

Art in America

Boucher, Brian: André Butzer at Metro Pictures June/July 2008



André Butzer: *Red Man Edvard Munch*, 2007, oil on canvas, 118 by 94 1/2 inches; at Metro Pictures.

André Butzer at Metro Pictures

Visitors to André Butzer's recent show at Metro Pictures found themselves, in the opening gallery, stared down by four giant, cartoonlike figures from 10-by-7-foot paintings barely big enough to hold them. All four wear antique, stiff white collars above shapeless clothes. The canvases on which they appear are so thickly impastoed as to verge on the sculptural. The 35-year-old German artist's bravado neo-expressionism plainly owes a debt to its 1980s precedents, though Butzer professes to be as interested in the future as the past, describing his practice as "science fiction expressionism." While it's easy to find yourself thinking of artists ranging from de Kooning to Basquiat, Joan Mitch-

ell to Joyce Pensato, Butzer's work fully holds its own. This is his New York solo debut after one-man shows, over just the last couple of years, in Munich, Vienna, London, Moscow and Berlin. The busy artist has also founded an artists' collective and is a publisher and editor.

In *Roter Mann Edvard Munch* (all works 2007), a mustard-shirted man stares from round black eyes in a face resembling that in *The Scream*. Resting on the painting's surface are diagramlike, squiggly brown and blue lines describing connected squares and triangles. The subject of *Untitled (Wanderer)* wears a brown coat, one white glove and a mad grimace. He lunges from a green ground, his eyes also great black circles. Splotches of yellow and orange, and seemingly a whole tube of red, lie indiscriminately on figure and ground. Each figure has two pairs of flaplike shapes emerging from his cheeks; with their staring eyes, they resemble SS death's heads. Their comparatively innocent-looking, smiling companions *Heinrich Butzer Limonadenfabrikant* ("lemonade manufacturer"), with his oval, citrusy-yellow head, and *Frau*, with her pink coat and friendly wave, both

have oval eyes with prominent whites, as if drawn by a child.

These paintings' free intermingling of abstraction and figuration found further expression in Metro's back room, where the 15-by-27-foot *Viele Tote im Heimatland: Fanta, Sprite, H-Milch, Micky und Donald!* was flanked by two 11-foot-high untitled abstractions. The large canvas, whose title translates to "many dead in the homeland," pictures a primal stew in which float 16 heads over a broadly brushed blue, green and orange ground. Faces and ground alike are splattered with red; the combination of violence with naive drawing evokes a child's rendition of a death camp or the aftermath of a school shooting.

Another room displayed several smaller, sketchlike works. *Untitled (mehrere Figuren)* resembled a group snapshot of Butzer's trademark characters as children. *Untitled (mit N-Haus)* depicts a couple outside a schematic house marked with a red N, for Nasaheim, Butzer's fictional combination of NASA and Anaheim, the California city ("home on the Santa Ana River") originally settled by Bavarians and later by Disneyland. Nasaheim's curious melding of science and fantasy, juvenile and sophisticated, German and American, nicely encapsulates Butzer's ambitious project.

—Brian Boucher