



adam gallery

ALF LÖHR

a d a m gallery

Between Chance and Determination

ALF LÖHR

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## 10 Questions - an interview by Isabel Kidel with Alf Löhr

You were born in Germany and studied at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. Does that still influence your work today?

My education was indeed very privileged. We had unlimited access not only to some of the best international contemporary art galleries, but also to very influential artists, philosophers and art historians who taught at the academy or lived down the road. The most avant-garde art world was at arms length, but as a student, you don't quite grasp the magnitude of such encounters, which is probably a good thing. What I liked about the place was that they told you that it would take 10 years for you to forget everything you learned before you could finally do your own art.

In that sense, I hope you do not see the influence anymore.

Has painting always been your medium?

My luck with good mentors continued when I moved to London. I began to make some large scale sculptures with Govan shipbuilders, Michelin and Rolls Royce airplane engines, and wrote a PhD on environmental sculpture in the urban setting when Sir Christopher Frayling ran the art history department at the RCA and Phillip King was in charge of the sculpture school.

From there, I moved to Barcelona, and then to the US for several years to engage with sociopolitical-specific art projects, where artists contributed their unique know-how to work with the homeless and people in prisons and mental institutions. These were groundbreaking achievements based on the insight that real improvements in society come only from people who enhance our ability for compassion.

On my return to Europe, I found the art world was not yet interested in these kinds of social interventions and taught at art schools for a few years. When I realised that the more I cared for the students, the less time I had for my own work, I stopped and played tennis for half a year. This relieved the effects of the institutional backstabbing, which had become quite paralyzing. For quite a while, I did not know how to continue, trying to find a way back into my work.

One day, I saw Bellini's 'Doge Leonardo Loredan' (1501-2) at the National Gallery, and realised how many generations had fallen in love with this painting and how many people had saved it from destruction in various wars. From that moment, I knew I wanted to make something that people would cherish and would endure. It was a lucky discovery, and all the principles for the next years were laid out in front of me. I started drawing, and the drawings became paintings. Each one had to be unique, and I avoided pretense by using simple materials that only allowed honesty. Mistakes were visible.

How do you want people to see your paintings?

Hopefully, they feel moved by them. But you are right; the relationship between the artist and the viewer is fundamental in my view. There are many ways to enable the viewer to see and feel things that statement or trophy art cannot facilitate. You live with a painting, and it should allow you to find a distance, not from the world but from being captured in the expectations of the everyday. Some people say that my paintings provide an openness where they can find their own sensitivity, intuition and subconscious. I hope they also enjoy the irony in them.

View across mixed media on canvas 200 x 230 cm 2008



Your paintings seem to distil a single moment in to an abstract visual language. What are your interests behind that?  
To create a poetic resonance.

How do you see your own paintings?  
They are moving organisations of time, where rhythm is expressed as an inner process.

What are you trying to paint?  
Our world, not the one you see out there, but the one you see in you.

What are your influences?  
I often wonder about that myself. For years, I was fighting on boards of non-profit artist organisations to increase funding for the arts. It is very hard to get people to realize that culture is not a given or a consumer item, but that you and I have to carry it if we want to distinguish ourselves from monkeys. We live in a culture where 95% of the often fabulous art that gets made never gets shown. I wonder who influences us to carry on against the odds. Maybe, the ability to see beauty where others see nothing is the biggest influence.

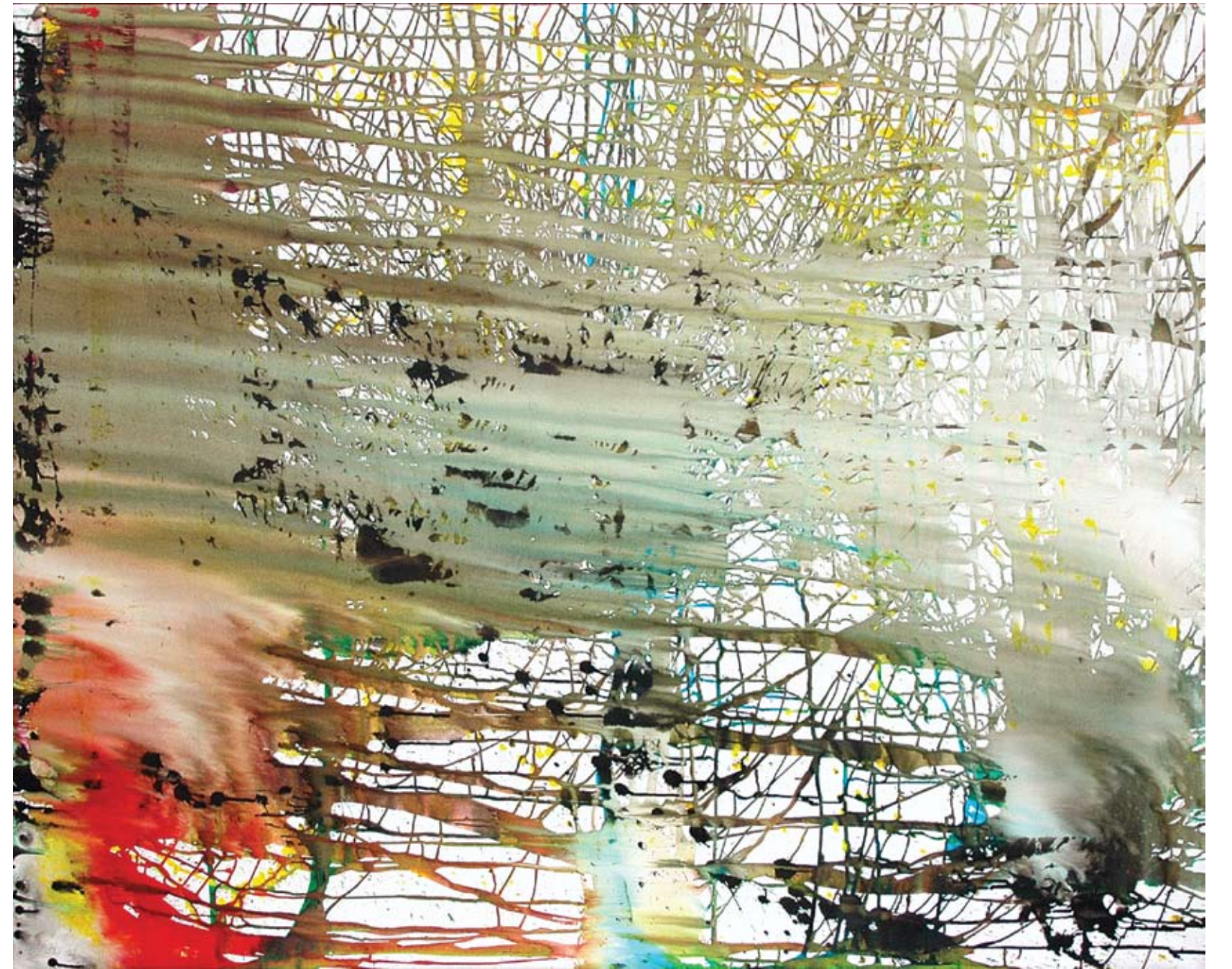
Where were your paintings shown before?  
Mainly at museums and art galleries, but also at a cathedral. I try to avoid situations where a thoughtful and complex composition becomes a consolation prize in an endlessly grey corridor. My work does not have that kind of popular appeal, but it has a personal appeal. It is not a statement on the condition of society at large, but made for people to live with. The more personal and undisturbed the setting, the easier it is for the viewer to make contact with the painting.

Who owns your work?  
The people who buy my work are usually individuals who have the confidence to trust in what they see. None have needed the reassuring effect of a trend, and no painting was ever returned to go on the secondhand market. Instead, most people come back to the gallery, eager to have a second or third painting. It is a fortunate position and I am very grateful for such passionate support. Surely some people buy the work because the paintings look impressive. They enjoy that they are, so to speak, aesthetically fine-tuned, but considering who has actually bought them over the years, it would be silly to think that this is all people are looking for. What most collectors say, is that even though there is a sound intellectual process behind the paintings so that you do not get tired of looking at them, there is also a unique emotional vitality. To engage a viewer beyond the present moment means the work has to be warm at heart.

How do your paintings age?  
Very well indeed, thank you. Keep them, live with them and you will see.



This evening on the radio an exceptionally abstract program mixed media on canvas 90 x 90 cm 2009



Vortex mixed media on canvas 175 x 200 cm 2009



A sudden wave of silver mixed media on canvas 126 x 100 cm 2009



Based upon a true story mixed media on paper 120 x 150 cm 2009



Politeness mingled with mischief mixed media on canvas 90 x 90 cm 2009



Dear Master Mathis mixed media on canvas 126 x 100 cm 2009

In my studio near Shakespeare's Globe - To grasp or not to grasp at all or to go at it like crazy mixed media on canvas 180 x 220 cm 2009







Inflections of voices now silent? mixed media on canvas 40 x 30 cm 2009



Yellow outline of her resonance mixed media on canvas 40 x 30 cm 2009



As in the play of images mixed media on canvas 76 x 60 cm 2009

An inner likeness mixed media on canvas 230 x 200 cm 2008





Contrary to metaphor the dawn inks are doing their dissolve mixed media on canvas 180 x 220 cm 2009

## Between Chance and Determination

Löhr's painting at first glance might be historically described as action painting. However, his aesthetic principles are motivated by quite different concerns. He does not aim to produce a fetish finish surface, on compositions seemly free of human production. He is governed by principles of action-reaction, and by a clear set of visual dynamics and vocabulary. His painterly syntax is based on an exquisite dance between chance and determination of visual and emotional differences modulated between transparency, layering, drips, splatters, splashes, opacities, luminosities, hues, and tones, given scalar force and dimensionality. His work is about elementality, but of acts and events rather than form. It is about affective states and emotional experience, about the production of such states, through the means of projection – throwing paint and catching it in midair as it were. Landing somewhere along the line of their arc into being, his paintings never realize being as such, only processes, or events, of becoming. They are neither form or formless, never become resolved in Euclidean space or linear Newtonian time of the everyday we have been trained to believe in, to see without seeing. They never resolve themselves in the safety zones of integrated one-, two-, and three-dimensionality, but insist on variable velocities and variable scales co-creating each other, in  $2/3$ s of a dimension, or 1.25 dimensions, 2.66 dimensions, 3.333 dimensions. In effect, and affect, they must be understood more in terms of time than of space, closer to filmic experiments of the American and British avant-gardes of the 60s and 70s, but derive from our contemporary moment made manifest in televisual moving images of war, forest fires, floods, weather or the melting of ice sheets. They attempt to resist the spectacular hegemony of filmic expression by slowing it, condensing it once again into the still frame of his watercolor works on paper, where movement in all its fragility and mesmeric intensities are caught with great precision and range. They are slow 'zoom ins' and 'zoom outs' that aim to capture the raw power of the violence that constitutes today's affective visual atmosphere. They are simultaneously macro and micro cosmic, in which the universe is simultaneously both scaled up and down to register all the more powerfully because rare become denser as it compresses, and the superdense becomes rarer as it expands. Löhr's work must be understood as seeing and feeling events taking place more in time, rather than through the idioms of spatiality. In this fact lies his great accomplishment; his work takes painting in a radical new direction, beyond the formalist obsessions that have typically driven the medium.

Dr Mark Bartlett

2010



A thing I learned without learning, a hand is a stronger mouth, a kiss could crack a skull mixed media on canvas 270 x 180 cm 2009

## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 'Between Chance and Determination' Adam Gallery, London  
'Wolkenfarbene Esel- eselfarbene Wolken' Galerie Jones, Cologne
- 2009 Atelier Aperti, Orvieto, Italy (group exhibition)  
Umfeldarbeit, Projektraum Deutscher Kuenstlerbund, Berlin (group)
- 2008 'Objective Emotion' Broadbent Gallery, London  
Galerie Jones und Truebenbach, Cologne, Germany  
MUKA Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand  
"Bias Bond", Aug., Melbourne, Australia
- 2007 'Looking for the Tasmanian Tiger', Broadbent, London  
Victorian Tapestry Workshop, Melbourne, Australia  
Gallery Conny Dietzhold, Sydney, Australia
- 2006 EINblicke VI, Galerie Witzel Wiesbaden, Germany  
'Conversations on Cork Street', Adam Gallery, London  
'Quiet strokes of the New Swimmer', Residency Gallery, German Embassy, London
- 2005 Angus Broadbent Gallery, London  
Gallery at the Residency of the German Ambassador, London
- 2004 "Slow Art" , Broadbent Gallery, London  
Herbarium der Blicke, Gruppenausstellung
- 2003 Newlyn Art Gallery, Cornwall  
Herbarium der Blicke, Gruppenausstellung  
Kunst & Austellunghall der BRD, Bonn  
Kunstverein Rastatt
- 2002 Pumphouse Gallery, Battersea Park, London  
Howard Garden Gallery, Cardiff  
Firstsite at the Minorities, Colchester
- 2001 Goethe Institute, London  
Gloucester Cathedral, Gloucester
- 2000 Galerie Christoph Grau, Hamburg, Germany  
Galerie Karl Plotzke, Düsseldorf, Germany  
Staatliche Galerie Schloss Moritzburg, Halle, Germany  
Neanderthal Museum, Düsseldorf, Germany
- 1999 Museum Bochum, Germany  
Stilwerk, Berlin, (Public Art Commission)

## EDUCATION

- 1985-88 Ph.D Royal College of Art, London  
1977-83 Kunstakademie Düsseldorf  
1980 School of Fine Art, Kyoto, Japan  
1979-82 Heinrich-Heine Universität Düsseldorf,  
1977-78 Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf Abt. Münster

## AWARDS and HONOURS

- 2004 Firstsite Board of Trustees, Colchester  
Vorstand des Deutschen Kunstlerbundes
- 2003 Kunstfonds, Bonn, Arbeitsstendium
- 1996 Senior Fellow, University of Wales Institute of Cardiff
- 1992 Kaiserringstipendium, Museum fur moderne Kunst, Goslar
- 1989-91 Feodor Lynen Research Fellowship, AvH Bonn
- 1987 D.A.A.D. (One year scholarship)
- 1986 British Council Fellowship, London. (One year scholarship)
- 1985 Heinrich Hertz Stiftung, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, N.R.W
- 1983-85 Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes



*Photo of the artist, Florida: Marcus Pietrek*



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