socialist pathos of labor. The rhetoric of socialist realism is made clear and gets stuck, as it were, in a self-referential bubble. The action of the worker remains enigmatic and can no longer be meaningfully integrated into a larger context. Tradition and modernism, classical, Christian, and secular promises of salvation meet in the painting—and go nowhere. The comic references keep the painting itself from becoming emotive. Paraphrasing Neo Rauch—they prevent the work from lapsing into spiritual kitsch. At the right edge of the image, figuration dissolves entirely into abstract painting. The representational level of meaning is perforated by the painting style and the painting style comes under pressure from what is depicted. At the same time, the representationalism of what is depicted interlocks with the representationalism of the painting.

BARBARA STEINER  
director, Galerie für Zeitgenössische  
Kunst, Leipzig



Warten auf die Barbaren, 2007, oil on canvas, 150 × 400 cm / 59 × 157½ in.

## Warten auf die Barbaren, 2007

What has been most striking to me in the work of Neo Rauch is that it gave me a certain flashback to my early childhood, the opportunity to perceive a surprising and incomprehensible world with wonder while experiencing excitement, curiosity, and sometimes fear. This has to do with the scale of the work in relation to the beholder, the use of color, and most of all, the way he manages to withdraw his imagery from incidental-contemporary features. The different elements in the paintings originate from various eras and places, provoking an autonomous space where the specific is transposed to the general, thus creating a detached universality where we are freed from references and signifiers to which we are accustomed.

MICHAËL BORREMANS  
artist



Theorie, 2006, oil on canvas, 250 × 190 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 74<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Höhe, 2004, oil on canvas, 270 × 210 cm / 106¼ × 82⅝ in.



Dämmer, 2002, oil on canvas, 250 × 210 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Reich, 2002, oil on canvas, 400 × 210 cm / 157½ × 82⅝ in.



Reaktionäre Situation, 2002, oil on canvas, 210 × 400 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 157<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.



Bestimmung, 2002, oil on canvas, 210 × 160 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 63 in.



Silo, 2002, oil on canvas, 210 × 300 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Acker, 2002, oil on canvas, 210 × 250 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>in.



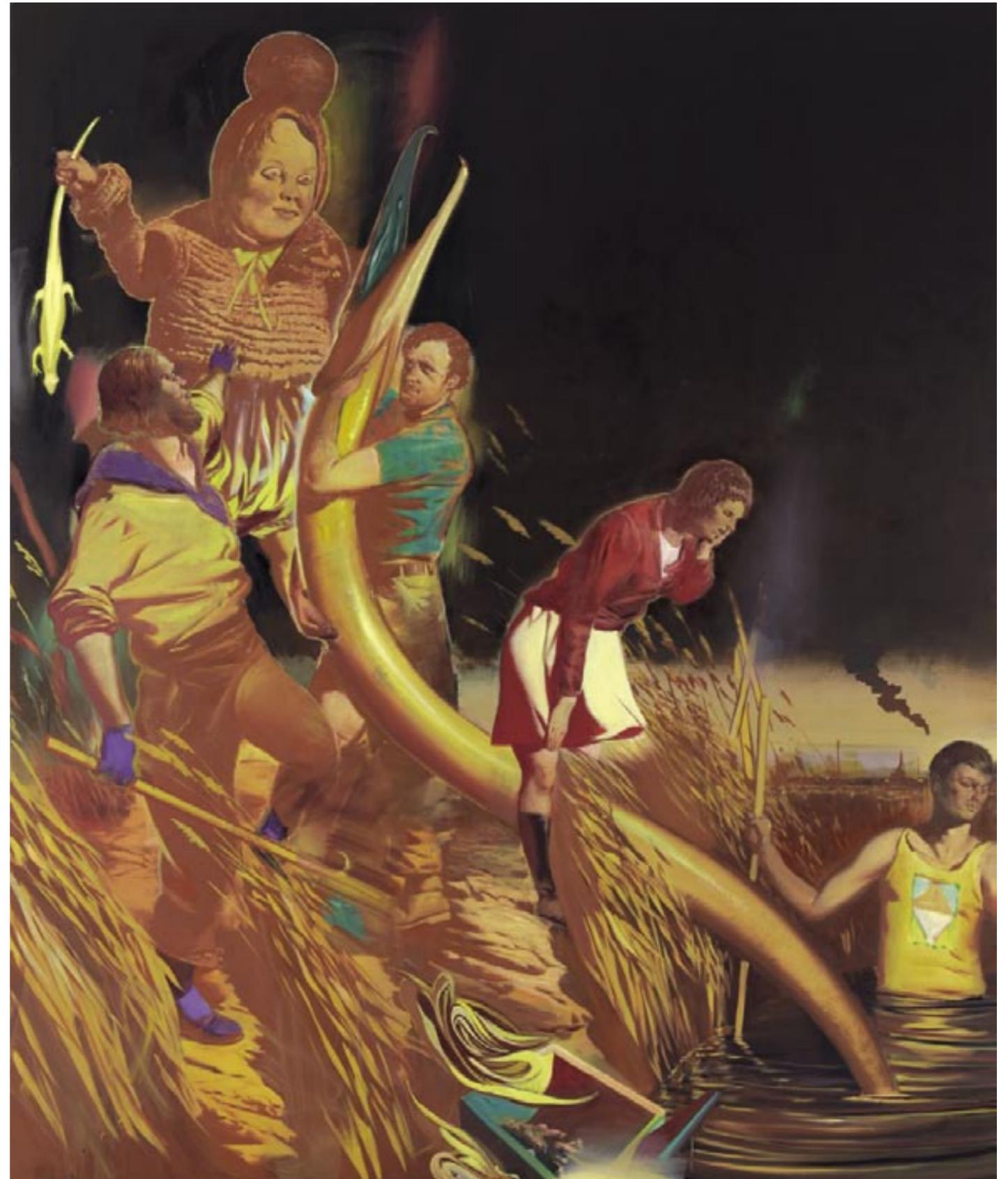
Dörfler, 2009, oil on canvas, 35 × 50 cm / 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Der Schütter, 2009, oil on canvas, 50 × 35 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Segnung, 2009, oil on canvas, 50 × 35 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Schilfkind, 2010, oil on canvas, 300 × 250 cm / 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Bergfest, 2010, oil on canvas, 300 × 250 cm / 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Unter Feuer, 2010, oil on canvas, 250 × 300 cm / 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Reiter, 2010, oil on canvas, 300 × 210 cm / 118 1/8 × 82 5/8 in.



Abraum, 2003, oil on canvas, 210 × 250 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Das Neue, 2003, oil on canvas, 210 × 300 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



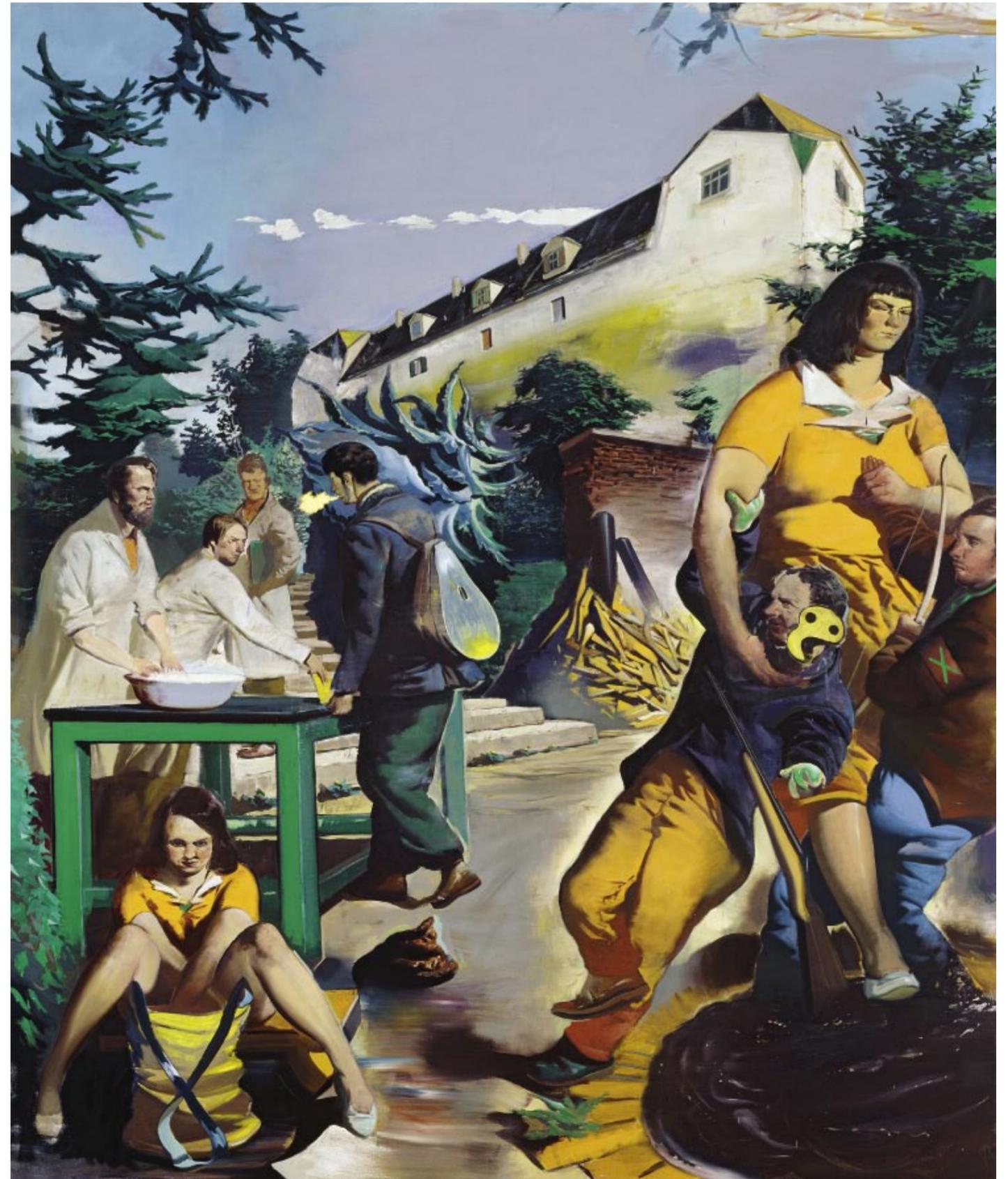
Jagdzimmer, 2007, oil on canvas, 110 × 160 cm / 43¼ × 63 in.



Rauch, 2005, oil on canvas, 80 × 70 cm / 31½ × 27½ in.



Scheune, 2003, oil on canvas, 200 × 250 cm / 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Die Aufnahme, 2008, oil on canvas, 300 × 250 cm / 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Aufstand, 2004, oil on paper, 199 × 275 cm / 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 108<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Krönung I, 2008, oil on canvas, 250 × 190 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 74<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Krönung II, 2008, oil on canvas, 250 × 190 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 74<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.





Die Flamme, 2007, oil on canvas, 160 × 110 cm / 63 × 43¼ in.



Vorgänger, 2002, oil on canvas, 51×40 cm / 20<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>×15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.

## Boys and Science

The first encounter with the work of Neo Rauch ...

... was in the form of a publication shown to me by my Antwerp dealer Frank Demaegd. The works aroused a horrific kind of nostalgia within me. I felt a bit off balance with the printed poster vignette style, but was still intrigued by the odd superimpositions within the imagery. The second time I saw the work in the flesh was at David Zwirner's gallery, still located in Soho at the time. There was a smaller, more sizable painting depicting a fireman with a fire hose, displaced within a horizontal landscape. There had been a certain time lapse between these two encounters and, clearly, the work had become far more condensed. Although the linearity and the draftsmanship still persisted—when examined more closely and in detail—the works appeared far more painterly. There was no doubt about it, Neo was and is a painter. Having seen more of his work since, this opinion has reinforced itself. Luckily for me, I saw the works first. It is only lately, in preparation of this text that I delved into the numerous reviews and the more comprehensive texts about Neo's work. Only recently, I learned he was orphaned shortly after birth. This instantaneously opens up, of course, nearly biblical or legendary connotations. Also, the name Neo Rauch seems to come straight out of an *Old Shatterhand* novel by Karl May, one of Hitler's favorites, of which Hans-Jürgen Syberberg made a film. This was the second part of a triptych, together with the first *Ludwig II*, and ending with the third *Hitler, ein Film aus Deutschland* covering altogether 150 years of German history. Each film is at the epic length of seven hours. Syberberg was born in the GDR as well as Neo Rauch, and as Neo has made a statement, where the element of dreaming was important. In one of his interviews, Neo Rauch states that dreaming, or dreams have an important influence on the making of his imagery. When accused of raveling the facts by the historian Joachim C. Fest, Syberberg replied that one should be enabled and allowed to dream history. So, even before starting to write about Neo, the stage is set and one can already predict the “smell of teen spirit,” the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a truly German invention, Wagnerian heights, music conversing simultaneously with instruments and the fucking universe. To me, it was crystal clear that Neo's oeuvre was the beginning of a lasting oeuvre from day one. What strikes me is that a lot of the writings about his work proclaim that the imagery is mysterious and virtually indecipherable. There is even an article with the question “Where do these paintings come from?” When I saw Neo's work, it was clear to me that these came from

Germany and this occurred at first glance. This is reflected in the scale, the robustness of the image, the draftsmanship as mentioned before, and, above all, their weight. Although the images show offset persona, sometimes disproportioned and distorted in a sort of midair elevation, they are immediately torn back to the ground by the dense surroundings in which they are depicted. They actually surrender to these settings which look like inert stage props. Assembled to create a vast arsenal of symbolic and iconic objects to which they are forcefully connected and entangled, the scenery divides itself in sharp angles. The excavation of the painted surface all draws back to a severe sense of gravity. Neo's people or props don't fly; they are suspended, put on hold for us to look at in an exponential way.

More than the usual remarks about the work, such as the linkage to the former GDR nostalgia, I see a clearly mapped out programme which may, as Neo claims, be propelled by dreams and intuition worked out on the spot, taking the canvas as a sort of in situ. It still appears to me to be extremely controlled and disciplined, the mirroring of space; the play with foreground and background is carefully arranged. In fact, a lot of the imagery appears to be deliberate and extremely conscious about its appearance. The other thing that astonished me is the misperception of the work when it comes to the idea of origin and tradition, which, in most of the writing, comes across as utterly confused. Neo wants his painting not only to be big, but also to be grand. And although some of the imagery has a slight touch of home brew Orientalism, they surely are originated within a determined locality, a topography in which everything is designated and assigned. For some it can awaken the idea that the paintings are transmitters. Then, there is the strange feeling that the paintings are holding in their breath, poised by a claustrophobia or a phobia altogether. With the exception of one smaller, insular painting, the portrait *Vorgänger* (p.97), his paintings never confront the viewer frontally. The portrayed here is a hybrid, nearly mythological creature resembling the Beast out of Jean Cocteau's movie *La Belle et la Bête*. Mostly the figures in his paintings are too preoccupied; they stay within the frame, taking care of business, but also meticulously guarding and taking care of the painting itself. As a viewer, one is excluded. The depicted figures deviate away from us in a strange angle to where they relocate or reassemble themselves. Neo's work is a large archive of monumental momentums in which time has become paint itself. Then there are the numerous suppositions of what the work tries to tell. To me, it resonates with a political speech once given by Spiro Agnew, who said, “It's not what I say, it's what I mean.” It is this allusiveness that I find in Neo's work, combined with making a detour to get things done without

committing or positioning oneself. Neo is often lined up with figureheads such as Balthus or with German Romanticism, etc., but there are others such as American painter Thomas Hart Benton, who, in the nineteen-thirties, created a sort of lyrical, linear perception within the realm of a realism with a filmic and social agenda, or English painter Stanley Spencer, who also in the nineteen-thirties, made plans for large murals ranging from the social to the combinations of religion and sex.

Despite Neo's denial and understandable wanting to dissociate himself from the stigma of Germany's past, it has a definite impact on his art. The inhabitants of his paintings are seldom, although all share a characteristic, unified physiognomy. They embody a state or colony, a conglomerate singing the same anthem, and their clothes look like flags wearing nineteenth-century costumes. They overpower each other from within an infested incestuous familiarity. In his work, some see a critique of the outcome and aftermath of the French idea of illumination, followed by its revolution, and the travesty it became in time. Others detect a certain form of humanism. I, moreover, see the configuration of something like *la condition humaine* and a sort of lost generation within a wasteland of excess. Neo has been accused of repetition, obscurantism, heroism, or just plain conservatism and many, many more superlatives as it happens with every meaningful artist. But once one starts to peel the layers of paint, it becomes self-evident that the image wants to persist, has become fully embedded and sedentary, and painted matter has become paint through time.

Another astonishing thing is the remark rightfully made by Gottfried Boehm in the monograph *Neue Rollen*, about the enormous importance and presence of color as a nearly incidental juxtaposition to the imagery itself, and here, another link turns up, this time to filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock. He was highly superstitious and made sure that he appeared for a couple of seconds in nearly all of his films. Neo has mentioned that although he never depicts himself, part of him is always to be indirectly perceived throughout the body of his work. Alfred Hitchcock once organized a dinner for his guests where all the food was blue. Through the disconfiguration of the expected colors of the food, the dinner was instantaneously turned into a sort of horrific suspense. As Hitchcock's dinner, Rauch's colors seem to have been consumed, digested. They instigate a cake-like morphological feeling. This constant morphing of space, frame entities of time, stand-ins make me wonder who is covering up for whom. It is this game of analogies, associations, and disassociations that makes the work compelling. And as in his painting *Ende* (1998), the end seems to be perpetual.

In 1921, on his way back by train from Berlin to Belgium and the city of Antwerp, one of the most famous Belgian Dadaist poets Paul van Ostaïjen, after having met Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, tries to figure out a way to describe what being German could be all about. He came up with the following solution: According to him, Germans are people who grab a Christmas tree, cave themselves in, and keep on holding on to the Christmas tree.

LUC TUYMANS  
artist

## FATHER

### Subject.

Dream or ecstasy,  
hence the son's  
claim of loss  
The question becomes  
self-attaint:  
Whence, why, whither, I?  
Desire creates burden,  
not lust, not mildness,  
on the path to himself,  
to his father's likeness.  
Banish,  
magic.  
As grand projection,  
with the breath of the saint,  
for the marveling son.  
He hopes to have won  
through what he has become  
his father's finding.  
NEO.  
Ultimately, the granting  
of a name is to  
claim destiny, give reason.

### Object.

From the idea  
and cause of the son's search  
for Kafka's "path that occurs  
as you take it"  
the wounding becomes  
a metamorphosis  
of the vision.  
PIETÀ.  
Father in the father, father in the son,  
distance in closeness,  
harmony in essence,  
embracing life, initiation.  
ERLKING.  
Conversely,  
in the night wind's force,  
the father's awaking and form.  
Dream, please do linger!  
But the moment is fleeting,  
all capture evading.  
Finally to reveal  
the mystery of the hands:  
in the fear of completion, salvation,  
exposure,  
RUMPELSTILTSKIN'S end?  
Dreaming is again dream,  
dream is not deceit!  
What can he give him, the son?  
To take not from him  
is fulfillment enough.

CASPAR,  
Your Godfather.  
H. E.

HARTWIG EBERSBACH  
artist



Vater, 2007, oil on canvas, 200 × 150 cm / 78¾ × 59 in.



Moder, 1999, oil on canvas, 300 × 200 cm / 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.

“This evening, we are pleased to present to you the work of a Leipzig artist who has restored to the art of painting, the splendor of images, the phenomenal talent of composition, and the seduction of color. However, be aware! Not everything is easy to use, for despite the great temptation of what can be seen, Rauch is not a man of surfaces. Recognition is entangled in an infinite multitude of subjects. Chance and order intermingle with the ideas of the paintings, scaling the plateaus or dropping to the depths of consciousness... For several years, important years, Rauch’s focus was the academy of arts in Leipzig. To be precise, his anatomical, moral, aesthetic, metaphorical, and political energies were directed toward a center, energies that assigned art and artists a place in a shared social and political responsibility. Rauch proved himself selective in this position from the start. He did not dissociate himself from the school, but took from its repertoire only that which he urgently needed for: the making of paintings, the craft, the ability to compose. To this day, it remains the backbone of his highly ambivalent imagery... A great future lies before Neo Rauch, providing fast-paced art history of recent times leaves the door open long enough, and the artist can maintain critical distance from himself. We wish him this with great pleasure, and seek to accompany him as often as he gives us the opportunity to do so.”

Excerpt from Klaus Werner, opening address for  
*Randgebiet*, an exhibition of Neo Rauch’s works in the  
Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig  
December 9, 2000  
Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Klaus-Werner-Archiv

KLAUS WERNER  
(1940–2010)  
founder and director of the Galerie für Zeitgenössische  
Kunst, Leipzig

## Uhrenvergleich, 2001

*Uhrenvergleich*, the *corpus delicti* of the title is quickly spotted: In the lower half of the painting we see two clock faces placed exactly in parallel to one another—one clearly has an analog display, the other, a digital one. Whether due to a power outage or technical defect, however, neither clock seems to be indicating the time. This clock scene is superimposed on a pictorial space that depicts a runway at night. A second “picture bubble” above, likewise superimposed, affords a view onto a sea of houses behind which towers a high-rise building. But what is going on here? The building is on fire. Dense smoke rises from upper stories into the blazing-red sky. When we seek a connection between the different pictorial and spatial levels of the painting, we cannot help but think of that “time check” carried out by partners in crime to synchronize their actions during an organized attack.

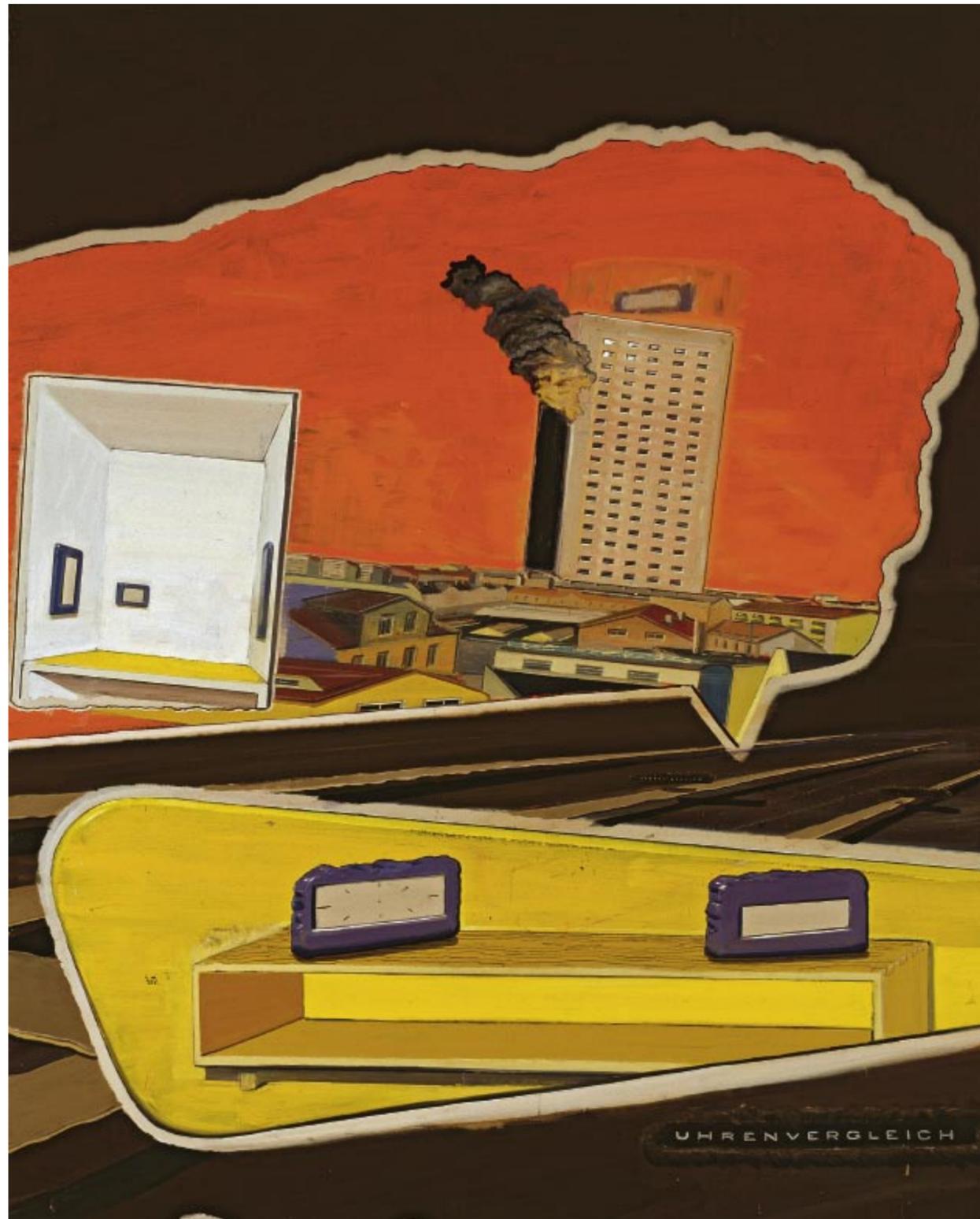
Alarm bells begin to sound when we do a second time check, namely the one that has us time-checking the year the painting was executed: 2001. Indeed, in 2007, during a tour prior to the opening of his exhibition in the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Neo Rauch admitted to having painted the work shortly before the infamous September 11, 2001. Is art inching closer to becoming a subject of precognition research? Did Neo Rauch paint the preparation and attack by terrorists in New York and thus, a world-historical event before it happened? Our common sense, of course, tells us, “No.” Incidentally, there were several such “coincidences,” some that achieved tragic fame—the sculptor who, for instance, erected an installation with crashing model planes in one of the twin towers shortly before the actual planes hit. In 1997, Anselm Kiefer executed a painting six meters in size dedicated to the Jewish demon Lilith. It shows a burning plane speeding through a landscape of high-rise buildings. On September 11, 2001, a gallery owner offered *Lilith* to the collector Ernst Beyeler in Paris. When Beyeler saw the burning towers on television a few hours later he remembered the offer and bought the painting for his museum in Basel, where it can be seen today—as can, incidentally, *Der Rückzug*, a large-format painting that Neo Rauch executed in 2006 for the Wolfsburg exhibition.

Time and again seismological abilities have been ascribed to what is known as the avant-garde in part, also, to pay tribute to their name. What is meant is not the prophetic talent to predict concrete events or winning lottery numbers, but rather, the ability to filter out, from the hodge-podge of symptoms characteristic of a given time, those signs that provide, in retrospect, a coherent panorama of history, and to piece these signs together into a clear picture. Franz

Marc's gloomy paintings of the woods and its vulnerable inhabitants were later interpreted as harbingers of World War I. It is the sensitivity to the collective unconscious that artists often possess and that fuels talk of “art as an early warning system.” Trend researchers and futurologists have also recognized this sensitivity, and they study art to ascertain the needs of future societies.

The extent to which Neo Rauch incorporated an “early warning system” into his art remains to be seen. But his pictorial constructions, which are often made up of actually dreamt dreams, do frequently have something threatening about them that seems to have been projected into his paintings from the future and endows them with a hidden charge. This is what lends his paintings their unique impact. And his works come close to what the psychoanalyst C.G. Jung calls the “simultaneity of the non-simultaneous.” *Uhrenvergleich* is a programmatic painting, so to speak, taking this particular operational mode of Neo Rauch's works as its subject.

MARKUS BRÜDERLIN  
director, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg



Uhrenvergleich, 2001, oil on canvas, 250 × 200 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.

## Mittag, 1997



Mittag, 1997, oil on canvas, 223 × 194 cm / 87<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 76<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.

What is initially striking about Neo Rauch's early paintings is the new color palette, a brand new "collection of colors." At first sight, the colors seem washed-out. Yet, they possess a brilliance and expansive quality on the picture plane that supports a seemingly cool kind of painting, one that is as powerful as it is non-expressionistic. *Mittag* is a typical example of this union of luminescence, coloristic density, and distinct iconography. This is achieved through the openness and firm tectonics of the pictorial composition, through iconographic freshness, and a subtle play between a two-dimensional pictorial space that extends well beyond the borders of the canvas in the tradition of Abstract Expressionism, and an opening of this space into further dimensions via the elements of perspective and the collage-like encounter of abrupt pictorial planes. In the more than ten years since it was executed and first exhibited, *Mittag* has lost nothing of the freshness that distinguished it in 1997. Combined with this is Neo Rauch's sureness as a painter and his uninhibited, natural handling of symbols and artistic subjects that had, on the face of it, been cast aside for good from the development of painting as an art. Between the realism of the depiction, the generous abstract expressionist arrangement of pictorial space, and the juxtaposition of modern, pre- and postmodern structures from different cultures of the late twentieth century, a somnambulist atmosphere emerges in *Mittag* that, between 1997 and 1999, contributed to the promotion of Rauch's approach to painting, from one that had a more regional reach, to one that had an impact, and commanded attention from around the world. *Mittag* is also a perfect demonstration of Neo Rauch having been the only German painter of his generation to succeed individually in building on the powers and abilities of the great nineteen-sixties' generation of German painters—from Georg Baselitz to Gerhard Richter—to succeed in coming to terms with the past via post-abstract painting without becoming illustrative or formulating explicit messages. With these paintings, Neo Rauch managed to process German reunification via paint, doing so by consolidating, in a superb manner, deeply emotionally-charged clichés of different spheres of experience, and, in the Hegelian sense, thinking and sublimating the whole in pure painting. In *Mittag*, in this regard, everything is subordinate to the coloristic process of the painting, to the multiphonics of yellow tones (yellow is one of Neo Rauch's favorite colors) across the canvas in their seemingly impossible, disharmonious relationship to different gray tones, which, just as exclusively, carry the staggered spatial arrangement of the painting.

ROBERT FLECK  
director-general, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der  
Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn



Sonntag, 1997, oil on canvas, 223 × 194 cm / 87<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 76<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Weiche, 1999, oil on paper, 215 × 190 cm / 84<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 74<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Platz, 2000, oil on canvas, 200 × 250 cm / 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Sturmnacht, 2000, oil on canvas, 200 × 300 cm / 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Fell, 2000, oil on canvas, 190 × 134 cm / 74<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 52<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Neid, 1999, oil on canvas, 200 × 300 cm / 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Arbeiter, 1998, oil on paper, 200 × 150 cm / 78¾ × 59 in.



Die große Störung, 1995, oil on paper on canvas, 273 × 210 cm / 107½ × 82⅝ in.



Start, 1997, oil on canvas, 200 × 150 cm / 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 59 in.



Die Küche, 1995, oil on paper on canvas, 266 × 136 cm / 104<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 53<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.



Erl, 1993, oil on canvas, 250 × 191 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 75<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Dromos, 1993, oil on canvas, 250 × 199 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 78<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



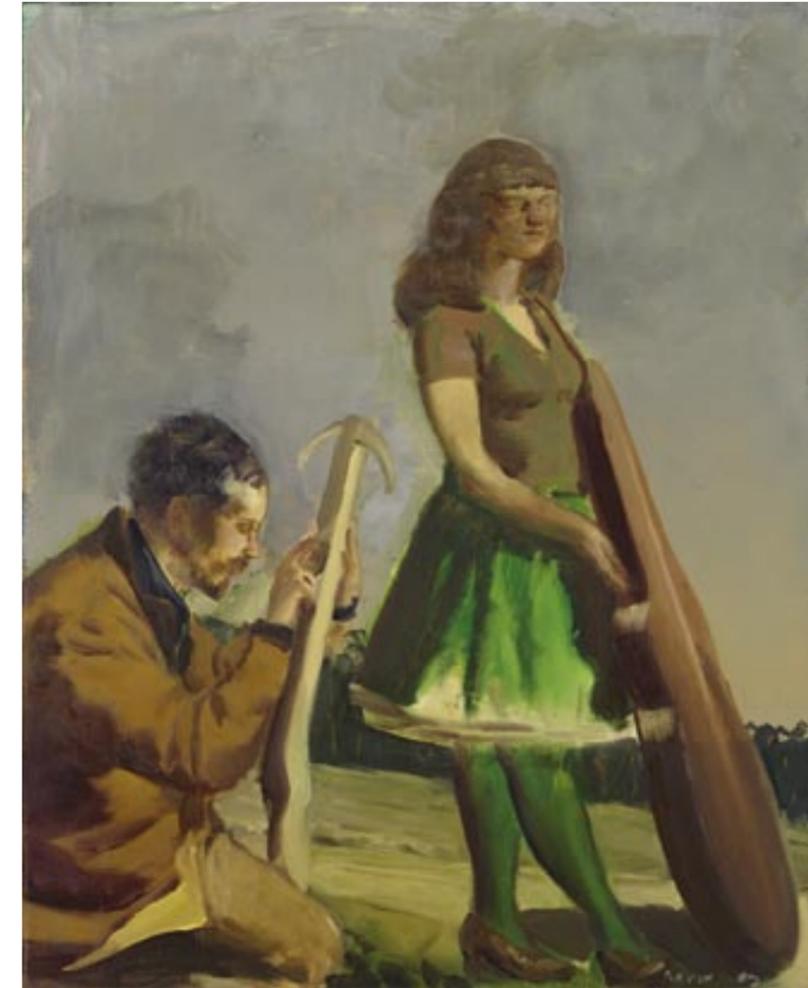
Vorraum, 1993, oil on canvas, 250 × 190 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 74<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Ortner, 2001, oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 15<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.



cross, 2006, oil on canvas, 29 × 40 cm / 11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Am Waldsaum, 2007, oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Helferinnen, 2008, oil on canvas, 60 × 50 cm / 23<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 50<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Parabel, 2008, oil on canvas, 300 × 210 cm / 118 1/8 × 82 5/8 in.



Fluchtversuch, 2008, oil on canvas, 220 × 400 cm / 86<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 157<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.



Die Fuge, 2007, oil on canvas, 300 × 420 cm / 118 1/8 × 165 3/8 in.



Das Gut, 2008, oil on canvas, 280 × 210 cm / 110¼ × 82⅝ in.



Das Plateau, 2008, oil on canvas, 210 × 300 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Vorort, 2007, oil on canvas, 150 × 250 cm / 59 × 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Bon Si, 2006, oil on canvas, 300 × 420 cm / 118 1/8 × 165 3/8 in.



Scherz, 2004, oil on canvas, 270 × 210 cm / 106¼ × 82⅝ in.



Abstieg, 2009, oil on canvas, 60 × 50 cm / 23<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.

## Biography

1960

Born in Leipzig

1981–86

Studied painting at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig under Professor Arno Rink

1986–90

Master student at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig

1993–98

Assistant at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig

2005–09

Professor for painting at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig

Since 2009

Honorary Professor at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig

Lives and works in Leipzig

## Awards

2010

– Prize of the Stiftung Bibel und Kultur

2005

– Finkenwerder Art Prize

2002

– Vincent van Gogh Bi-annual Award for Contemporary Art in Europe, Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht

1997

– Art Prize of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

## Works in Public Spaces

2007

– Glass window in the Elizabeth chapel of the Naumburger Dom

1999

– Contribution to the decoration of the House of the Bundestag Paul-Löbe-Haus, Berlin

## Solo Exhibitions

2010

– *Begleiter*, Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig / Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich

– Zacheta Panstwowa Galeria Sztuki, Warsaw

2009

– *Schiffland*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin

– German Embassy, London

2008

– David Zwirner, New York

2007

– *para*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York / Max Ernst Museum, Brühl

– *Neue Rollen*, Rudolphinum, Prague

2006

– *Neue Rollen. Bilder 1993 bis 2006*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg

– *Der Zeitraum*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Leipzig

– Musée d'Art contemporain de Montreal

2005

– CAC Málaga. Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga

– *Renegaten*, David Zwirner, New York

– *Works 1994–2002. The Leipziger Volkszeitung Collection*, Honolulu Academy of Arts

2004

– *Arbeiten auf Papier 2003–2004*, Albertina, Vienna

2003

– *Currents*, The Saint Louis Art Museum

2002

– Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht

– Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin

– David Zwirner, New York

2001

– *Neo Rauch. Zeichnungen und Gemälde aus der Sammlung Deutsche Bank*, Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin / Mannheimer Kunstverein / Neues Museum Weserburg Bremen / International Culture Centre, Krakow / Städtische Galerie Delmenhorst

2000

– Galerie Eigen + Art, Leipzig

– *Randgebiet*, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig / Haus der Kunst, Munich / Kunsthalle Zürich, Zurich

– David Zwirner, New York

1999

– Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin

1998

– Galerie der Stadt Backnang

1997

– Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig (Art prize award of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* 1997)

– *Manöver*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Leipzig

1995

– *Marineschule*, Overbeck-Gesellschaft, Lübeck

– Galerie Eigen + Art, Leipzig

– Dresdner Bank, Leipzig

1994

– Projektgalerie, Kunstverein Elsterpark e.V., Leipzig

1993

– Galerie Eigen + Art, Leipzig

## Group Exhibitions

2010

– *Das versprochene Land*, re-opening Albertinum, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden,

2009

– *Carte Blanche IX: Vor heimischer Kulisse – Kunst in der Sachsen Bank / Sammlung Landesbank Baden-Württemberg*, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig

– Galerie Eigen + Art, Leipzig

– *1989. Ende der Geschichte oder Beginn der Zukunft?*, Villa Schöningen, Potsdam / Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna

– *Compass in Hand: Selections from the Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

– *60–40–20*, Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig

– *Bilderträume. Die Sammlung Ulla und Heiner Pietzsch*, Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin

– *Realismus in Leipzig*, Drents Museum, Assen  
– *60 Jahre 60 Werke. Kunst aus der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949–2009*, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin  
– *Blattgold. Zeitgenössische Grafik*, Art fund of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden in the Saxonian treasury department, Dresden  
2008  
– *Third Guangzhou Triennial*, Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou  
– *Max Ernst. Dream and Revolution*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm  
– *Sommer bei Eigen + Art*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin  
– *Vertrautes Terrain. Aktuelle Kunst in & über Deutschland*, ZKM, Karlsruhe  
– *Living Landscapes. A Journey through German Art*, National Art Museum of China, Beijing  
– *Kopf oder Zahl. Leipziger Gesichter und Geschichten 1858–2008*, Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig  
– *The Leipzig Phenomena*, Mucsarnok, Budapest  
– *Hommage à Klaus Werner*, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig  
– *Carte Blanche. Freundliche Feinde*, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig  
– *Visite. Von Gerhard Richter bis Rebecca Horn. Werke aus der Sammlung zeitgenössischer Kunst der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn  
– *Collecting Collections*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
– *New Leipzig School*, Cobra Museum, Amstelveen  
2007  
– *Size Matters: XXL—Recent Large-Scale Paintings*, The Hudson Valley Center of Contemporary Art, Peekskill, New York  
– *Passion for Art. 35 Jahre Sammlung Essl*, Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg  
– *The Present—Acquisition Monique Zajfen*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam  
– *Flurstücke Nr. 2*, Collection of the Sachsen LB, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig  
– *Visit(e). Werke aus der Sammlung zeitgenössischer Kunst der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Palast der Schönen Künste, ING-Kulturzentrum am Kunstberg, Brussels  
– *Made in Leipzig. Bilder aus einer Stadt*, Essl Collection, Schloss Hartenfels, Torgau  
2006  
– *Der erste Blick/Die Sammlung GAG*, Neues Museum, Weimar  
– *Landschaft*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin  
– *Eye on Europe: Prints, Books & Multiples /1960 to Now*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

– *Tokyo Blossoms. Deutsche Bank Collection Meets Zaha Hadid*, Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo  
– *Made in Leipzig. Bilder aus einer Stadt*, Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg  
– *Full House. Gesichter einer Sammlung*, Kunsthalle Mannheim  
– *After Cézanne*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
– *Cold Hearts. Artists from Leipzig*, Arario Beijing  
– *Infinite Painting. Contemporary Painting and Global Realism*, Villa Manin—Centro d’Arte Contemporanea, Codroipo  
– *Essential Painting*, The National Museum of Art, Osaka  
– *Deutsche Bilder aus der Sammlung Ludwig*, Ludwig Galerie / Schloss Oberhausen  
– *VNG-art präsentiert deutsche Malerei*, Muzeum Rzeźby, Krokilarnia, Warsawa / Galeria Miejeska Arsenal, Poznan  
– *Back to Figure—Contemporary Painting*, Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung, Munich  
– *Männerbilder 1945–2005*, Museum Junge Kunst, Frankfurt/Oder  
– *“Was wäre ich ohne dich ...” 40 Jahre deutsche Malerei*, Galerie Hlavního Města Prahy, Prague  
– *RADAR: Selection from the collection of Vicki and Kent Logan*, Denver Art Museum  
– *Styles und Stile. Contemporary German Painting from the Scharpff Collection*, Municipal Art Gallery, Sofia  
– *“Surprise, Surprise,”* Institute for Contemporary Arts, London  
2005  
– *Generation X. Junge Kunst aus der Sammlung*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg  
– *Nur hier?*, exhibition series on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the gallery of the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig  
– *Carnegie International Acquisitions*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh  
– *Gegenwärtig: Geschichtenerzähler*, Hamburger Kunsthalle  
– *On Paper III*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh  
– *Contemporary Voices: Works from the UBS Art Collection*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
– *Portrait*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin  
– *Life After Death: New Paintings from the Rubell Family Collection*, MASS MoCA, North Adams / SITE Santa Fe / Katzen Arts Center Museum, Washington D. C. / Frye Art Museum, Seattle / Salt Lake Art Center, Salt Lake City / Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City (until 2008)  
– *La nouvelle peinture allemande*, Carré d’Art—Musée d’Art contemporain de Nîmes

– *25 Jahre Sammlung Deutsche Bank*, Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin  
– *(my private) HEROES*, MARTa, Herford  
– *Cold Hearts. Artists from Leipzig*, Arario Gallery, Chungnam  
– *From Leipzig*, The Cleveland Museum of Art  
– *Beautiful Cynicism*, Arario Beijing  
– *Goetz meets Falckenberg: Sammlung Goetz zu Gast in der Sammlung Falckenberg*, Kulturstiftung Phoenix Art, Hamburg  
– *Symbolic Space: The Intersection of Art & Architecture through the Use of Metaphor*, Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, Peekskill, New York  
2004  
– *Northern Light: Leipzig in Miami*, Rubell Family Collection, Miami  
– *Aus deutscher Sicht, Meisterwerke aus der Sammlung Deutsche Bank*, State Pusckin Museum, Moscow  
– *International*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh  
– *Not Afraid*, Rubell Family Collection, Miami  
– *Treasure Island*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg  
– *The Joy of My Dream—La Bienal Internacional de Arte Contemporaneo de Sevilla Territorio Livre—26a Bienal de São Paulo. Representações Nacionais Fabulism*, Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha  
– *Heißkalt. Aktuelle Malerei aus der Sammlung Scharpff*, Hamburger Kunsthalle / Staatsgalerie Stuttgart  
– *Disparities & Deformations: Our Grotesque*, Site Santa Fe International Biennial  
– *Perspectives @ 25: A Quarter Century of New Art in Houston*, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston  
2003  
– *Sommer bei Eigen + Art*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin  
– *Berlin—Moskau / Moskau—Berlin 1950–2000*, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin / State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow  
– *For the Record: Drawing Contemporary Life*, Vancouver Art Gallery  
– *© Europe Exists*, Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art (MMCA) of Thessaloniki  
– *Outlook*. International Art Exhibition, Athens  
– *Die Erfindung der Vergangenheit*, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich  
– *Update #6. Monumente der Melancholie*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg  
2002  
– *Mare Balticum—1000 Jahre Mythos, Geschichte und Kunst*, Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen  
– *Eight Propositions in Contemporary Drawing*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
– *Cher Peintre, peins-moi / Lieber Maler, male mir / Dear Painter, Paint Me*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris / Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna / Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main

– *Sommer bei Eigen + Art*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Leipzig  
– *Paintings on the Move*, Kunstmuseum Basel  
– *Pertaining to Painting*, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston / Austin Museum of Art  
2001  
– *The Mystery of Painting*, Sammlung Goetz, Munich  
– *Contemporary German Art / The Last Thirty Years / Thirty Artists from Germany*, Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath Art Complex, Bangalore / National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi  
– *Plateau of Mankind. La Biennale di Venezia*, Venice  
– *Squatters*, Museu Serralves, Porto / Witte de With, Rotterdam  
– *Wirklichkeit in der Zeitgenössischen Malerei*, Städtische Galerie Delmenhorst  
2000  
– *Contemporary Art from Germany*, National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai / Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kalkutta  
– *After the Wall*, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin  
– *Salon*, The Delfina Studio Trust, London  
– *Malkunst. Pittura d’oggi a Berlino*, Fondazione Mudima, Milan  
– *Bildwechsel*, Kunstverein Freunde Aktueller Kunst im Städtischen Museum Zwickau and Kunstsammlung Gera-Orangerie  
1999  
– *The Golden Age*, ICA, London  
– *Malerei*, INIT Kunsthalle Berlin  
– *After the Wall*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm  
– *German Open. Gegenwartskunst in Deutschland*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg  
– *Drawing and Painting*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin  
– *Children of Berlin*, P. S.1, New York  
1998  
– *Transmission*, Espace des Arts, Chalon-sur-Saône  
– *Die Macht des Alters—Strategien der Meisterschaft*, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin / Kunstmuseum Bonn  
– *Vitale Module*, Kunstverein Ludwigshafen am Rhein / Muzeum Sztuki Mieszczanskiej, Wrocław  
1997  
– *Vitale Module*, Kunsthaus Dresden / Städtische Galerie e.o. Plauen  
– *Need for Speed*, Grazer Kunstverein, Graz  
1996  
– *Der Blick ins 21ste*, Kunstverein Düsseldorf  
– *Contemporary Art at Deutsche Bank*, London  
1995  
– *Echoes*, Goethe House, New York  
1994  
– *1. Sächsische Kunstausstellung*, Dresden

# Colophon

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Cover illustration Leipzig: *Krönung I* (detail), 2008 (p. 89)

PINAKOTHEK DER MODERNE, MUNICH

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Exhibition  
Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich

April 20 – August 15, 2010

Neo Rauch

HATJE  
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Paintings

## Foreword

Born in Leipzig in 1960, Neo Rauch is undoubtedly the most internationally significant and most discussed German painter of his generation. His paintings are like a *theatrum mundi*, overlapping scenes that gradually lend a surreal aura to their formal verism and their narrative. Following the political changes of 1989 and the ensuing great socio-political upheavals in East Germany, Neo Rauch primarily produced images of the rebuilding of the landscape and the dismantling of an economy that, until then, had been kept alive artificially. Shortly thereafter, his focus shifted to researchers, artists, and paramilitary-looking service personnel. Whereas his work until the late nineteen-nineties was oriented around aspects of drawing, thereafter, the characteristic style of his painting and a more markedly colorful palette gained the upper hand. Moreover, Rauch expanded the personnel of his paintings—dispersed English-landed nobility; Biedermeier aesthetes; activists equipped for an expedition through somnambulistic worlds in which actions and spaces merge. Ultimately, it remains obscure which goals the figures pursue, and we can see them as being closely related to robotic beings or toy figurines.

Rauch's works belong to the tradition of the Leipzig School, at whose center Bernhard Heisig and Arno Rink were active for two generations. It abandons classical iconography for subjective forms, and leads viewers via the trail of the narrative into the field of the mysterious, where they have to watch out for their own signposts to find their way through the interlocking pictorial zones.

Neo Rauch's unmistakably, individual painting stands in a line of art historical tradition for which Titian, Tintoretto, and El Greco can be named as precedents. The artist himself has identified Beckmann, Bacon, Beuys, and Baselitz as modern points of reference. Neo Rauch's oeuvre reflects the complex moods of our time, an age in which an intense self-confidence with regard to what is doable encounters a deep uncertainty in difficult global circumstances, where euphoria over and disgust with the media describe a schizophrenic picture, and where fear of terror and catastrophe feed a need for security and contemplation.

The Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich and the Museum der bildenden Künste in Leipzig are dedicating a comprehensive retrospective exhibition to Neo Rauch that will be shown in both venues simultaneously. The particular form this cooperation has taken is an expression of the artist's art historical significance. Neo Rauch calls this project *Begleiter* (Companions), and this exhibition title is as open as the title of his paintings. *Begleiter*—the word can signify compiled personality types, certain historical witnesses, fellow

travelers yet to be identified, or supporters, but they could also be less identifiable feelings, positive or negative, guardian angels, or recurring nightmares of a life-path that, in the meantime, has covered fifty years.

A total of 120 paintings are on view in Leipzig and Munich. Selected in close cooperation with Neo Rauch, the works are taken from a period that began around twenty years ago. Many of the paintings, some of which are large-format works, have never been shown before in Germany. Strong demand led to a paradoxical situation in which the paintings ended up in private hands almost as soon as they were finished in the studio. Both parts of the exhibition deliberately dispense with a strict chronological order for the works. Rather, they are subdivided according to “atmospheric” aspects, which enable the characteristic, oft recurring themes, motifs, and artistic conceptions to emerge all the more clearly.

Neo Rauch first appeared before the public in a large exhibition in 1997. At the time, he received a prize from the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, which, together with the Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig, had organized his “personal exhibition.” Neo Rauch's biography as an artist is characteristic of those associated with the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig. Like Bernhard Heisig, Werner Tübke, Sighard Gille, Arno Rink, and many others before him, he was active at this academy as a student, assistant lecturer, and professor. His oeuvre is rooted in a tradition practiced there of the storyteller and arranger of myths with a distinct mastery of the craft. The end of his teaching activity in 2009 has therefore been interpreted, not without reason, as a caesura, and as the end of a historical chapter in his education and career as a teacher.

The first large retrospective of Neo Rauch's works was held exactly ten years ago and it was also organized in a close collaboration between Leipzig and Munich. Back then, it was the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig that cooperated with the Haus der Kunst in Munich as part of an exhibition tour. Thus, Neo Rauch is not unknown to the public in Munich. A few years later, shortly after the Pinakothek der Moderne opened, Rauch was also shown there, in a dialogue with the sculptor Manfred Pernice, who was almost exactly the same age. At around the same time, PIN: Freunde der Pinakothek der Moderne, acquired the first Neo Rauch painting for the museum. *Wahl*, a work from 1998, is the symbol of the current exhibition for the Munich portion of the show whereas Leipzig is advertising with a coronation scene it purchased in 2008, which is being shown here publicly for the first time.

Without the many lenders to this show, many of whom are private parties, it would not have been possible to offer such a comprehensive, multifaceted survey that reveals

an evolution in the artist's work that was formulated with great mastery. We are sincerely grateful to all of them. Such an exhibition project could not be realized without the help of third parties. In this case, we have to thank, above all, the Sparkassen-Finanzgruppe: for the support of the exhibition in Leipzig, we are grateful to the Ostdeutsche Sparkassenstiftung together with the Sparkasse Leipzig; for the sponsorship of the exhibition in Munich, we are indebted to the Bayerische Sparkassenstiftung, the Kulturfonds of the Deutsche Sparkassen- und Giroverband, as well as the Sparkasse München. Their combined generous commitment made it possible to implement these two exhibitions. Our gratitude also goes out to VNG—Verbundnetz Gas AG as well as to the associations of supporters of both the Förderer des Museums der bildenden Künste Leipzig and PIN: Freunde der Pinakothek der Moderne for their active support.

Bernhart Schwenk in Munich initiated the project and was responsible for curating it. Simone Kober was responsible, in close cooperation with Claudia Klugmann in Leipzig, for transportation and insurance. Jörg Dittmer and Sylva Dörfer conceived the publicity campaign and marketing in Leipzig, which was handled in Munich by Tine Nehler and her colleagues. Dietmar Stegemann and his team in Munich, and Torsten Cech and his team in Leipzig handled the installation of the exhibition at the respective venue. Conservation was in the capable hands of Rüdiger Beck and his team in Leipzig as well as those of Irene Glanzer and Kerstin Luber in Munich. Steffi Klopsch and Robert Kirchmaier directed the administrative activities of this anything but ordinary cooperative project. As representatives of all those who contributed to the project, we owe them our thanks.

The present bibliophile exhibition catalogue documents both parts of the exhibition and supplements their selection of works with additional illustrations. We are grateful to Annette Kulenkampff of Hatje Cantz Verlag for her commitment to this book as publisher. In collaboration with her team, Maria Magdalena Koehn, a reliable partner in dialogue with Neo Rauch regarding all questions of aesthetic communication, produced an extraordinary design for the book. Descriptions of the works by art historians, critics, and fellow artists, such as Michaël Borremans, Hartwig Ebersbach, Jonathan Meese, and Luc Tuymans, provide very exceptional access to this oeuvre. The essay by Uwe Tellkamp, written especially for this occasion, offers a unique approach to this oeuvre. We are deeply indebted to all who contributed to the success of this publication.

To Gerd Harry Lybke and his team from the Galerie Eigen + Art, Leipzig/Berlin, we would like to express our thanks for coming to our aid on numerous occasions. Neo

Rauch supported the exhibition and publication with great sensitivity from the outset. His personal contribution of publishing two lithographs especially for the exhibition venues deserves our utmost appreciation. We are therefore extremely grateful to the artist and his wife Rosa Loy.

HANS-WERNER SCHMIDT  
director, Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig

KLAUS SCHRENK  
general director, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich

## The Power of the Untimely— Neo Rauch: Painter of the Present

“I do not know what meaning classical studies could have for our time if they were not untimely—that is to say, acting counter to our time and thereby acting on your time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come.”

Friedrich Nietzsche, 1873<sup>1</sup>

The small figure stands motionless in the center of the otherwise restless painting. A belt of explosives is wrapped around his upper body. Who notices the uncanny character, however, and the danger he emanates? It is certainly neither the man in hat and coat rushing past, nor the young woman watching her dog on its outstretched leash as it gnaws on a bone. Standing closest to the small figure is a uniformed custodian of the law, who merely motions for him to move on.

Nervous tension lies in the air. People are holding up signs whose messages cannot be read. They have assembled in front of a building; a man is leaning out of one of the windows, his left arm outstretched. In the foreground, unnoticed by the others, a naked man is squatting, tied to a small, bare tree. The blank newspaper headlines on a circular stand refuse to comment on the event. Instead, black disks sail down along the right edge of the painting, each marked with a capital letter. Taken together, they spell the word D-E-M-O-S. As so often in the work of Neo Rauch, whose painting from 2004 we are looking at here, this title has many meanings.

For the ancient Greeks, the word *demos* stood for their idea of a cultivated people, which fulfilled its obligations to civilization within the framework of mutually recognized laws and availed itself of its political rights. Neo Rauch's *Demos*, by contrast, conveys a different, less focused image of this idea of the people: Order and anarchy dominate his painting as does engagement and ignorance. The possible terrorist act contrasts with the peaceful expression of opinion, the animal with the human being, play with seriousness, and the collective gesture with the individual one. When spoken, moreover, the word *demos* echoes the word *demon*, the restless, living spirit of the past. Neo Rauch's painting, in summary, is about the threatened state of a society and about its political culture, about how one acts in public, and actively shapes history.



*Demos*, 2004, oil on canvas, 300 × 210 cm / 118 1/8 × 82 5/8 in.

To what era does *Demos* refer? Does the painting depict a scene from the twenty-first century? The architecture and the clothing of the figures leave this open. The pale colors of the painting recall a color print from the nineteen-fifties, and the woodcut-like figures could have been taken from a prewar broadsheet. Nevertheless, the painting's immediate, emphatic, and old-fashioned representationalism distinguishes it from other omnipresent images that surround us, especially in the media. Perhaps, the painting derives its charm and unmistakable character precisely from its peculiarly “analogous” aura. Is a young painter telling an ancient story? Or is an ancient painter telling a modern one? Wherein lies the topicality of this painting? The viewer is confronted with a timeless historicity.

Friedrich Nietzsche referred to his own *meditations* published in the mid-eighteen-seventies as “untimely,” in which the then thirty-year-old took a critical look at something “of which our time is rightly proud”—namely, education in history, an achievement of the Enlightenment.<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche criticized the one-sidedness of a logical, rational worldview that risked ossifying life into scientific systems and schemas

of thought, and which ignored essential areas of life—namely, everything that could not be controlled, explained, and calculated. A comparable criticism accompanies the current media age in the context of a new Enlightenment,<sup>3</sup> since the ever more rapid availability of information and tightly networked structures of communication present new challenges. These concern the discrepancy between the constant production of knowledge and its qualitative process, and the creation of meaningful contexts.

The twenty-first century critique of the ideas and achievements of modernism is also reflected in contemporary art, especially in photography and media art since these genres confront most directly the iconic turn: a visual culture that has become overpowering. Consequently, documentary pictorial strategies are often employed, because they are particularly effective at revealing the collapse of reality and its depiction, the congruencies of reality and fiction.

Within the spectrum of contemporary art, especially when compared to photography, video and installation, paintings on canvas can sometimes seem anachronistic at the beginning of the twenty-first century, specifically because painting is often associated with a kind of preliminary stage of aesthetic consciousness. Painting seems to lack the critical distance that the technology of a still or video camera brings with it. Conversely, a critical distance to experienced reality and its depiction could result precisely from the alienation from painting that resulted, and thus, painting, in particular, can provide an occasion for precise observation. Using the expressive possibilities of painting—an artificial colorism and obviously posed, pseudoscenic composition—Neo Rauch's *Demos* directs the viewer's interest to the state of a self-satisfied society that, with its focus on the activity of the individual, easily forgets what collective action can mean and what it can achieve. For the moment, the person protesting with his mere presence on the cold ground, like a martyr for the idea of community, is tied to a little tree whose snapped branch can likewise be read as a metaphor.

Now, an important stylistic feature in Neo Rauch's oeuvre condenses into a statement of content—the broadsheet, printed quality, the emphasis of the planar. With this character, the painting rejects all illusionism and reveals the model-like, sometimes even clichéd aspect of a motif all the more clearly. The collage-like combination of its individual elements results in an unwieldy context, where the cut-out-like *dramatis personae*, with their various costumes and poses, are like the bit players in the “marionette theater” of a “blessed cabinet of abnormalities,” of the “Luna Park” at whose mercy George Grosz felt as early as 1918. In his “Gesang an die Welt” (Song to the world), Grosz described himself as the saddest person in Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Reflections on media sometimes become a theme in Rauch's painting, as the painting *Wahl* of 1998 clearly demonstrates. The work recalls one of the most striking media for propaganda, the poster, which calls for immediate action, as in an election. Here, too, it could be about façades, about parallel plans of reality and fiction. Rather than convey a hermetically sealed worldview—as the propaganda poster intends—the pictorial space in *Wahl* is, however, broken down like an optical illusion of figure and ground. Is the painting actually divided into an inner world and an outside world that surrounds it? Or, is precisely this separation eliminated? In any case, the rearward, step-like construction does not much resemble a stable wall, but at most, a folding screen while the trees visible behind it do not resemble nature, but rather, the work of a scenery painter. Are we actually peeking into an artist's studio, as we first thought? That initially confident assumption increasingly evaporates. The easel-like stand on which giant panels rest, the black, cylindrical volumes—all these objects could be the utensils of a painter. This assumption is, however, indefinite. Likewise, the man standing on a ladder, with his two different heads, also turns out to lead a double existence. Who is this Janus-faced man? What could the black mask of his alter ego signify? The assumption that the human being, like the room, is divided into an external role and an inner side recalls C. G. Jung's personality distinction, between “persona” (as a “segment of the collective psyche”) and “anima” or “animus.”<sup>5</sup>

With its open boundaries and abrupt cuts, with its overpainting, traces of drops and splatters especially around the edges, the painting de-emphasizes the “magical” product of the completed work of art and instead, directs the gaze to the process of creation, the production of the painting as such. This is clearly an ongoing, constantly repeating, and never completed process. *Wahl* does not seem to be concerned with the idea of the individual, unmistakable image, if only because all the “paintings” on the easels depict the same reduced motif on a black background: circles with three white dots inside. This formation vaguely recalls the international warning signs for danger—high voltage, radioactive materials, or radiation—but it also recalls braille. One might also think of black dominos and of the skill required to make a row of them fall down elaborately.

In any case, experiencing reality in this painting turns out to be a constellation of energies that is constantly transforming, a series of decisions in which it always remains doubtful that the possibility of a real choice ever existed. This scenario could be interpreted as a fundamental grappling with the potential of psychological conflict to which people are exposed when they act. The painting reflects a conception of oneself, located between personal ambition



Wahl, 1998, oil on canvas, 300 × 200 cm / 118 1/8 × 78 3/4 in.

and the expectations of society; the work is also concerned with the conditions under which paintings are produced and, once created, how they gradually escape the influence of their author.

Mediations on time and the specific handing of the historical can also be discerned in another work by Neo Rauch. They could offer exemplary answers to the questions of “why” and “how” the artist repeatedly employs “exhausted” materials and “unusable” vocabulary in many of his paintings.<sup>6</sup> *Zoll* (p. 10) directs the viewer's gaze to an outdoor rural scene, a forested landscape that stretches far into the depths of the painting, through which a turquoise river runs sluggishly. The buildings located on the loamy bank appear to have been placed in this landscape as isolated objects. There is a tall brick façade that terminates the view on the left side of the painting, the fragment of a monumental wall with gargoyle-like projections, and a platform of wooden boards on which four people are acting, as though

they are on a stage. Three men and a woman are standing in the center of the dramatic, almost threatening-looking scene. They make the ritual of a border check, the theme of the painting. Two suitcases are opened and their contents examined. Whereas the woman and the man standing beside her are trying to maintain composure, the two uniformed border guards—in an emphatically indifferent, impersonal, and expressionless pose—are trying to uncover something. The men discover a large, white, bonelike form in one of the two suitcases. Evidence of a terrible crime? The second suitcase contains a crystalline stone formation that, like a stalagmite, looms straight up, phallus-like, in front of the searching inspectors.

Where and, above all, when does the event shown take place? The word *Zoll* (customs) in tall, inadequately fastened and thus, very much ambiguous letters on the brick wall suggests it is a German border, though in today's largely united Europe, no borders of this sort exist in Germany. The subdued, dull colors, and the joyless personnel also make one initially think of past times, of decline and phasing out, not of the present. But caution is of the order: The wooden stage appears to be under construction, the excavated sand is still visible. The grass has yet to grow over this situation. The banister-like barrier of wooden beams also looks new and rather temporary, and the birch stump in the painting's foreground looks recently cut. The vagueness between past, present, and future corresponds to the overcast, faint sky. As with *Demos*, in *Zoll*, it is difficult to clearly determine the time of day or the season.

Probably this Neo Rauch painting is also less “untimely” than it initially appears. The signs of a construction site, continued building, argue for that. Similarly, the backdrop-like architectural elements recall a variable constellation, a kind of laboratory situation. Neo Rauch concentrates everything that concerns a possible action into a kind of interim stage (before or after the action) and confronts the viewer with an overarching meaning, the substrate of what “customs” could be understood to mean. Increasingly, the painting transforms from an illusionistic narrative work to an abstraction projection screen. What tariff is being collected here? On what kind of a border is this check taking place? What marks the real boundaries of the painting and how do they run?

Like an old wound reopened, the old-fashioned-seeming painting has a power that functions undiminished, a kind of trauma that evokes old borders and draws new ones, a drama that has never ended, and perhaps will never end. It recalls the so-called historical images of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the opening of the border between the two Germanys and the end of the Cold War, which, in fact, signify neither a beginning nor an end in the larger context.

Where are the new borders? What are the new crimes? Real walls and borders are rarely seen, but often, it is precisely the invisible ones that hamper people. The figures in the painting *Zoll* are not actors, but prisoners of a worldview that prefer an authentic, that is to say, autonomous, inner life. At times, the viewers of the painting may find themselves prisoners as well, namely, of their prejudices toward an aesthetic supposedly stuck in the past.

According to Sigmund Freud, the discontentment with civilization he described in 1929 was the expression of an imbalance between natural human prerequisites and needs, on the one hand, and the rules and conventions of human society, on the other, whereby the latter stand in the way of the former.<sup>7</sup> This imbalance, according to Freud, increases as a culture becomes more developed. His theory could explain why, in the secularization and democratization of society, in parallel with the high spirits of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, there were a series of approaches to thinking that remained skeptical about the unconditional nature of the new ideas, which were questioned critically. From them developed, around 1800, the most significant and important of these counter-movements: Romanticism, which sought to break down the inflexible dividing lines between science and art, and to treat the unconscious or mystical of equal value. Anti-Enlightenment currents accompanied high modernism in the twentieth century from the beginning. They sought alternatives to a rational, technocratic modernity, which was, ultimately,

the expression of a reevaluation of a field repressed or suppressed by the Enlightenment. Dadaism and Surrealism were the most important of these, and the work of Neo Rauch has already been connected with their ideas. The objective of both Romanticism and Surrealism was liberation, reviving primal, yet timeless forces that had been buried by an unquestionable image of the world and history self-confidently anchored in the here and now. The existence and significance of these forces are more clearly part of the consciousness of the general public and, with them, lies the need to intervene on behalf of their significance. For the “discontentment with culture” was reinforced at the beginning of the twenty-first century by the precept of a supposedly unrestricted freedom. The attraction of the latter is the unlimited satisfaction of desires to consume, and needs for security, and precisely by that very means, threaten to change suddenly into a situation of compulsion, a “dictatorship of freedom.”<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, ensuring freedom goes hand in hand with restricting the possibilities of choice; it is based on control and surveillance, the satisfaction of the world on a system of centralized orders. And this very world-order could become its own undoing, as Aldous Huxley feared in his famous novel *Brave New World* of 1932: namely, that the very thing we love will do us in.<sup>9</sup> This pessimistic view makes it understandable that numerous philosophers, sociologists, and artists, but also natural scientists are increasingly confronting us with dystopias—that is to say, negative utopias—since the utopias of mod-



Zoll, 2004, oil on canvas, 210 × 400 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 157<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.

ernism proved impossible. Neo Rauch’s painting *Der Garten des Bildhauers* (p. 12) also promises nothing good. The location of the action is a large property with tall trees and several buildings. The “garden” is immersed in dramatic light—nocturnal light or, more likely, that of a gathering storm. Something unusual appears to have happened.

Several people have stopped on the wide roads that run around the house. A couple is approaching the large entrance gate from the left: a woman in a bright, yellow dress and a male companion supporting the woman, who is wavering slightly. It is unclear whether the two have come from the luxury car of (probably) American make, standing in the background. In any case, a second man is already waiting for them at the gate, with an inviting gesture. The wide open door of the tall gate, through which bright light seems to stream, separates this group of figures from three others. Two men have combined forces to carry away a third man who has collapsed. It cannot be said with certainty whether the red puddle has anything to do with his lifeless posture. There is, at least, no visual contact between the groups, and it almost seems as if such contact is supposed to be avoided.

Particularly striking is a wide stripe that crosses the painting, which is painted largely naturalistically, descending diagonally on the left side as though on a second plane. The garish green and sulfur yellow coloring of this semi-transparent stripe degrades the events of the painting just described, and moves them to the background, plunging them into a darkness that is all the more gloomy for it. This makes the light the main motif, though it should probably not be seen as a mystical or divine illumination of the sort seventeenth-century painters tried to depict. Rather, it evokes associations of some kind of technical lighting, perhaps a theatrical spotlight, but also, some kind of mistake, perhaps an unintentional dissolve. This refraction through the medium defines the painting as something artificially made, something painted, and it signals that the viewer is dealing here with an indefinable, but by no means, unconsciously perceived reality.

Organoid objects are borne into the painting along this stripe-like zone; their relationship to the events of the painting literally remains up in the air, as does their nature, dimensions, and possible orientation or movement. Are they elements of a micro- or macrocosm? Or, are they art objects? After all, as the painting’s title indicates, we are in a sculptor’s garden. The ambiguity of their existence is heightened further by the white, narrow appendices that protrude from the objects, applied as if they belonged to a sewing pattern or a paper model kit.

If we are living in a kind of age of Enlightenment today, then *Der Garten des Bildhauers* is a painting that resists, with

particular intensity, the cheerful mood of enlightening, since gloominess and hopelessness dominate the image. It depicts a terrifying vision based, above all, on the fact that the dimensions of the event are not perceived by those involved and, in part, they do not even wish to perceive them. Who knows what is being performed? We are seduced into looking primarily where the big spotlights focus their light, and we then attribute crucial significance to what is illuminated there. But there are many other processes we do not perceive. We block them out; they remain in the dark.

“For one road to reality is by way of *pictures*.”<sup>10</sup> This often cited remark by Elias Canetti makes it clear that every excerpt from the space of our experience, whether painted, photographed, or filmed, begins by isolating it, making it autonomous, and giving it its own context, which we call reality. More than ever, we are surrounded by (pseudo) realities created by images, since the supply and consumption of images is larger than ever before.

Perhaps this iconic turn can also explain the contradiction that the twenty-first century is an age of enlightenment and of obscurity at once. The countless traditional and new images increasingly mix; they revise myths, rewrite them, invent alternative identities, create other images, expose, manipulate, celebrate, and condemn. The incipient twenty-first century, which is both enlightening and enlightened, especially as a result of the large number of images, also turns out to be an era of public lies, and, sometimes, of deliberate misinformation.

For that reason, Neo Rauch’s paintings, which are seen as “premodern,” trigger highly topical associations. Consciously untimely, they work with a historicity that reveals the historical not as an unquestioned fact, but remains semantically open in a timeless form of retelling. They make various (re)interpretations possible.

Neo Rauch’s painting addresses social themes and the psychological state of contemporary culture, whose possibilities for an outsider’s view are greater today than ever before. At the same time, however, Rauch’s paintings show that the people’s abilities to see and understand themselves or others are insufficient, and perhaps even atrophying. In any case, these abilities do not go hand in hand with greater consciousness or even more responsible action. In this ambiguity, Rauch’s work conveys a specific human state between a will to enlighten and being enlightened, on the one hand, and, on the other, a dim notion that clear limits exist on being enlightened, which are far more powerful than all the small, absurd attempts to draw boundaries of the human will to order, and its corresponding systems.

In Neo Rauch’s early work, these contradictory ideas are conveyed in a relatively restrained way. One early painting is entitled *Das Haus*. It shows a small building in the shadow



Der Garten des Bildhauers, 2008, oil on canvas, 300 × 420 cm / 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 165<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.

of an enormous wall, a wall of muteness and silence. Another work, *Staudamm* (p. 139) suggests repressed situations and suppressed tension that could unfold in free energy. Over the course of his artistic development, Neo Rauch leaves more and clearer clues. Figures and constellations of figures become evident. They reflect, in their suggested actions, familiar events, perhaps even citing them. Through these citations, they come into contact with familiar contexts that Western culture has created during its own evolution or which individuals have cobbled together before the images call these contexts into question and mix them up. As always, Neo Rauch is interested in creating a balance between individual and collective action. To that end, the artist uses a language that is articulated in a timeless historicity in order to afford a fundamental, sometimes even existential reading beyond all narrative, comparable to the supposed hermeticism of a nonrepresentational painting. Superficially tied to a historical time, while on closer inspection, released from time, Neo Rauch's painting reveals

a social criticism that argues all the more powerful from the distance of the seemingly untimely. Its effect, which initially produces alienation, enables the paintings to engage actively with ways of thinking and acting that have become ossified. With their dystopian potential, they demand critical questioning of that visual vocabulary which has been unjustly appropriated. Ultimately, thus, they argue for a freedom from aesthetic prejudice.

BERNHART SCHWENK  
curator, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich

## Notes

- 1 Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, UK, 1997), p. 60.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 See, for example, Neil Postman, *Building a Bridge to the Eighteenth Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future* (New York, 1999).
- 4 George Grosz, *Ach knallige Welt, du Lunapark: Gesammelte Gedichte*, ed. Klaus Peter Dencker (Munich, 1986).
- 5 C. G. Jung, "The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious," in *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, second ed. (London, 1999).
- 6 Harald Kunde, in *Neo Rauch: Randgebiet*, exh. cat. Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig; Haus der Kunst München, Munich; Kunsthalle Zürich, Zurich (Leipzig, 2000), p. 33.
- 7 Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (Vienna, 1930); trans. Joan Riviere as *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York, 1930).
- 8 Ulrich Woelk has described this "dictatorship of freedom" as a system of entertainment industries and market mechanisms within which we can act freely but which we cannot escape; see "Wie Dystopien vor Fehlentwicklungen warnen: Ulrich Woelk im Gespräch mit Katrin Heise," Deutschlandradio Kultur, January 7, 2010, <http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/thema/1100334/> (accessed February 16, 2010).
- 9 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London, 1932).
- 10 Elias Canetti, *The Torch in My Ear*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York, 1982), p. 113.



Das Haus, 1996, oil on canvas, 196 × 137 cm / 77<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 54 in.

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\* not shown in the Munich exhibition



Quecksilber, 2003, oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Überborte, 2010, oil on canvas, 300 × 250 cm / 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Das Blaue, 2006, oil on canvas, 300 × 420 cm / 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 165<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Kalimuna, 2010, oil on canvas, 300 × 500 cm / 118 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 196 $\frac{7}{8}$  in.



Fastnacht, 2010, oil on canvas, 250 × 300 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Das Haus, 1996, oil on canvas, 196 × 137 cm / 77 1/8 × 54 in.

## Das Haus, 1996

There are dreams and there are dreams. The usual ones make peculiar short films from the stuff of life, but occasionally, dreams are of a mysterious crystalline clarity that emerges with visionary force. And there are paintings: those that resist that first look, and others that seem to have been waiting for it. I stood in front of *Das Haus* with my mouth agape. I fell into it as though into a dream of the second sort. What was it about this painting that had me in its clutches? I asked myself the first time I saw it, and I still don't know.

With this title *Das Haus*, the painter tries to direct the viewer's gaze to the lower edge of the painting: Here we find a pile of lumber, colorful squared slats of wood reminiscent of matches. It is from this that three tiny construction workers are building "the house," which is looking to be more of a hut or a carnival tent beneath trees, for they are building a stage inside, perhaps also a false ceiling beneath which it would be impossible to stand upright. The scene is more sketchy than detailed in its execution; the house is more of an idea or model than sturdy actuality. Settlers build their houses this way. Above all, however, the house is threatened by the dark massif of perpendicular brushstrokes that fills the vast remaining part of the vertical format, literally pressing down on the small scene in the lower quarter.

And there is a path, too, leading right into the middle of the dark—well, what? Sky? Beechwood forest soaring into the sky? That epochal curtain that divides the painter's oeuvre into a before and after? What will soon characterize the painter's oeuvre, the amply figurative and colorfully narrative, is this not forcing its way into this painting? A window into the studio then; the painter allows a look at how the peculiar is absorbed into his work. Or is it a painting on the act of painting in general; the membrane between the visibility of the painting and its dark sources.

This may be so—additional paintings ignited by this painting. Prismatic scatter effects. One thing seems certain, however: it is the strong, creaturely tension that constitutes the painting's impact. Extruding and shooting into a great blackness—into a painting that does without a narrative, without colors or the work of man, a painting that is almost abstract—a painting that is narrative magma and color. Build a house at the foot of nothing, in the shadow of abstraction. Is that it—the humanum?

Caution! Despite the leading title, it is not "the house" that first attracted attention, it was the massif. The chaos in its cosmic blackness is the *ur*-fascination. Again, caution! For this, too, is true: Without the house, the chaos would just be a color field, a black Rothko. However fragile, however

mixed its purpose, the construction continues. The house is still empty and the anti-matter overpowering, but soon it will fill up. The curtain will lift, the chaos will clear, the genesis, painted and extinguished by painters, will be revived. A painting of annunciation.

WOLFGANG BÜSCHER  
journalist and author



Modell, 1998, oil on MDF, 160 × 105 cm / 63 × 41<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.

## Modell, 1998

Neo Rauch's strategic pictorial solutions reach a culminating point in *Modell*. It becomes clear in this work that the world of Rauch's paintings that seems almost surreal is the result of an inscrutable game of figures and scenery, symbols and quotations. We enter the pictorial world of *Modell* through a window motif—as if looking out a train window onto a landscape. On closer inspection, however, this landscape proves to be highly artificial, and the fleeting moment of the glimpse out the window exists in a peculiar relationship with the arrangedness of the outside world.

A model forms the focus of the work, executed from a central perspective and showing a landscape on which apartment buildings have been constructed. Within this seemingly banal motif, upon closer examination, we discover, the tips of red armament projectiles in the green of the grass; these deprive the model of its partiality and, despite their barely perceptible size, they are the source of a subtle threat that extends across the painting's events. Dominating these events are figures whose graphic design, pedestals, and white tabs reveal them to be cardboard cut-outs. The presence of these figures radiates a lingering uncertainty: The first figure, a man in uniform balancing on top of the lower part of the window frame, holds a flame-thrower and moves toward another figure at the right. This second figure—a unit of man, tip of armament projectile, and square symbol—appears to be placed further back at the edge of the model. We encounter the third motif, of two men behind the model and above the flamethrower. With an outstretched arm, one is showing the other another instance of the square symbol, which lies in the viewer's line of vision. A further variation of this symbol is cut off by the right edge of the painting, as is an oversized *M*, which not only forms the beginning of the painting's title, but also leaves room for other interpretations.

The game-piece figures, whose activities dominate the painting's events, are all roughly the same size irrespective of their position on the picture plane. This leads to a considerable confusion of spatial perception when viewing the painting. The figures defy perspectival foreshortening, a situation that then reinforces the character of their interchangeability. The inhabitants—or are these invading forces?—turn out to be stereotypes whose right to exist is limited to their respective functions.

The painting has once more become a stage on which those acting can be shifted back and forth at will without a recognizable plot to connect them. The work becomes a symbol of the deliberations of the painter; when assigning his painted figures positions on the picture plane—or in his

picture-world—such planning games can continue *ad infinitum*. Neither landscape nor figures seem certain here. The outside world is revealed to be a dream world. And this spills over into the viewer's immediate space—for the two spaces, that of the viewer and that of the viewed, are not really separated by the window. The man with the flame-thrower is already on the threshold, thus bringing the events of the painting into the real space of the viewer. It is here that the stage-like world beyond the window encroaches on our space and becomes an immanent threat. Or is it all very different? Is it that when we are looking through the window we dream ourselves into the world lying before us? This can also, however, only be a dream.

HOLGER BROEKER

curator, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg



Sucher, 1997, oil on canvas, 60 × 45 cm / 23<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 17<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.

## Sucher, 1997

A painting of listening, a painting of seeking:  
a painting of artist and art.

“Eine Straße musst du gehen, die noch keiner ging zurück” (You must travel a road, by which no one has yet returned). With single-mindedness, in ridiculously loose suspender pants, he hurries toward a gray, painting future, in mined terrain, with the detector, in a concentrated, listening search of the critical explosion that could radically change everything, but is not supposed to (p. 31). In so doing, he fails to notice that the big bang is, indeed, already happening, that the flash of inspiration is igniting, that the meteor is striking. But the easel (is it even an easel?) and the paint cans isolated by a bright light (are they even paint cans?)—everything is several sizes too large for the listening little man; the comet (is it even a comet?) is actually almost missing, not quite hitting, though a little bit of the universe’s dust does seem to have snared the painting.

Self-doubt and self-assurance in balance: that is art.  
Need one say more?

ULF KÜSTER  
curator, Fondation Beyeler, Riehen / Basel

## Sucher, 1997

*Sucher* is a small painting, relatively sketchily and simply structured (p. 31). It makes due with less than ten shades, a single figure, and four props: a can of green paint, a can of yellow paint, an easel, and a metal detector, complete with headphones, such as that used by treasure hunters, grave robbers, and deminers. It is a *pièce de résistance* about the life of an artist as Neo Rauch sees it. It is hard to say whether it plays with the clichés or is a thoroughly honest struggle for artistic positioning. It was painted in 1997, when Rauch was first finding success.

The man with the detector wears National People’s Army pants, recognizable by the y-shaped suspenders. The pale olive green is military-like, but it is also the conventional color for machine tools and *Ölsockel* [a vernacular term for the lower parts of walls painted with a kind of paint intended to keep moisture out]—thus a very familiar shade in central Germany around the time of Communism’s collapse, a time and place which left its mark on Rauch. The fellow scanning the path is evidently a painter, even if his easel is much too large for him. He would have to rise to the occasion, literally and figuratively, to place a motif on the canvas. The canvas’s ground is as green as his pants, as green as the land: There’s no painting in sight.

Searching with a metal detector requires a method, otherwise the search becomes dangerous or turns into a game of pure chance, depending on whether it is land mines or precious items being sought. At any rate, the search seems to be a wasted effort in this case. An apparition of light whooshes across the sky, separating the cloudy from the clear, and seeming to magically graze the can of yellow paint intended for the subject of the easel’s painting; the excitement causes the can to emit a small cloud of pigment. We fear the seeker will notice nothing of this, even though a reflection of light from the released yellow paint strikes him on the back. Any second now, and he will probably grow smaller, dutifully obeying perspective, and then, following the path, he will turn the corner—and disappear.

At issue here is clearly the relationship between the constant “work” (steadiness, service, craft) and inspiration as the unknown, without which great things in art would just not happen. The problem is so old-fashioned that no one actually wants to think about it anymore. For Rauch, however, it is existential. There is this juxtaposition and confusion of production and afflatus, awakening and imbuing with life. A thousand painters set out, 999 disappear behind the curve. The artist in this painting is armed and diligent, but are his methods suitable, his zeal well-aimed? At the

moment, he looks to us like a misguided little worm, deaf and blind to higher powers. But a single glimpse into the light—and he’ll be a higher power himself.

TIM SOMMER  
editor-in-chief, *art*



Paranoia, 2007, oil on canvas, 50 × 150 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 59 in.

## Paranoia or The Shadow of Meaning

In his statements, Neo Rauch frequently diminishes the importance of the narrative content of his paintings. He admitted in 2007 that “I make no secret of the fact that I prefer those observers who regard my painting primarily as art, and who only seek a narrative in them subconsciously, or if they feel that they really must. After all, I am no different when I stand in front of a Tintoretto or a Beckmann.”<sup>1</sup> For him, the figures have a pictorial logic, not an anecdotal one: “. . . the figures are more or less equal with toy cars, pots and pans and drawers when it comes to being the bearers of meaning. There is hardly any difference in the intensity of the artistic saturation, and if there is, then it is not to give a figure more meaning; rather, it is there because the picture demands a thicker fabric in this area. What I want is for the elements in the painting—color, form, the interlocking spaces inside it—all to suggest an impression of tension about to break.”<sup>2</sup> This may well have been true for much of his work at the end of the last century and the beginning of the present one, from around 1995 until about 2003, when his paintings were characterized by flattened motifs and spaces, often realized with minimal shadows or even no shadows at all. However, by 2003, Rauch began to use shadows more extensively, with the concurrent result being a much more insistent suggestion or implication of a narrative. His figures had grown to occupy a space, not infinite, but believable, like that of a theatrical stage; likewise his figures seemed believable, even as they were engaged in activities that defied logical interpretation. Further, many observers understandably sought an explanation for the large number of characters suddenly populating his paintings. (Perhaps one should look again at Tintoretto and Beckmann for the answer?) Rauch responded: “My recent overfilled canvases have been criticized, and have made many observers gasp. Some critics are nurturing the suspicion that I have lost all control of my art. But this is just the high water level in the lock chamber, and very soon—I sense this very clearly—it will flow out into new channels. I went through a similar experience in 1992, when the material built up in the large panoramas suddenly poured out.”<sup>3</sup>

Without shadows, Rauch’s “panoramas” could easily resemble the decorative wallpaper fashionable in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century. With shadows, looming clouds, mysterious recesses, and glimpses of space beyond the picture frame, his paintings take on the appearance of Baroque allegories—riddles that engage the viewer in a

fascinating guessing game, puzzles with no correct answer. A key, one supposes, is the title. “Coming up with titles,” Rauch wrote, “is often an arduous process because my interest in the etymological roots of even the most banal terms leads me to sediments of meaning that can lead me to introduce unexpected impulses to the intentions of the painting. It can happen that a word develops an incredible atmospheric undertow in the directions of a painting that produces itself, where my only duty is to assist. Such moments are precious, and they bring me even closer to my mother tongue, for it is only here that such experience can occur.”<sup>4</sup>

*Paranoia*, the title of a painting created for the 2007 exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art entitled *para*, is a word with atmospheric undertow (pp. 34/35). Its presence in the thought balloon at the top of the canvas permeates the picture with unease—perhaps even dread. Who could resist the impulse to interpret this picture? Is that not a painter in his studio, wearing a T-shirt branded with the title of the exhibition he is making? Aren’t those rolls of canvas in the corner the artist’s books on the shelves? Why has everyone gathered? What are they about to do? All attention is centered on the make-shift altar, with two candles illuminating the latest picture about to be unveiled, still hidden by a curtain. The authority figure—father, critic, dealer, curator?—leans forward with anticipation; the woman—the artist’s wife, his muse, his companion, his assistant?—anxiously takes notes, awaiting any word; the artist resists any display of emotion by placing his hands on his hips. Rauch gives voice to the mood with the title of the painting, inscribed on the picture and even underlined: *paranoia*. One does not need to be a psychologist to recognize that Rauch was expressing the anxiety that anyone must experience when presenting their work to a critical public; like so many of Rauch’s paintings, this one speaks to difficulty of creation.

“Despite all the desire for interpretation,” Rauch insists, “painting should retain the privilege of placing that which cannot be verbalized into an obvious structure . . . Painting has its strongest effect on me when it appears as an unpremeditated, spontaneous thing like an act of nature, and makes me realize the force of amazement and of sensual experience.”<sup>5</sup> Francis Bacon was another artist who famously resisted literary explanations of his work. He often explained that he sought to bypass the viewer’s intellect in order to communicate directly with the viewer’s limbic system, “to unlock the valves of feeling.”<sup>6</sup> Bacon, though, had inherited the modernist disgust for illustration and anecdote and lived through a period dominated by abstract painting in Europe and America. After Bacon’s death in 1992, viewers and critics were free to admit that his paint-

ings were compelling—not *despite* the fact that they reflect Bacon’s life, his condition, and his beliefs—but *because* they reveal so much about the history of Europe in his time, and Bacon’s own particular situation. In our own postmodern era, should we not be free to ask Rauch for permission to enjoy his remarkable oeuvre for those very same qualities?

GARY TINTEROW

curator, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

## Notes

1 Interview with Neo Rauch, April 2007, printed in *Neo Rauch. para*, exh. cat. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, 2007), p. 79.

2 “Conversation between Klaus Werner and Neo Rauch” in *Neo Rauch, Manöver*, exh. cat. Galerie Eigen + Art (Leipzig, April 17–May 31, 1997), reprinted in *Neo Rauch. para* (see note 1), p. 53.

3 Interview with Neo Rauch (see note 1), p. 79.

4 Neo Rauch quoted by Alison M. Gingeras, “Neo Rauch. A Peristaltic Filtration System in the River of Time” *Flash Art* 227 (November/December 2002), reprinted in *Neo Rauch. para* (see note 1), p. 64.

5 Interview with Neo Rauch (see note 1), p. 79.

6 Francis Bacon filmed interview with Melvyn Bragg, *The South Bank Show*, London Weekend Television, 1985.



Alte Verbindungen, 2008, oil on canvas, 250 × 300 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Kühlraum, 2002, oil on canvas, 210 × 300 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Reflex, 2001, oil on canvas, 210 × 250 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Etappe, 1998, oil on canvas, 200 × 300 cm / 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Armdrücken, 2008, oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Sekte, 2004, oil on canvas, 250 × 210 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Der Laden, 2005, oil on canvas, 210 × 300 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Demos, 2004, oil on canvas, 300 × 210 cm / 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Revo, 2010, oil on canvas, 300 × 500 cm / 118 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 196 $\frac{7}{8}$  in.



Die Lage, 2006, oil on canvas, 300 × 420 cm / 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 165<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Schöpfer, 2002, oil on canvas, 210 × 250 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Der Gärtner, 2007, oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Der Altar, 2008, oil on canvas, 250 × 210 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Glück, 2006, oil on canvas, 40 × 50 cm / 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Einkehr, 2003, oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Mars, 2002, oil on canvas, 250 × 210 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Das Unreine, 2004, oil on canvas, 270 × 210 cm / 106¼ × 82⅝ in.



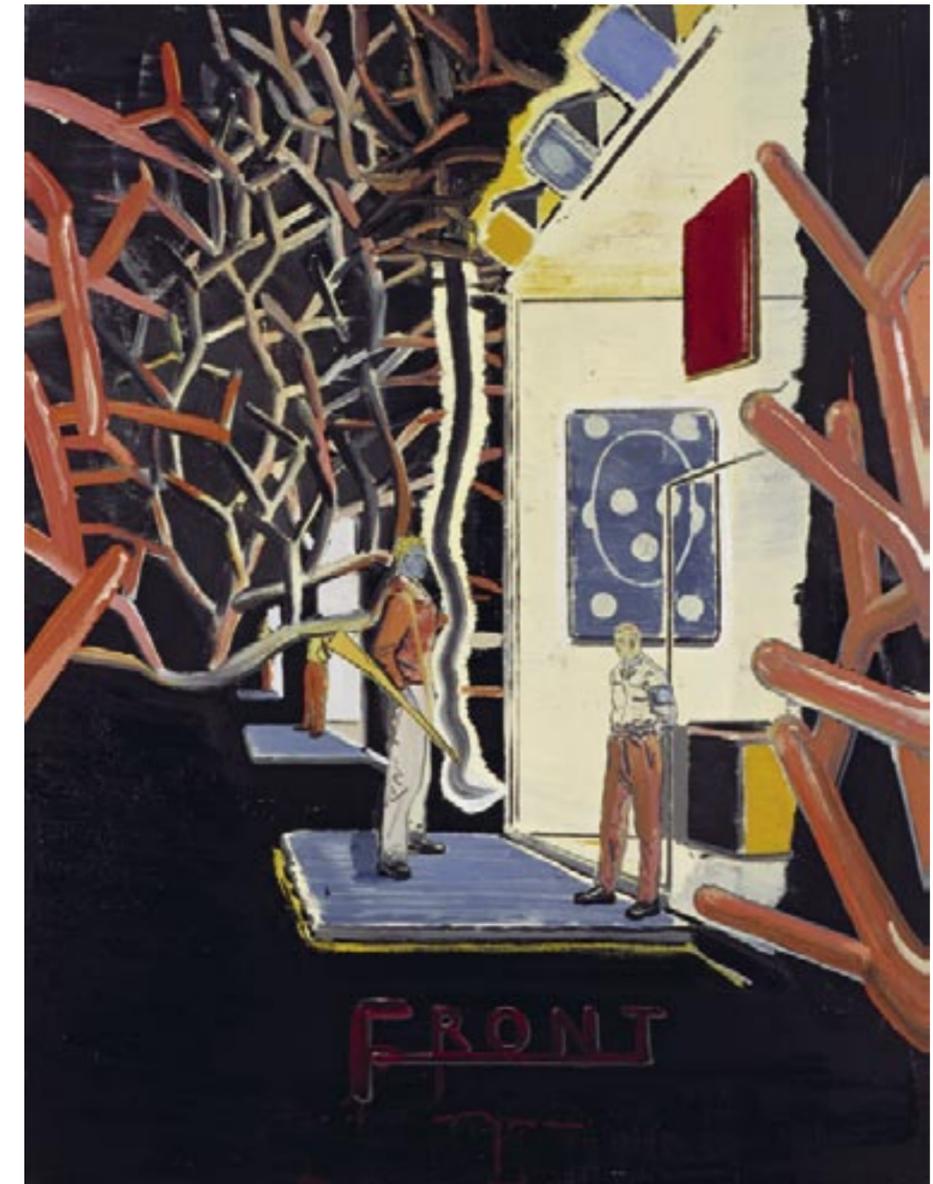
Entfaltung, 2008, oil on canvas, 300 × 250 cm / 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Schicht, 1999, oil on canvas, 200 × 180 cm / 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 70<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Energiebild, 1997, oil on canvas, 260 × 200 cm / 102<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Front, 1998, oil on canvas, 120 × 90 cm / 47¼ × 35⅜ in.



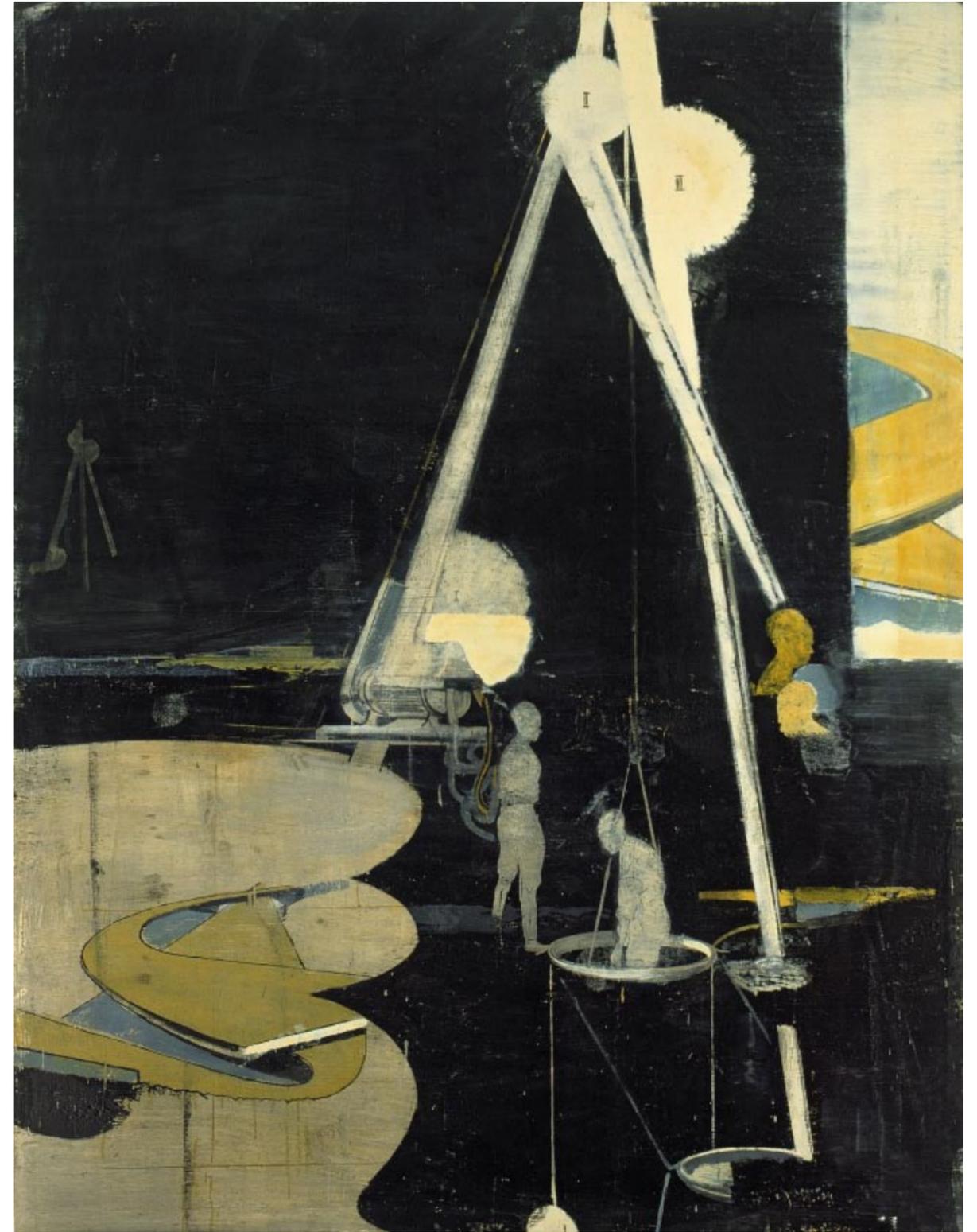
Wahl, 1998, oil on canvas, 300 × 200 cm / 118 1/8 × 78 3/4 in.



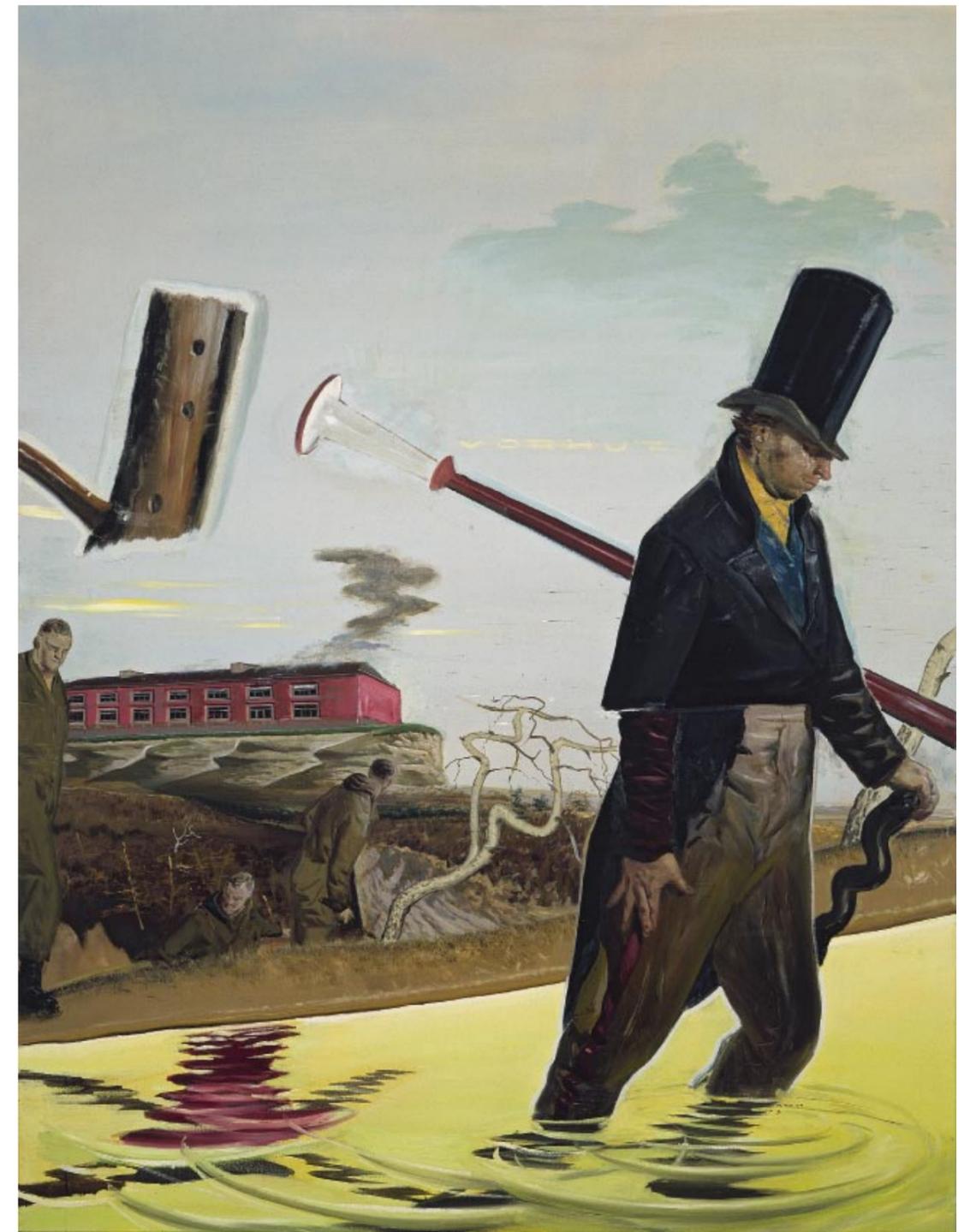
Haus I, 1995, oil on paper on canvas, 125 × 162 cm / 49¼ × 63¾ in.



Grund, 1993, oil on canvas, 250 × 190 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 74<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Taufe, 1994, oil on canvas, 250 × 190 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 74<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Vorhut, 2003, oil on canvas, 210 × 160 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 63 in.



Schilfand, 2009, oil on canvas, 211 × 300 cm / 83 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 118 $\frac{1}{8}$  in.



Wächterin, 2009, oil on canvas, 160 × 50 cm / 63 × 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Sänger, 2009, oil on canvas, 160 × 50 cm / 63 × 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Gefangene, 2007–08, oil on canvas, 90 × 120 cm / 35<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 47<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Laube, 2008, oil on canvas, 300 × 250 cm / 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.

## Laube, 2008

From my porch swing I look into Neo's studio, into his garden. I relish my exposed position as neighbor.

A woman and two men in front of a well-cared for garden house in the late summer? Who is showing the way to Dr. Daniel Gottlob Moritz Schreber and Turnvater ("father of gymnastics") Friedrich Ludwig Jahn?

A nice spot in the best tradition of the allotment garden turned into the art of contemplation through root-taking—highly satisfying, meditative earthwork. A female arsonist calmly and coolly invites the detonation of eruptive thought processes and plot offensives. Even Turnvater Jahn has grown a mane of hair as mimicry to do justice to his constant reincarnations as father of gymnastics, aerobic, and fitness king, yoga guru, pilates trainer, and coach. It is evidently more difficult for him to celebrate the cult of the body than for the slim Dr. Schreber, who saw gardening as contemplation of the more thorough sort: Indeed, the post-workout glasses of beer during deeply serious save-the-world conversations take their toll. It seems the two are negotiating about a green snake from the enigmatic lava garden of earthly delights—is it a West African green mamba or a blindworm?

I swing back and forth a little longer, amused by the boys, locate yin and yang on the garden house: So, everything's okay? I breathe in the potato fire burning in the autumnal distance. Even Dr. Kack [a wise guy] with his Nietzsche moustache cannot rattle my confident mood, for the torch-bearer stands tall.

ROSA LOY  
artist



Der nächste Zug, 2007, oil on canvas, 150 × 200 cm / 59 × 78 ¾ in.

## Move by Move

Anyone surveying Neo Rauch's artistic production over the last several years will quickly notice that both the extent of pictorial complexity and the degree of motivic self-referentiality have been steadily on the increase. The large-format tableaus now resemble imagined stages, on which eschatological human grotesqueries are performed. Their store of characters, costumes, and props is almost inexhaustible. It seems as though the coordinates of personal biography—with its attachment to particular times and places—have increasingly been viewed as too narrow and have given way to an eruptive expansion into deeper-lying sediments of history, of topography, of transrational connections. From this perspective, it is no surprise that uncovered mammoth teeth now accessorize the scenery as do the relics of Napoleonic mercenaries or the flying bombs of both world wars. Even jagged protoplasm has managed to gain visual reality this way: leaping mercury, hallucinatory fungi, mandrake roots, and rising vapors complete the alchemical arsenal—and all these things draw attention to the fact that in the staging of human *Welttheater* (world theater), enlightened reason is assigned a mere minor role. In this respect, Neo Rauch sees himself, both wittingly and unwittingly, as interpreter and medium of contemporary assessments of the *conditio humana*, and the more uncertain the results, the more opulently he populates the potential spaces of his artistic alternative worlds.

In this connection, *Para*, the series Rauch executed in 2007 for an exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, proves to be a significant example; the title, after all, already points programmatically toward realms of an inter-, secondary-, and supra-reality. *Der nächste Zug*,<sup>1</sup> a work from this series, initially presents itself to the viewer as relatively uncomplicated (pp. 94/95): Two male protagonists dressed in formal—operetta-ish—tuxedos, have retired. They are exhausted after a social appearance, and are recapitulating the situation as they smoke. The younger of the two has, as is often the case in Neo Rauch's works, self-portrait-like features, and appears as though in need of advice; the older man, lost in thought and timeless-looking, exhibits the role of fatherly friend. The scene is set in a mix of living room space and studio; female creatures lie torso-like on the bed in the background, their shimmering skin transmitting impulses of long extinguished desire; and on the left, the artist's palette hovers above an open tome and a crimson-colored knobbed form like the utensil of a day's work left unpursued for some time. It is, however, the large rear wall in light orange that constitutes the color focus of the work; its contrast is a rampant blackness, in front of

which fluttering curtains and rising cigarette smoke loom like portents. *Der nächste Zug* clearly relates to the activity depicted—smoking—but it also refers to a pending decision and a necessary strategic maneuver, the consequences of which are not yet known and the inevitability that already weighs heavily on all involved. From this point of view, there is no doubt that this work is an instance of artistic self-reassurance (*Selbstvergewisserung*) that includes not only a stocktaking of the path already taken, but also an urgent questioning of the future direction; it is a self-reassurance that turns up in Neo Rauch's oeuvre whenever a new form of creating needs to be found for changed energy streams. All the associated implications of “either/or” and “not only, but also” resonate fleetingly in the space, consolidate into that traditional hero's choice between virtue and vice, and, ultimately, lead to the ringing imperative that resounds from Rilke to Sloterdijk, “You must change your life!”

In terms of Neo Rauch's situation during this time, this may mean that although his role as champion and professor of the New Leipzig School granted him social success, his artistic sensorium unwaveringly and alertly indicates the need to change. In such circumstances, a thorough questioning of one's origin is also always on the agenda—*Vater* (cat. Leipzig, p. 101), a work from the same year, shows the artist holding a dwarfish Friedrich Nietzsche in his arms—and in this respect, the bearded counterpart in *Der nächste Zug* could be a quotation of another prolific ancestor of the Saxon history of mentalities, namely Max Klinger, whose figurative symbolism had widespread influence on his contemporaries, and who can, indeed, be considered the intellectual founder of Leipzig painting. Which *Zug* this *spiritus rector*, operating across time and space, will advise, in this case, remains open to a large extent. He may be boosting courage for a move toward artistic autonomy—which ultimately will lead to the reduction of Neo Rauch's teaching obligations at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig in Leipzig; what is certain, however, is that he emphasizes the freedom of possibilities as a painter, a freedom which led to the creation of this work and which presents itself repeatedly by concentrating on one's strengths.

HARALD KUNDE  
art historian

<sup>1</sup> The German word *Zug* translates into several English words, including drag, move, train, etc.



Die Stickerin, 2008, oil on canvas, 300 × 420 cm / 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 165<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.

## Die Stickerin, 2008

*Threads too of golden wire were woven in, And on the loom an ancient tale was traced.*

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, sixth book, Arachne

Absolutely nothing is certain in Neo Rauch's metamorphic work. Via polyvalent meanings, allusions, and associations, rhetorical techniques, and thematic shiftings, he parts ways with his contemporaries. Neither time nor place, form nor content of his pictorial worlds can be fixed. The viewer's gaze falters in the depths of the painter's hybrid combinatorics. Rauch dreams in a calculated way, and he wisely withholds and encodes the motives of his image-breeding imagination. Each interpretation gets tangled in the maelstrom of tense uneventfulness characteristic of his opulent pictorial tableaux. These tableaux reveal themselves to him, as the essence of his work, in "half-awake moments in which the flotsam accumulates in my catch basin and rearranges itself to an new organization ..."—and the fictitious presence of memory speeds by like the fleeting shadow of a dream before midnight.

In one such half-awake moment, a frontal view into an indeterminate workroom reveals the dubious existence of eight figures occupying themselves in uncertain ways (pp. 98/99). Only the female embroiderer of the painting's title is noticeably at work—seemingly on yellow material for a flag; this yellow material weaves leitmotif-like through the ambiguous, shady plexus of the composition. But what this young woman is actually doing, dressed in a timeless work garment, is in doubt. She bows her head over her day's work while an assistant holds the pictorially dominant, nationless flag for her. Yet, it remains uncertain whether she is embroidering or darning. In any case, darning mushrooms seem to be wriggling free from the sewing box in the foreground, unfurling a morphogenetic obstinacy and absurdity. Sitting behind the protagonist is a bearded thinker who pensively examines or cuts fabric of the same yellow color. On the other side of the young woman, three sleep-walker-like men await the completion of their monochrome pennants and flags. A strapping female figure with her back to the wall looks like a cheerless reversal of Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*. Here, as well, however, a baroque semi-nude woman facing the opposite direction, her swelling back turned toward the viewer, is introduced into the labyrinth of the narrative. What this curly-haired blonde in sweat pants and leather boots is up to above a "frayed part" of the two-part painting, if she is not unrolling or continuing to spin the fateful thread of history, however, remains the artist's secret.

Neo Rauch calls his paintings, plainly and simply, allegories. And thus, the modern Parca at the left border who irrevocably breaks the logic of the painting must be a key figure. Her attitude is reminiscent of the mythological prototype and art historical model of the spinning woman: Arachne, Athena's skilled rival in weaving and the central figure in the first factory space of modern art history, found in Velázquez's late work *The Fable of Arachne*. The Leipzig painter is, however, no longer telling Ovidian stories from late antiquity, but rather, only his own mirror-image ones. He allows work to be done on the fabrics of painting in a contemporary world of art and concepts. On his stages, diligent workers try to pin something on the painter's work. Whereas Velázquez's broad archway allows a look into the divine world, Rauch's narrow door closes off any way out of the painter's private mythology. The viewer has no option but to retrace the central thematic thread set down by the previous painter. And so we approach uncertainly, the hidden sources of inspiration of one of the great allegorists of today.

ULRIKE LORENZ

director, Kunsthalle Mannheim

## Die Stickerin, 2008

Located in the plain, whitewashed back room of the large bar, *Am Wiesengrund* (The Meadow) is the department of pilgrimage and street fighting. A small group of *Heimattreuer* (those loyal to their homeland) has gathered for a volunteer nightshift (pp. 98/99). They submit like ornaments to the space, and to their callings. It is a harmony that arises only in details and in the attractions of the peculiarity. From sense to nonsense, there are almost imperceptible but insidious segues.

They often sing while they work. Old traditional songs and made-up ones, and when there are no words, they hum. Sometimes, old Anton puts on one of his plastic records. This crackles beautifully in the worn grooves, like a cozy, little fire, and the Pilgrims' Chorus from *Tannhäuser* sounds as though it is entering the room from afar. But right now it is silent. It has gotten late. The drinking-din from neighboring rooms has turned to murmuring, and the last patrons of the bar are sent off into the night. "*Wann gait's nu lous,*" ("So, when are we gonna go?") asks the perpetually intoxicated student Anselmus in a Silesian accent. He has soaked up a great deal of wisdom and wine in all faculties of the university, and he demonstrates the close proximity between drama and comedy like no other. "At once, at once," whispers the beautiful Serpentina, who has already embroidered hundreds of meters of banner-seam with noise-soaked thread. Her assistant gives her an appreciative nod. Even the banner seems to want to get going—to cut the indeterminate darkness with fresh cloth and a shiny tip. Yellow and green; for synesthetes, it sounds like a radiant C major. It gleams like courage and life. People will understand it.

We need unbridled minds. First, the old pilgrims' paths are followed, then into the streets, the buildings, the salons. We sing for the blind, and for those hard of hearing we shout. For those who do not want to understand anything, brother Lindhorst has brewed up something. There's no escape. The Dionysian liberation committee has much in the way of resources. Fine handiwork is always first, then comes music, and then, the hard stuff.

TILO BAUMGÄRTEL

artist



Vorführung, 2006, oil on canvas, 300 × 420 cm / 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 165<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.

## Vorführung, 2006

As one of the great insistent questioners, Neo Rauch, with his remarkable oeuvre, joins the ranks of those demiurges in the guise of artists that stage the world and create riddles. Rauch does not gather real and unreal inventory eclectic-like, but rather, by integrating this inventory—reshaped into thoughts and images—into an overriding synthesis, he plays an active role as retrospective Romantic, arcane Symbolist, as dream-juggling Surrealist, or alternatively, he does the hard-as-nails, cutting Realist—all of these German and European art historical positions. Neo Rauch is a German painter, a painter from Leipzig, and it is precisely here that the spirit of Max Klinger seems present in the form of Leipzig realism. But having long since arrived in the twenty-first century, Rauch translates this mixture of subjective codes and familiar clichés of our past and present into expressive painterly color harmonies in a manner as commanding as it is vexing, and which is found in few other painters working today. Realities interact with one another and seem to communicate only at a level that is incomprehensible to us. This is where Rauch can be understood as a master of quotation, who takes past times and spaces and transcends them into a singularity with surreal features, as it were, into a new event space. The necessary resolve to allow a particular possibility become a reality, in art as in life, which always means the eradication of all alternatives, is severely undermined by Rauch. He joins together possibilities, designs, variations, the fitting, the paradoxical, the logical, and the illogical, according to an invisible master plan, which even he, perhaps gropingly, but persistently, hopes to uncover.

Neo Rauch’s protagonists are developed from the hard-working, strong, but, nevertheless, seemingly remote-controlled heroes of the post-industrial fringes that become the nostalgically play-acting spiritual heroes of stage and theater.

*Vorführung*: On this Schillerian stage as moral institution, the figures are trying—in their quotations, gesticulations, or despair—to uphold the old values, but, like those great intellectuals of days past, they are heading for grand failure (pp. 102 / 103). Assembled “tableau-vivant-like” on this painted stage are all those who participated in fulfilling the young Schiller’s hope for wisdom and moral education through art. Yet, they fail to notice that these ideals are on the verge—much like the German monuments—of plunging into the abyss. And to quote Heinrich Heine, who likewise distanced himself from Romanticism and faced reality with a keen and critical mind: “At night I think of Germany, And then there is no sleep for me.”

These symbolic figures—whether muse wearing a wreath of flowers absorbed in prayer, warrior raising his weapon, voice of warning lifting his finger in admonition while simultaneously committing murder, or despairing thinker with devil’s horn whose pants pocket contains nothing but an empty thought bubble—all find themselves in an indefinable, disintegrating stage set. It is only the female figure in the background who tries, with an open book, to stop the chaos and destruction. Or, is she actually unleashing the disorder, magic-spell-like, with words from the book? The *experimentum mundi*, with its aim of endowing meaning (*Sinnstiftung*), is already, in its beginning phase, not particularly hopeful, but it is steeped in open and hidden, joyful and painful sensory stimuli and a very special dynamic that Rauch presents to us as a rigid “point of no return,” as a persistence teetering on the edge of nothingness. This explains much of the tension in his paintings.

The question concerning the significance of art hovers above both the stage heroes and audience members; the latter, seated on green beer crates, become protagonists and fulfill the performance of virtues, follies, sufferings, and vices, thereby reducing the moral influence of the stage, prized by Schiller, to absurdity.

We still have art, as well as the questions and the nighttime thoughts ...

PETRA LEWEY

director, Kunstsammlungen Zwickau

KLAUS FISCHER

author and curator

## Der Garten des Bildhauers, 2008

*Der Garten des Bildhauers* (pp. 106 / 107) is as elusive as any of Neo Rauch’s paintings. Not only are we asked to look simultaneously at two images that apparently have no connection, but the subject matter of each shifts in meaning the longer we attempt to reach an interpretation. The strategy of presenting one or more paintings within a painting is well known in Neo Rauch’s work as a method of introducing breaks, a variety of vistas and perspectives, and the possibility for the artist to quote from art history and popular culture. *Der Garten des Bildhauers*, on the other hand, is constructed from one painting on top of another, the former’s transparent surface allowing the image below to remain visible, as though viewed through an intense light source.

This main image could, at first glance, be a painting that Rauch found in a provincial museum or flea market. The cypress trees, token hill, and moody sky as well as the palate of muted greens, blues, and browns recall the romantic and archetypal visions of classical Italy portrayed by nineteenth-century painters. However, the figures, who resemble bit parts from a play set during the French Revolution, demand a very different interpretation of both the modern transit van placed at the central point of the work and the smoke belching from the open door into which a dead or wounded man is apparently being carried. Is he the sculptor of the title, whose creations are flashed into the lower left of the painting, like the asides expressed in the think bubbles of comics? Certainly, the suggestion is that the building, with its oversized door and high walls, is the sculptor’s studio, and that the group of stylized bushes and curious star-shaped plants represent the garden he has developed. Like many of Neo Rauch’s paintings, *Der Garten des Bildhauers* communicates an ominous, almost palpable stillness.

In this painting, the practice of making sculpture appears to be synonymous with death. The brown structure spread out on the ground near the figures resembles a pool of glistening blood, while the function of the implements it supports (practical tools or violent weapons?) remains ambiguous. Could it be that Neo Rauch is making a wry reference to the dramatic assertions made several years ago that the Leipzig School style of painting had been exhausted and was necessarily being replaced by a new trend in sculpture? After all, the only symbol of Rauch’s own practice is a featureless canvas propped dangerously close to the smoke-filled doorway, and the glow that surrounds the sculptures has a distinctly sacral tinge. On the other hand, the sculptures are distinguished from the other elements in

the work by the transition from academic realism to a punchy graphic style that recalls children’s book illustration, filtered through Surrealism and Pop Art. Although they resemble the organic fragments of classical statuary, the tabs fixed to their sides render them flat, superimposed as a collage on the picture surface like the clothes of old-fashioned paper cut-out dolls. The palate of neon green and yellow that beams the objects into the time and place of the main painting connects with this only through the touches of sickly yellow that seeps out to the plants and figures. If the primary image presents a troubling fusion of past and present, these abstract sculptures surely belong in a science fiction-like future.

The dreamlike atmosphere that Neo Rauch creates in *Der Garten des Bildhauers* appears to have been constructed not in a trance, but in a state of absolute wakefulness, almost indistinguishable from the madness of reality. Ultimately, however, this puzzling and highly entertaining narrative is a pretext for examining what painting is still capable of. As though we were nearing the end of a thriller, we are finally led to the seemingly most insignificant element in the work—the almost invisible canvas—as the centrifugal force in the painting around which everything else revolves.

FELICITY LUNN

curator



Der Garten des Bildhauers, 2008, oil on canvas, 300 × 420 cm / 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 165<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.

Neo Rauch is undoubtedly the best thing to happen to continental painting in a long time (ca. 1990). (Is the same true of his countless imitators? Hardly).

He was the bitter pill that German painting had to swallow to secure its categories, and the resulting considerations did not please everyone.

At the time, the characters populating his early work also seemed, to me, suspicious; long a thing of the past, they have turned into a compendium of the most amusing madness.

I prefer looking at the paintings upside down. What's on the surface then falls away, is left at the margins, revealing style and organization, the true criteria of painting. And behold—fantastic!

DANIEL RICHTER

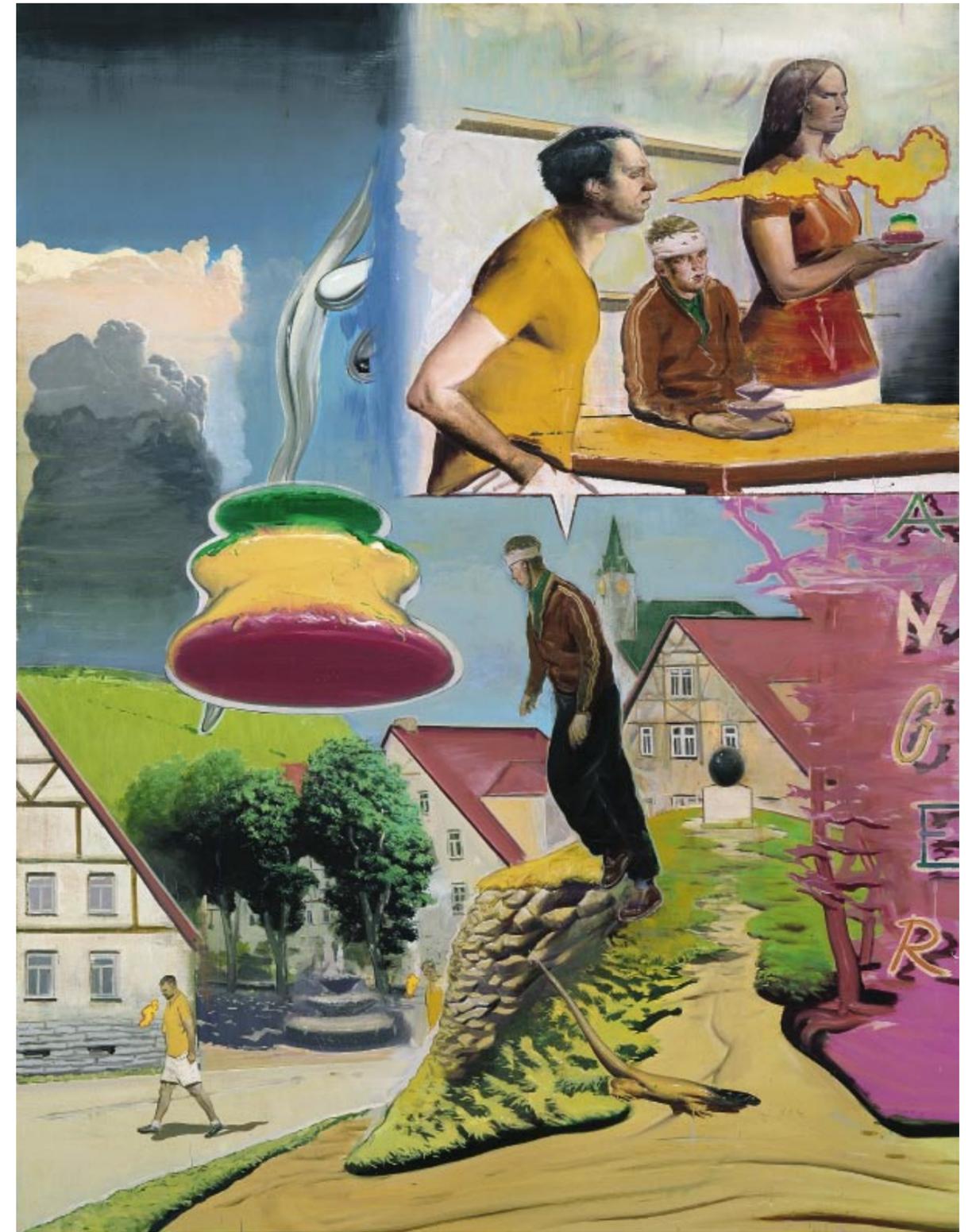
artist



Gutachter, 2009, oil on canvas, 300 × 210 cm / 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Interview, 2006, oil on canvas, 210 × 300 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 118<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



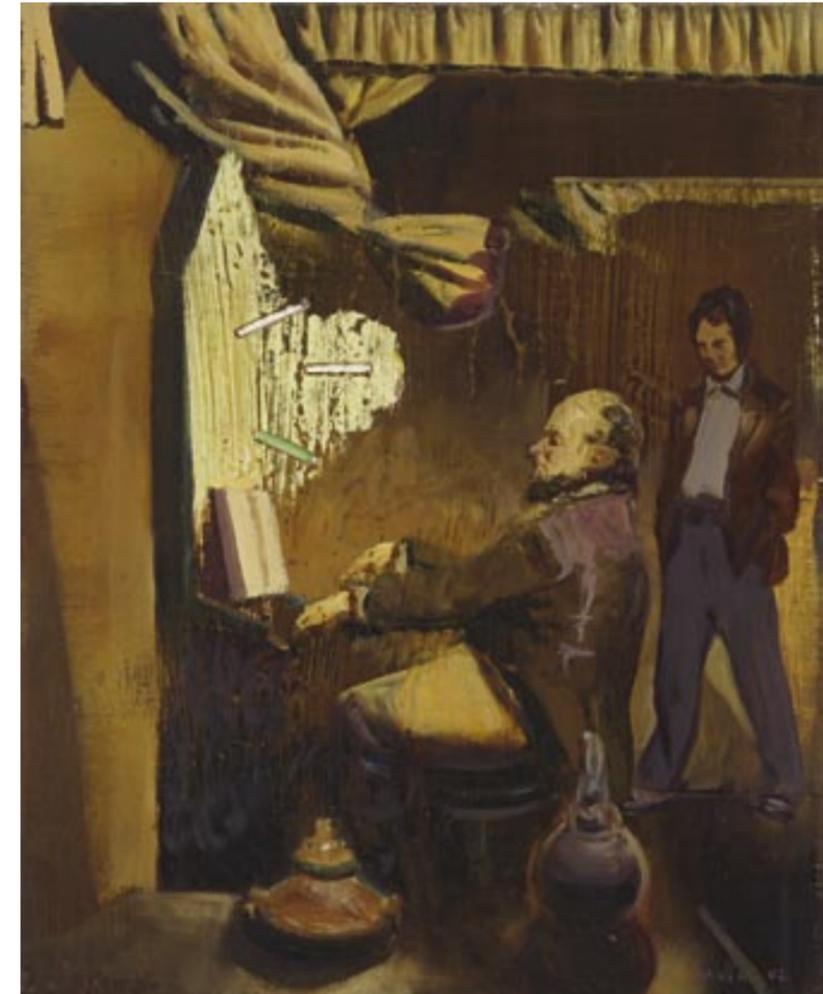
Anger, 2003, oil on canvas, 250 × 190 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 74<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Hof, 2003, oil on canvas, 250 × 200 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Nexus, 2006, oil on canvas, 300 × 420 cm / 118 1/8 × 165 3/8 in.



Meisterschüler, 2007, oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Pulis, 2005, oil on canvas, 210 × 270 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 106<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Pendel, 2009, oil on canvas, 35 × 50 cm / 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Duett, 2005, oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Serenade, 2008, oil on canvas, 60 × 50 cm / 23<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 50<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Zöll, 2004, oil on canvas, 210 × 400 cm / 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 157<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.



Kommando, 2010, oil on canvas, 70 × 100 cm / 27½ × 39¾ in.



Prozession, 2010, oil on canvas, 50 × 60 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 23<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



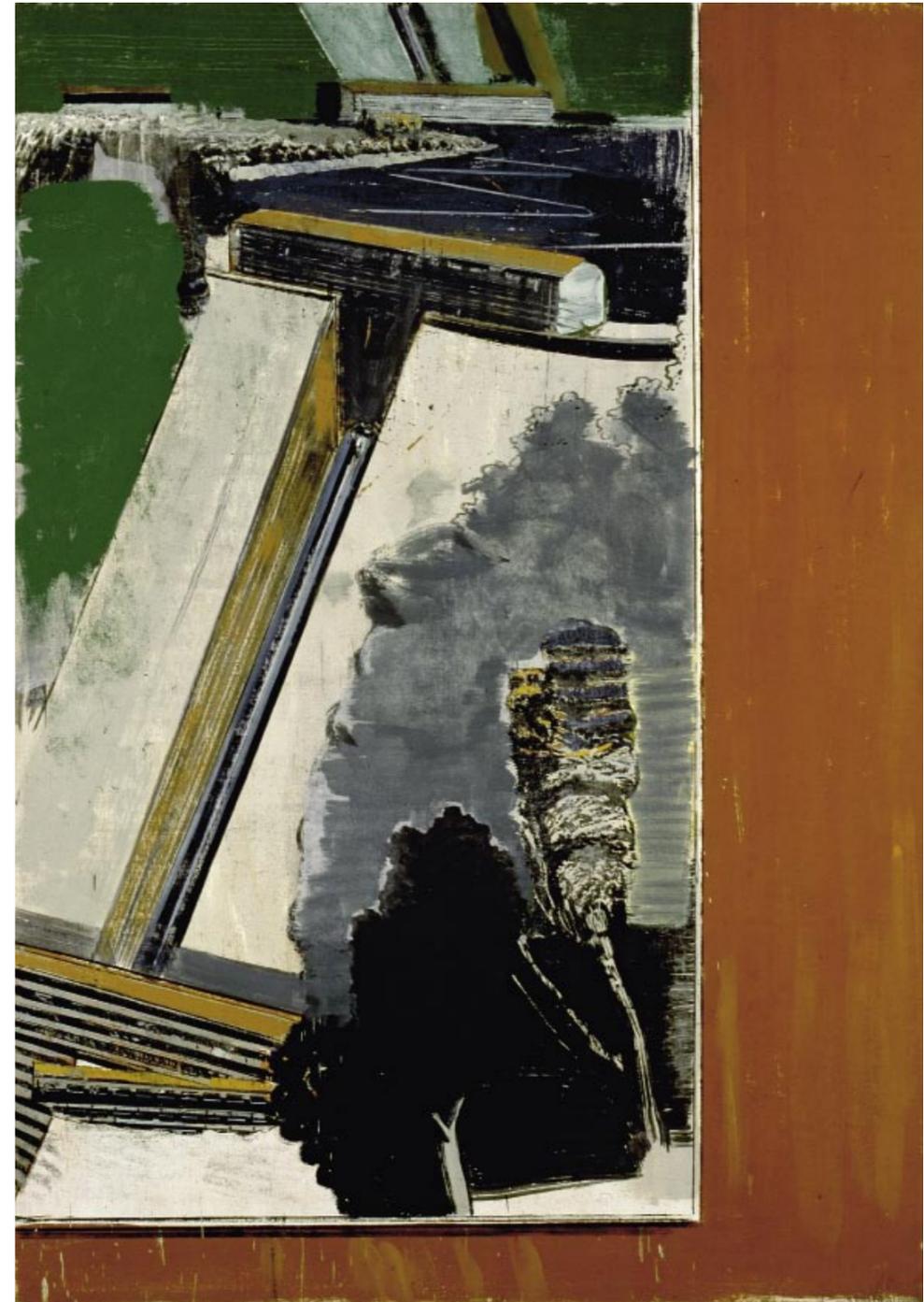
Goldgrube, 2007, oil on canvas, 80 × 160 cm / 31½ × 63 in.



Initiation, 2009, oil on canvas, 60 × 50 cm / 23<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Linke und rechte Hand, 2009, oil on canvas, 50 × 35 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 13<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Staudamm, 1996, oil on canvas, 196 × 131 cm / 77<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 51<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.



Schlinger, 2005, oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Tank, 1998, oil on canvas, 250 × 200 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 78<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Bergführer, 2007, oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Halt, 2005, oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.



Alter, 2001, oil on canvas, 250 × 210 cm / 98<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 82<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.



Suche, 2004, oil on canvas, 270 × 210 cm / 106¼ × 82⅝ in.



Waage, 2007, oil on canvas, 50 × 40 cm / 19<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 15<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.

## Biography

1960

Born in Leipzig

1981–86

Studied painting at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig under Professor Arno Rink

1986–90

Master student at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig

1993–98

Assistant at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig

2005–09

Professor for painting at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig

Since 2009

Honorary Professor at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig

Lives and works in Leipzig

## Awards

2010

– Prize of the Stiftung Bibel und Kultur

2005

– Finkenwerder Art Prize

2002

– Vincent van Gogh Bi-annual Award for Contemporary Art in Europe, Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht

1997

– Art Prize of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

## Works in Public Spaces

2007

– Glass window in the Elizabeth chapel of the Naumburger Dom

1999

– Contribution to the decoration of the House of the Bundestag Paul-Löbe-Haus, Berlin

## Solo Exhibitions

2010

– *Begleiter*, Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig / Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich

– Zacheta Panstwowa Galeria Sztuki, Warsaw

2009

– *Schiffland*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin

– German Embassy, London

2008

– David Zwirner, New York

2007

– *para*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York / Max Ernst Museum, Brühl

– *Neue Rollen*, Rudolphinum, Prague

2006

– *Neue Rollen. Bilder 1993 bis 2006*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg

– *Der Zeitraum*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Leipzig

– Musée d'Art contemporain de Montreal

2005

– CAC Málaga. Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga

– *Renegaten*, David Zwirner, New York

– *Works 1994–2002. The Leipziger Volkszeitung Collection*, Honolulu Academy of Arts

2004

– *Arbeiten auf Papier 2003–2004*, Albertina, Vienna

2003

– *Currents*, The Saint Louis Art Museum

2002

– Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht

– Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin

– David Zwirner, New York

2001

– *Neo Rauch. Zeichnungen und Gemälde aus der Sammlung Deutsche Bank*, Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin / Mannheimer Kunstverein / Neues Museum Weserburg Bremen / International Culture Centre, Krakow / Städtische Galerie Delmenhorst

2000

– Galerie Eigen + Art, Leipzig

– *Randgebiet*, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig / Haus der Kunst, Munich / Kunsthalle Zürich, Zurich

– David Zwirner, New York

1999

– Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin

1998

– Galerie der Stadt Backnang

1997

– Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig (Art prize award of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* 1997)

– *Manöver*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Leipzig

1995

– *Marineschule*, Overbeck-Gesellschaft, Lübeck

– Galerie Eigen + Art, Leipzig

– Dresdner Bank, Leipzig

1994

– Projektgalerie, Kunstverein Elsterpark e.V., Leipzig

1993

– Galerie Eigen + Art, Leipzig

## Group Exhibitions

2010

– *Das versprochene Land*, re-opening Albertinum, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden,

2009

– *Carte Blanche IX: Vor heimischer Kulisse – Kunst in der Sachsen Bank / Sammlung Landesbank Baden-Württemberg*, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig

– Galerie Eigen + Art, Leipzig

– *1989. Ende der Geschichte oder Beginn der Zukunft?*, Villa Schöningen, Potsdam / Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna

– *Compass in Hand: Selections from the Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

– *60–40–20*, Museum der bildenden Künste, Leipzig

– *Bilderträume. Die Sammlung Ulla und Heiner Pietzsch*, Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin

– *Realismus in Leipzig*, Drents Museum, Assen  
– *60 Jahre 60 Werke. Kunst aus der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949–2009*, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin  
– *Blattgold. Zeitgenössische Grafik*, Art fund of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden in the Saxonian treasury department, Dresden  
2008  
– *Third Guangzhou Triennial*, Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou  
– *Max Ernst. Dream and Revolution*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm  
– *Sommer bei Eigen + Art*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin  
– *Vertrautes Terrain. Aktuelle Kunst in & über Deutschland*, ZKM, Karlsruhe  
– *Living Landscapes. A Journey through German Art*, National Art Museum of China, Beijing  
– *Kopf oder Zahl. Leipziger Gesichter und Geschichten 1858–2008*, Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig  
– *The Leipzig Phenomena*, Mucsarnok, Budapest  
– *Hommage à Klaus Werner*, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig  
– *Carte Blanche. Freundliche Feinde*, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig  
– *Visite. Von Gerhard Richter bis Rebecca Horn. Werke aus der Sammlung zeitgenössischer Kunst der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn  
– *Collecting Collections*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
– *New Leipzig School*, Cobra Museum, Amstelveen  
2007  
– *Size Matters: XXL—Recent Large-Scale Paintings*, The Hudson Valley Center of Contemporary Art, Peekskill, New York  
– *Passion for Art. 35 Jahre Sammlung Essl*, Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg  
– *The Present—Acquisition Monique Zajfen*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam  
– *Flurstücke Nr. 2*, Collection of the Sachsen LB, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig  
– *Visit(e). Werke aus der Sammlung zeitgenössischer Kunst der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Palast der Schönen Künste, ING-Kulturzentrum am Kunstberg, Brussels  
– *Made in Leipzig. Bilder aus einer Stadt*, Essl Collection, Schloss Hartenfels, Torgau  
2006  
– *Der erste Blick/Die Sammlung GAG*, Neues Museum, Weimar  
– *Landschaft*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin  
– *Eye on Europe: Prints, Books & Multiples /1960 to Now*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

– *Tokyo Blossoms. Deutsche Bank Collection Meets Zaha Hadid*, Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo  
– *Made in Leipzig. Bilder aus einer Stadt*, Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg  
– *Full House. Gesichter einer Sammlung*, Kunsthalle Mannheim  
– *After Cézanne*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles  
– *Cold Hearts. Artists from Leipzig*, Arario Beijing  
– *Infinite Painting. Contemporary Painting and Global Realism*, Villa Manin—Centro d’Arte Contemporanea, Codroipo  
– *Essential Painting*, The National Museum of Art, Osaka  
– *Deutsche Bilder aus der Sammlung Ludwig*, Ludwig Galerie / Schloss Oberhausen  
– *VNG-art präsentiert deutsche Malerei*, Muzeum Rzeźby, Krokilarnia, Warsawa / Galeria Miejeska Arsenal, Poznan  
– *Back to Figure—Contemporary Painting*, Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung, Munich  
– *Männerbilder 1945–2005*, Museum Junge Kunst, Frankfurt/Oder  
– *“Was wäre ich ohne dich . . .” 40 Jahre deutsche Malerei*, Galerie Hlavního Města Prahy, Prague  
– *RADAR: Selection from the collection of Vicki and Kent Logan*, Denver Art Museum  
– *Styles und Stile. Contemporary German Painting from the Scharpff Collection*, Municipal Art Gallery, Sofia  
– *“Surprise, Surprise,”* Institute for Contemporary Arts, London  
2005  
– *Generation X. Junge Kunst aus der Sammlung*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg  
– *Nur hier?*, Exhibition series on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the gallery of the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig, Leipzig  
– *Carnegie International Acquisitions*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh  
– *Gegenwärtig: Geschichtenerzähler*, Hamburger Kunsthalle  
– *On Paper III*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh  
– *Contemporary Voices: Works from the UBS Art Collection*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
– *Portrait*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin  
– *Life After Death: New Paintings from the Rubell Family Collection*, MASS MoCA, North Adams / SITE Santa Fe / Katzen Arts Center Museum, Washington D. C. / Frye Art Museum, Seattle / Salt Lake Art Center, Salt Lake City / Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City (until 2008)  
– *La nouvelle peinture allemande*, Carré d’Art—Musée d’Art contemporain de Nîmes

– *25 Jahre Sammlung Deutsche Bank*, Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin  
– *(my private) HEROES*, MARTa, Herford  
– *Cold Hearts. Artists from Leipzig*, Arario Gallery, Chungnam  
– *From Leipzig*, The Cleveland Museum of Art  
– *Beautiful Cynicism*, Arario Beijing  
– *Goetz meets Falckenberg: Sammlung Goetz zu Gast in der Sammlung Falckenberg*, Kulturstiftung Phoenix Art, Hamburg  
– *Symbolic Space: The Intersection of Art & Architecture through the Use of Metaphor*, Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, Peekskill, New York  
2004  
– *Northern Light: Leipzig in Miami*, Rubell Family Collection, Miami  
– *Aus deutscher Sicht, Meisterwerke aus der Sammlung Deutsche Bank*, State Pusckin Museum, Moscow  
– *International*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh  
– *Not Afraid*, Rubell Family Collection, Miami  
– *Treasure Island*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg  
– *The Joy of My Dream—La Bienal Internacional de Arte Contemporaneo de Sevilla Territorio Livre—26a Bienal de São Paulo. Representações Nacionais Fabulism*, Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha  
– *Heißkalt. Aktuelle Malerei aus der Sammlung Scharpff*, Hamburger Kunsthalle / Staatsgalerie Stuttgart  
– *Disparities & Deformations: Our Grotesque*, Site Santa Fe International Biennial  
– *Perspectives @ 25: A Quarter Century of New Art in Houston*, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston  
2003  
– *Sommer bei Eigen + Art*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin  
– *Berlin—Moskau / Moskau—Berlin 1950–2000*, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin / State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow  
– *For the Record: Drawing Contemporary Life*, Vancouver Art Gallery  
– *© Europe Exists*, Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art (MMCA) of Thessaloniki  
– *Outlook*. International Art Exhibition, Athens  
– *Die Erfindung der Vergangenheit*, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich  
– *Update #6. Monumente der Melancholie*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg  
2002  
– *Mare Balticum—1000 Jahre Mythos, Geschichte und Kunst*, Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen  
– *Eight Propositions in Contemporary Drawing*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
– *Cher Peintre, peins-moi / Lieber Maler, male mir / Dear Painter, Paint Me*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris / Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna / Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main

– *Sommer bei Eigen + Art*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Leipzig  
– *Paintings on the Move*, Kunstmuseum Basel  
– *Pertaining to Painting*, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston / Austin Museum of Art  
2001  
– *The Mystery of Painting*, Sammlung Goetz, Munich  
– *Contemporary German Art / The Last Thirty Years / Thirty Artists from Germany*, Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath Art Complex, Bangalore / National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi  
– *Plateau of Mankind. La Biennale di Venezia*, Venice  
– *Squatters*, Museu Serralves, Porto / Witte de With, Rotterdam  
– *Wirklichkeit in der Zeitgenössischen Malerei*, Städtische Galerie Delmenhorst  
2000  
– *Contemporary Art from Germany*, National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai / Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kalkutta  
– *After the Wall*, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin  
– *Salon*, The Delfina Studio Trust, London  
– *Malkunst. Pittura d’oggi a Berlino*, Fondazione Mudima, Milan  
– *Bildwechsel*, Kunstverein Freunde Aktueller Kunst im Städtischen Museum Zwickau and Kunstsammlung Gera-Orangerie  
1999  
– *The Golden Age*, ICA, London  
– *Malerei*, INIT Kunsthalle Berlin  
– *After the Wall*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm  
– *German Open. Gegenwartskunst in Deutschland*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg  
– *Drawing and Painting*, Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin  
– *Children of Berlin*, P. S. 1, New York  
1998  
– *Transmission*, Espace des Arts, Chalon-sur-Saône  
– *Die Macht des Alters—Strategien der Meisterschaft*, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin / Kunstmuseum Bonn  
– *Vitale Module*, Kunstverein Ludwigshafen am Rhein / Muzeum Sztuki Mieszczanskiej, Wrocław  
1997  
– *Vitale Module*, Kunsthaus Dresden / Städtische Galerie e.o. Plauen  
– *Need for Speed*, Grazer Kunstverein, Graz  
1996  
– *Der Blick ins 21ste*, Kunstverein Düsseldorf  
– *Contemporary Art at Deutsche Bank*, London  
1995  
– *Echoes*, Goethe House, New York  
1994  
– *1. Sächsische Kunstausstellung*, Dresden

# Colophon

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