



URBAN SPREE  
G A L E R I E

## ORSTEN GROOM: THE 'MUD' - AN INTERVIEW WITH MAX DAX

Ahead of the first solo exhibition of the painter **Orsten Groom** in Germany at Urban Spree Berlin, we are publishing an exclusive long interview between the French painter and the German journalist, author and gallerist **Max Dax**.



Orsten Groom in Berlin at Urban Spree, October 2020

**Max Dax: Simon, you seem to follow a method in your paintings: Onto an abstract, gestural background – that I also understand as a psychological undercurrent – you paint a concrete second layer of information – people, faces, animals, images.**

Orsten Groom: During my last exhibition in Paris a kid left a pair of chromatic 3D glasses on my desk. I guess it was on purpose, as the kid threw a knowing glance at me. So I put them on and was dumbstruck that it made the color layers stick out of the canvas. This was really impressive because it made visible how my paintings are conceived and composed: using a flat perspective, a reverse perspective or no perspective at all. I use the reverse perspective just like the icon painters did. The thing is, though, that I don't paint images, but fatras.

**Fatras? What does that term mean?**

It describes the way patterns overlap in cave art – sometimes over the course of thousands of years. The term goes back to the Middle Ages. It is linked to the bizarre and absurd fatrasia poetry, which, on the surface, appears as an incomprehensible clutter of vulgar and bawdy alliterations. But if you take a closer look it turns out to be a very elaborately composed secret, hermetic and sometimes even parodistic commentary on specific historical events.

**How do the concepts of fatras and reverse perspectives intertwine in your paintings?**

The Mauritian writer Malcolm de Chazal refers to 'turning perspectives' as « races brought to a standstill », which reminds me a lot of Walter Benjamin's concept of origin against history: An interruption cue in which a constellation constitutes itself as a disturbance in the flow of transformations – recurring 'eddies in the stream of becoming'. Perspective, just like history and images are authorities that stop the time. But why should we stop? I oppose the crisis fit stroke of the origin – the higher authority of painting as a flow of origin, that carries and overcome all things, in all dimensions.

**Did you eventually share the 3D experience with your audience?**

Of course. I bought hundreds of chromatic 3D glasses and gave them to the visitors to share that experience. People would turn into cavemen again. But in fact, you don't need such a gimmick to stand in front of my paintings. You can actually observe how all layers are treated equal with the bare eye – in the sense that they are both centrifugal and centripetal. They crush all plans on the surface, without entrance nor an exit point. Without time.

**You mean: Without the glasses, the colors tend to neutralize themselves as you often make use of complementary colors?**

In hindsight, I realize I seem to follow two principles: Firstly, I aim for complete saturation. In that sense I feel an immediate proximity with the Flemish painter Jacob Jordaens, who never leaves any empty spaces in his paintings – he would paint a cat's head or the ass of a cow just to fill the gap. And secondly I strive for total neutralization. All the colors that I use tantalize and compensate each other. If I have green in the background I use red in the



foreground to create paradoxical solidarities. Just like black and white as the lead in a stained-glass window - against the light.



Orsten Groom - MENINEN FIGUREN - Oil on Canvas - 210 x 270 cm

### **Are you painting the chaos?**

Here's the deal: We are living in a world of chaos. Leonard Cohen says: « There is a war between the ones who say there is a war and the ones who say there isn't ». The struggling against the mix of everything together, of corruption, is the issue - the greyness of confusion.

### **What's so wrong with grey?**

Delacroix says that grey is the enemy of color, the enemy of painting. And Cézanne : « one is not a painter until one has painted a grey ». There is a grey of failure, the drain-grey, and on the other side you have the great apotheosis, a grey of all colors that converge « into the white », to quote Frank Black of The Pixies. But above it all stands Paul Klee's definition of the 'grey point', who said: « Chaos as the antithesis of order is not true chaos. True chaos cannot be placed on the scales and remains forever imponderable and immeasurable. It would rather correspond to the center of the scales. »



**Or, as Nick Cave suggested: « There is a Kingdom / There is a King / He lives Without / And he lives Within? »**

Right on. « On a cold and grey Chicago morn / Another little baby child is born in the ghetto ». Chaos is relative to nothing, it is the opposite of nothing. It takes everything, it is the absolute, and its symbol is the grey point. The grey point is the fateful point between what becomes and what dies. It is as much white as it is black, as high as low, as hot as cold, it is non-dimensional. The grey point is a point between dimensions, at the crossroads. Let me quote Klee once again: « To this advent corresponds the idea of all beginnings, or better, the concept of the egg. Once the grey point is established, it jumps over itself in the field where it creates order. If the grey point expands and occupies the totality of the visible, then chaos changes direction and the egg becomes dead. » I am the egg, man. Goo-Goo-G'joob.

**How does this translate into your own paintings?**

Mine is a Greek Fire Grey that lit up every figure equidistant from the plan. The flaming darkness of the grottos against the blank canvas, which is already filled and cluttered with ghosts and clichés, commonplace images and platitudes. It suggests the worst atrocities and déjà-vu's as it implies ready-made norms, such as the concept of 'knowing how to draw'. It requests 'the academic nude' one has to master before being allowed to 'break the codes'. Painting a good picture is as uninteresting to me as painting a bad one because both can be measured by rules. But one needs a scale, not a normative rule. All these terms like « talent », « creativity », « imagination » - they must be atomized, destroyed and sent to the desert. They must be neutralized. I strongly believe that no one will ever know what painting is all about or what tongue it speaks.



Orsten Groom - BUCKLIG MÄNNLEIN - Oil on Canvas - 210 x 360 cm

## **So, in what tongue are your paintings speaking?**

Once you have spotted every figurative element in a painting of mine and have seen it all, only the vibration of the painting remains – the color field that I refer to as the *feldgrau*, or the grey point. In this Horror Vacui, this vibrance is paradoxically slow, like a etching hum. Not expressionist at all.

All the elements in my paintings marinate in the same digestive system. Antonin Artaud would say that it's all about « turning the anatomic into an atomic state ».

That's also why I would define my paintings as monochromatic.

They are colorful, yet at the same time they are reverse monochrome paintings, like the back of a tapestry – or the ass of translucency.

## **And yet again you use figurative elements.**

My main access to figuration comes from cave paintings, frescos and icons. I orientate myself on very ancient sources that can be traced back to the Stone Age. Cave paintings are not pictures but painting devices. In that sense the canvas to me is a dispositif where the narrative of painting is being carried on. I am not even 40 years old, and painting goes back 40,000 years at least.

So, if there is a schmock in the room – that's me, the historical being.

## **That's understood: You use canvases, brushes, colors and stretchers - like every other painter.**

It is always the same 40 000 years old child's hands on the cave wall. Every painting is always 40 000 years old and there is no such thing as progress or art history. I identify painting as a natural phenomenon and certainly not as an expression of a personal self.

Painting exceeds any personal life, just like life does. I would paint the same painting if I had no subconscious – or if I had three. A painting takes any form it wants.

To me, the fuck puppets we call 'painters' are alike the toys children use to cast forms with sand, and that is that.





Orsen Groom - TOPSY CHOW CHOW - CHROME DINETTE Series - Mixed Media - 160 x 215 cm

**You mean: The paintings are meant to find their way onto canvas anyway?**

Whenever I can't go to the studio because I'm sick or tired or hungover, I don't care because I know that some other fellow painters are in theirs, and that painting make them do what it wants: abstract, figurative, whatever. Like Jurassic Park says: « Nature always find a way ». The point is to swap positions, or, to use a chess term, to castle my private memory for that of the entire world - to trade my own failed life for the forces of life itself. I only make paintings because I am a painter. If I were a baker I would bake bread. That would be art too, with complete dedication.

**So, you are not talking of a tradition of painting. You seem to understand painting as a natural phenomenon, like the wind.**

Exactly. Or the libido. Painting to me is a phenomenon that just can't help but happen, and always will. Bergson calls it the « vital momentum », Spinoza calls it the « Conatus », Monet paints « the paint that grows on the cathedral walls » - and everybody knows that Jackson Pollock is Nature. Art simply takes over identity, or life, and regulates it, just like the sky displays clouds. One day my four year old niece - who's a painter too - told me in a very secretive fashion: « Sometimes I see peanuts in the sky ». That's way beyond abstract or figurative or imagination, that's simply great. Other people would see a giraffe instead of peanuts. There is always something for someone.

## **But if art is taking over identity and regulating it – why did you change your name from Simon Leibovitz to Orsten Groom?**

Orsten Groom is not me. It's what art makes me make. Like anyone is anyone. And I take them all. In Orsten Groom I disguise myself as a dog, as dog shit, as a 18th century etching or as a horse in a cave painting – as a detective, as Picasso, Moses or Freud. That's, by the way, what my Chrome Dinette exhibition is all about. It's just like in that Iggy Pop song: « You're wearing a mask / Which mask are you / You look better that way ».

## **Do you believe in God?**

I believe in all things, and the world exists. Art exists: it is simply the way any lifeform is lived. Like animals and everybody except some boring reluctant people. According to Judaism, God is merely a comical convention in which no belief is needed. To me, that's just what it's like with painting. We see the moon, don't we? So it's our eye. Animals see us. So we're their animals.

In his song « Into My Arms » Nick Cave sings « I don't believe in an interventionist God ». I do believe in a non-interventionist God – a God that is so vast that he turned away from us and doesn't give a fuck anymore. He doesn't give or take anything. He doesn't even need us people to believe in him. To me he is more like a gleaming medusa. He has left his creation as it is and thus has created the absurd phenomenon of life. A life that always was and will always continue to unfurl. In this regard, everything always remains the same: an apocalyptic flow of origins in a perpetual present tense. And we are all just antagonists under an indifferent glorious sky, all hermetic, lonely, dignified and tautological.

## **Do you paint at day or during the night?**

I love to work at night, at dawn. The time of night when the day begins with the very first rays of light. All the ongoing paintings in my studio glow for what they are – a horde that is struggling to appear. In that semi-darkness, I grab a can of paint and start the making – not exactly knowing what color I am putting on a yet unfinished painting.

An hour later when dawn is already in full progress I might realize that I had accidentally picked a can of green instead of red. While painting in these dark wee-hours, I only can differentiate between light grey and dark grey. But I don't care: the *Stimmungen*, the tones tune themselves in this rush. A mistaken choice of color will lead to an unpredictable and unforeseeable development – a direction that I always follow.

In that sense, the making remain strictly impersonal. And that's what I love about the act of painting. I follow the sun – where it's always daytime and nighttime at the same time.





Orsten Groom - NACHSPRECHEN - Oil on Canvas - 210 x 310 cm

### **How impersonal are your paintings really?**

It is just something you deal with. Not a tool for self-fulfilling expression, but the way what happens expresses itself over your nervous system. The way you just can't help to. Painters are not made but born, so painting is just like seeing with eyes, like detecting with antennas - which I haven't created. I just use them. I pour some paint on the surface and then the painting does its own thing. It very soon can't help populating the surface with what's already there in the soil.

The painting grows and ripens like an agriculture. Gilbert & George made a whole series of pictures putting their sperm under a microscope, and discovering that it is filled with crosses and swastikas and every symbol that you can think of!

### **Are you equally forensic in your attitude?**

It can be really anything - whatever Clows: like a duck with a shoe (sometimes I am horriCied how stupid it gets). If I wanted to disguise myself as an artist I'd probably argue that I didn't make the art school so as to paint a fucking duck - and pick more elaborated motifs of high sublime standards. In the contrary I always rely on the belief that Painting knows what it wants, that its plan is already there in the ground, like a potato or the tripods in the War of worlds.



## **Painters would be like mediums then.**

Painting knows the reason – and I don't. Yet. When it is time for painting to get some Picassos done, it takes the little Pablo from the cradle and there it goes for 90 years. Van Gogh only 10, plus an ear. Me I don't know. Maybe painting just wants one painting from you. We don't know. We can't know everything. It's very similar to Frank Zappa's Mojo « Anything, Anytime, Anyplace, for no reason at all », or the sound collecting method Edgar Varèse used to call the « Shit Pump ».

## **You only discover your paintings while you are in the process of making them.**

Yes. Basically the primary settlement of figures ignites the inquiry process. I then turn into a detective. A rabbi detective. I investigate on what paint does while doing it. '*Prozess*' in German also means 'trial'. Kafka's language of 'the law' knows a lot of words with such double meanings. An 'instruction' is an 'order' or a 'command'. Painting instructs me. By implication, this would mean that everything I know, I get to know from the instructions of my paintings when I'm investigating the figurative elements on the canvas. I use encyclopedias, atlases, etymology dictionaries etc..., to uncover hidden meanings and coherences. Like in films noirs and pulp novels: we always see the detective filling his notebook with tons of scribbling and doodles. But what goes on on the page? Does he ever read them? The case is here, full of scrambled clues, screaming to be unraveled.

## **So, when you paint a duck and a shoe you'd google 'duck' and 'shoe' to solve the mystery?!**

Exactly. And in nine out of ten cases, the combination of terms already appears in a very old myth – that may be an Inuit myth or a Talmud story, or the tale of a historical event I've never heard about before and that I would have never become aware of otherwise. Here's for the duck: I pour paint, make some gestures and all of a sudden this precise duck shape appears out of a stain. And it really IS a crucified duck that I couldn't have drawn better by intention. I cackle to myself « what the heck », but alright: that's what painting makes i.e wants so let's get on with it.

Next I google « crucified duck » just to find out that there is an ebook with the title « The Egyptian Philosophy of Christ », that is all about the antic conception of Osiris's spine. Etymologically speaking, the word morphs on its way to Greece and eventually becomes 'anas' – or 'duck'. But 'anas' is also the root of 'Anastasia', or 'resurrection', and 'Anamorphosis', the rise to form! I would have never guessed or learnt this if it wasn't for the painting Investigation – and from a stupid duck it suddenly turns into a highly painterly issue. Fascinating!



Orsten Groom - FIGUREN

**Osiris was Isis' husband. Did you listen to Bob Dylan's song « Isis », next?**

Well: « We came to the pyramids all embedded in ice / It said, there's a body I'm tryin' to find ». So I added Osiris and a spine and some other green duck et voilà the body. The painting knew beforehand what was hidden in what Kafka calls the 'unforgettable': It's the underlying container of all forgotten things that swirl and rush in the undercurrent, eagerly yearning to reappear and to influence, twist and deform the figures of reality.

**In that sense the act of painting is your grande école du trottoir - your personal, private university...?**

Every day that I paint I learn things about this world that I would have never discovered otherwise. So, yes, the act of painting is teaching me. And every new motif that unveils itself through my research eventually becomes a part of the grammar of that painting.

And just like it is the case with Jordaens, these motifs fill up every inch of the canvas. Everything I know - and therefore everything I am - was instructed to me through my paintings. If you'd punch me in the face, probably some yellow and blue would spill out my nostrils.





Orsten Groom - FORTSCHRITT IN DER PAPAGEISTIGKEIT from the CHROME DINETTE Series - Mixed Media - 160 x 215 cm

**If you were a writer one would probably call your method 'intertextual'.**

Maybe, yes. I actually do my investigations in all languages available! I for instance use Deutsch a lot. The German language is very precise and it also allows you to playfully combine words to reach a set of different meanings. I regularly use etymological methods to get to the deep roots of meaning - down to the indecipherable Aleph as « the glottis disposition of thus about to speak ». In other word : « ABRACADABRA » - « I create what I speak ». But if I would have to relate my practice of painting to writing, my intuition is that talking is way more connected to text than writing.

Because you always write SOMETHING - something thought, checked and processed in a certain shape, a definite form, a « sentence » - but you always say ANYTHING - Bullshit that just squirts out of the blue. So that when you talk, when you converse (like we do now) it's always about coming back on what has been said, specifying, evoking a remembrance, a song or a joke, emphasizing what you're saying with a gesture (like a secret eyebrows frown), and say « you know what I mean? » (in french it's « you SEE what I mean ? » - like for painting). It's all about raving. So in this way it really fits what « text » means : a fabric, a tissue that you keep sewing and sewing over - which is the very basis of judaism.



Your paintings have titles in many different languages, such as « EXOPULITAI », « SLUAGHGHAI RM SPERM », « NACHSPRECHEN », « JAGDPLATZ », or « MOLA G MOLVA ». At what point during the process do you give your paintings a title?

Nomination is crucial! An unfinished painting is like Pandora's box. Through my inquiries the painting reveals what it knows, what it wants and what it is. I told you before that I follow this investigative process in multiple languages. Sooner or later I get a feeling for the 'milieu', or the environment, the 'Umwelt' of a painting in the making. In this Umwelt, I will find a proper title for the painting.

Just take the Slavic term 'zamok': zamok means both 'castle' and 'lock'. Both, the title and the painting, the castle and its lock, are what I call the 'ZAMOK'. Then, 'Zamok' indicates when someone who just spoke shuts up.



Orsten Groom - MITTE



## **Do you see yourself in a tradition of painters that you adore?**

A tradition of painting, really... but if you want: Munch, Ensor, Clyfford Still, Piero della Francesca, Chauvet, Picasso, Nolde, Soutine, Sean Scully – I take them all, because they ARE. But to be honest, my personal taste is totally unimportant. It's irrelevant. As a member of the 'immanenz' team I believe and love everything that exists, especially in art. Everything that exists is already there. It's always about the Great Already-There. But apart from being a painter I am also a human being, with such things as « tastes » – and as such I'd mention Piet Mondrian as my favorite painter.

## **Considering your aesthetics, I would have never guessed him!**

But we really operate in the same color field and in the same groove. Mondrian seals the Flemish line from Bosch, Bruegel, Jordaens, Rubens, Ensor & Munch. Believe it or not, but I have a soft spot for minimalism – remember that I consider my work being equivalent to monochrome paintings. Or, even better: for suprematism: the war between the world and its representations.

Cultural blind fucks often tend to relate what I do to Jean Michel Basquiat. I love him, like I love all painters, but you must really be blind as a dick to refer my way to Basquiat rather than to Otto Dix or Polke (immediate references of the northern way) – simply because he's the latest magazine landmark when it comes to painting. Even though I think I guess the reason: Behind all that jazz, behind the freestyle and the rude colors, there is always still the wall – frescoes, Egyptian bas-reliefs and basically the caves themselves.

In my paintings everything is equidistant from one another: a pattern, a figure, a color spot, every layer is flattened into one without perspective – no images, but the fatrasias. All history, all painters and all paintings become equidistant in the grey point of origin.

## **Are you actually working on one painting at a time or do you paint several paintings at once in your studio?**

I consider my studio as a farm: Mother pig gives milk to all the little piglets. If I still have some red on my brush I walk along the line of unfinished canvases, checking if any of them still ask for some more red. And sometimes these little thirst fillings completely change the character of a particular painting and give way to a new direction. I can never foresee any result. And when a painting is finished, I stop.

That's why Picasso said: « When I don't have red I use blue ». You have to manage the equidistance of the brood, of the figures and colors just like the mother pig feeds all of her children without any preferences.



View from the studio, working on the CHROME DINETTE Series - September 2020

**But still you must evaluate each canvas's understanding, and react to what seems wrong - which is taste.**

Honestly, in terms of taste I don't really like my paintings. I don't have to. If they were from another artist they would probably make me vomit. But who cares? The paintings don't care for sure. I'm just the Groom here. It is none of painting's business if I am a Depeche Mode aficionado, a lefty, a dwarf or whoever. Most of the time the glorious moments are the serendipity ones towards the Kabbalah nature of this mysterious thing, which is strictly instinct, the fashion your nervous system is made of. Yet, this impersonal approach to painting completely takes away my deepest intimacy. I don't express myself in painting but paintings express me.

**Have you always painted?**

That I can't remember. I've had a brain accident and unfortunately lost my memory, so I don't know when it started. But what I can say is that I'm a painter because I already was one before. I tend to believe that this instinct of mine that is my main driver when I paint seems to derive from both the amnesia and the moments of epilepsy as a repercussion of a brain stroke I had suffered.



**You were 20 years old then. As a result you lost your personal memory. You were what could be called 'a blank slate'.**

An aneurysm, yes. The flat sun... I was in a coma. I've been told that my recovery was a miracle. It should not have happened. I should have become a vegetable or a cadaver.

But here I am. I am « today's composer who refuses to die », as Edgar Varèse once put it. In exchange I have lost my memory and turned epileptic. Ever since I ask myself the question: Can you swap your memory with the memory of another person? Or that of a fish? Or that of the entire world? Maybe I am possessed by a dybbuk? You know, in Jewish mythology, a dybbuk is a malicious possessing spirit believed to be the dislocated soul of a dead person. Or, maybe I am the dream of a dybbuk - a souvenir that my brain propelled out of my cranial vault like a rocket. Like Van Gogh's candlelight hat.

**And what's your conclusion?**

I guess I must admit that both the amnesia and the epilepsy obviously become visible and tangible in the way I paint. It's an apocalyptic recapitulation of a crisis - a catastrophe that « can fall upwards, as it can fall downwards », as Hölderlin nailed it on his hit record.

It is normal to throw something in exchange, to sacrifice something of yourself, if not the self itself: your memory, your health, an ear - that's nothing crazy at all.

**The apocalypse seems to play a key role in your painting.**

I think of the apocalypse as a moment that probably is so thin and so pale that we probably wouldn't even notice it. The apocalypse probably happens all the time, in front of everybody, while we are watching the moon or laughing at an idea.

George Bataille has this concept of space as a fish swallowing another one. Maybe the apocalypse is this fish? At least that's how I can relate to it best - I imagine the apocalypse as something organic that surrounds us constantly. Technically speaking, I think of it as a recapitulation or a cruel fairytale that makes children laugh. I could think of the apocalypse as the moment when you die and you are seeing your whole life scrolling back in a split-second. This idea of revisiting one's existence in this one moment of ultimate crisis moves and shakes me. In that sense the dice always falls for the first time ever. The dice rolls from a century ago don't count. It's like with the lottery: They always say that you have a chance of 1:31,300,000 but to me it's either you win or you lose.

For me it's a one chance in two. Yes and no. Bye bye. You're dead.



Orsten Groom - SHEOL

It is the famous photograph of Robert Walser lying dead in the snow. His own footsteps stop a few meters from his dead body, which seems to fly above the snow - with his hat parting from his hand. This image to me is the apocalypse. It is once again the grey point that jumps upon itself and escapes.

In Judaism the term 'Sheol' describes a form of afterlife reminiscent of the Egyptian concept of afterlife. The Sheol is the drainage gutter of all humankind, a total mass grave: Regardless of who you are and what you did in your life - you'll end there, without any distinction linked to values or personal achievements. Everyone terminates there to become nothing again. Not surprisingly the tonality of the Sheol is grey. It's the catastrophic dead egg of the grey point Paul Klee is referring to. And this grey is a curse, a dread and a bewitchment.

In this regard I sometimes suspect my paintings to be the apocalyptic epileptic recapitulation of creation that intensifies to its maximum for a very last time - right on the edge of Sheol. I also feel that we have no choice but to surrender to the concept of afterlife. There's got to be one, or a soul, at least in the way we are structured, because



the way we feel comes from apocalyptic urges. All these concepts – the Sheol, the apocalypse, the soul, and the afterlife – are strong enough to overwhelm us in the same way we are moved by the phenomenon of life.

**Did you study the drawings of the apocalypse by medieval monks – in a comparable way you were influenced by the religious icons?**

When I woke up after my coma I felt really strange. I was obsessed by an unknown sensation. It was a haunting intuition, a sensation of feeling the air, a foreboding that felt like a hallucination – I had the feeling that everything is made of the same matter. And I mean everything: objects, but also the light, our thoughts and memories, the air itself, as well as us humans. I called this sensation ‘the Mud’.



Orsten Groom – ORBE #3

## **The 'Mud'?!**

The Mud. I was living the Mud. Part of my life from now on consisted of trying to understand this intuition that everything is the same. I read numerous books and investigated deeply into this Mud thing. Sometimes I would find words or passages that seemed to deal with a similar concept, and only later on I found out about Spinoza, Lucretius or Captain Beefheart. Until today It's all about 'the Mud'.

## **Where did you actually suffer the stroke?**

It happened at L'École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Paris shortly after I had begun studying art there. I cannot recall anything that happened before. My parents told me many stories about who I was before - but this person to me is my Doppelgänger. One day they told me: « We don't know how you succeeded to be accepted into the Academy - you probably cheated ». Still, for them it was really impressive that their son had become a student who was allowed to enter this prestigious building with its golden letters and the French flag flapping in the wind as if it was the White House. So I went back to the Academy to tie on to my past and possibly become a painter. A comeback visit was organized and my professor shows me my place, and my beginner's brownish portrait attempts. I immediately felt a heavy presence of the mud, realizing that I was my own Doppelgänger - a dybbuk that inherited the paintings of my former self... I was back on his footprints and high as a kite.

## **Did you have to take prescribed drugs?**

Oh yes. I had an unlimited prescription for Codeine at that time.

## **What happened then?**

One day I rebelled against the role I was supposed to play. I grabbed a tube of yellow and smeared it all over an old self-portrait of my Doppelgänger. And that particular moment turned out to be a revelation about the mud. Imagine a landscape painting by Jean-Baptiste Corot: Sky on top, then an underwood with trees in the background, a little road, and maybe a dog poop in the foreground, with a ray of light hitting it. All of these elements have different peculiar qualities, but all of it is paint. The paint is the mud itself; it distributes its qualities to all essences, plus the mood, the affective tonalities in time and space and the psychic room of optics. I squealed for joy and from that moment on I started to paint like a maniac!

I did excessively heavy thick paintings, icons of mud - and this obsession turned into a complete passion that carried away all of my turmoil, anxiety and all of my traumas. I remember that I imagined a world without humans - and I heard myself saying to myself: « So what! » I can easily imagine a world populated entirely by animals, mushrooms and viruses, occasionally shaken by exploding volcanoes. That would be a world driven only by art, in the sense that art would be the force that allows all living species a fulfilled life. All animals would just live and play.





Orsten Groom - BOBOK FLAMAND

### **Would you like to be an animal in such a world?**

Why not? We all are: this is the genius state. The ancient Romans used the term 'genius' to describe everything that is happening naturally, by itself, under its own authority and without intention involved: for example the breathing phenomenon, or the way the heart beats - always forwards. Breathing, sleeping, eating, digesting, and playing are the 'genius' way of life - that so-called 'values' oppress. About everything else I don't give a fuck - I especially don't care about human obstruction to genius, to art, to God, to nature and to the world. Kafka famously wrote: « In your fight against the world, join the world's side ». Humans are not the measurement of anything. That is what separates immanence from its religious transcendental rip-offs. Man invented transcendence as a revenge for being alive. Nietzsche said that. What a guy, this Nietzsche! He's my main man.



**But it was humans that painted the icons and the apocalypse. What is it that fascinates you so much when it comes to religious imagery?**



Andrei Rublev: Christ the Redeemer, ca. 1410

When I recovered from the stroke and started to paint again, I became obsessed with icons. No idea why, but since I was considered a painter, I needed to find examples of painting, and I instinctively focused my attention on icons.

I didn't know anything about icons and their religious significance, but the golden backgrounds pulled me in. I became completely fascinated by the concept of the reversed perspective that is so typical of icons. Having had lost my memories, I had a reversed perspective on life as well - Freud would meow.

But even more important was the fact that the golden background symbolizes a state of unbearable glory. Icons are like photographs that are taken against the sun or Walsley lying in the white snow. The subject becomes a dark corroded silhouette against the sky, filled with intense concentrated power. You are looking at something that you cannot see, let alone understand, that is almost ready to explode.

So there is this immensely intense force that you are staring at. Even more irritatingly, the reverse perspective makes the spectator the focal point. The icon is watching YOU as is the backlight of the icon. You are being stared at by jaws that are swallowing you. The human eyes don't see in perspectives anyway. In this regard icons, like cave art, are embracing devices of the human form and perception abilities. This backlight, this saturation is the flow of paint itself, that always carries the glory, that takes over and regulates all things, that plays and combines and takes the entire world in charge, with immense power. Bruno Schulz calls this tension « The Age of Genius ». Can I read a bit for you?

**Please, yes.**

*« Ordinary facts are aligned in time, strung along its course like pearls. They have their antecedents and their consequences, which push each other in a crowd, trailing each other without pause and without interval. But what to do with events that do not have their definite place in time, events that come too late, when time had already been allocated, shared, taken, and which remain on the tile, untidy, suspended in the air, homeless & lost? »*

*There are marginal routes, a little illegal, but when we transport contraband of the kind we carry, an additional unclassifiable fact, we don't have to be picky. (...)*



*That's when I understood why animals had horns. They were the inexplicable that had found no place in their lives, an unwelcome whim, a blind and unreasonable obstinacy. A fixed idea had grown beyond their being, higher than their head and, suddenly denatured, plunged into the light, it had frozen into a tangible and hard material. It then took on an unpredictable, incredible form, twisted into fantastic and terrifying arabesques that the eyes below could not see, an unknown figure, and the animals lived under its threat.*

*I understood why the animals were prone to panic, to wild terror: drawn into their madness, they could not get rid of the tangle of horns; then, with their heads bowed, they cast sad and ferocious glances, as if they were looking for a way through their branches. «*

Cave art or Nick Cave art: everything always follows that same illegal stream, the «Age of Genius».

## **Now is the time to start talking about cave paintings. What makes them so important in your work?**

Damn... Discovering cave paintings was a relief. That's when I was born again as myself.

### **How is that?**

If you ask me, the human being is not considered the measurement of the world. You have to recall that those who painted the cave paintings didn't live there. These caves were very remote, and often difficult to access - sometimes they had to crawl through narrow tunnels to get into the pitch dark caves where they would paint the cave walls. And you have to realize that they had to do long expeditions to get the necessary color pigments that they would use in these cave paintings. They had to basically endure an intense adventure before even entering the cave. Then remember that it was pitch dark in the caves and that they only had archaic grease candles that would hardly light for ten seconds. And when in there, they would never start painting from the first room on: these are very precise and thoughtful tours.

For instance: in the Bull room in the Lascaux caves, all the animals on the left wall rush towards the bottom of the room, and those on the right wall back on the opposite direction towards the entrance. In the middle, a reversed horse polarizes the whole set as a turning arena. This is an utterly precise painting hanging disposition, for all and no one to see. And what is there to see: animals that are perfectly balanced and proportioned, beautifully painted. Very, very rarely you can spot a human figure - and when these paintings show a human, you'll always find it in the farthest corner of the cave, the less accessible angle, like in shame. (Overtime they even completely disappear, with figuration altogether for geometric and « unintelligible forms ».)

The whole room is an accomplished arrangement and we still do find similar hangings of paintings in exhibitions and museums. In this regard, that's why there is nothing to 'interpret': what you see is what you see - painting in plain view. And don't forget that the Falling Man painting of Lascaux is painted on a wall in a deep well of which we know that there was hardly enough oxygen to breathe. The guy that painted it literally had to choke, or died choking to do so, falling like this falling humanoid figure. The animals are perfectly drawn, with high finesse - but the human figure is not.

Why is that so? If they had wanted to, they would have painted a perfectly realistic man like they did paint the bulls. The answer to me is obvious: animals are part of this world, and they already belonged to the world before the dawn of the human race - they are self-evident, and the human form is not. Cave art, the cradle of art, addresses a fundamental question in painting: Does the human form belongs to the world? It is, really, a legitimate interrogation, and a necessary question, the most fundamentally ethical one. How can we be part of this world? We become human out of this very question - the question of art.



Detail from the CHROME DINETTE series



## **When did the perspective change?**

It started with the fucking Renaissance. Maybe it started with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. I mean, how would you call an image nailed to a frame? A painting. The Catholics invented the image – the image as a measure of man. And this is a scandal. To this day we are constantly dealing with the repercussions of this fateful change of perspective of seeing the world through human measurement. Our eyes do not see in perspective, we look at one thing after another, or we look at the empty horizon. And for good reason we are not allowed to look at the sun. That would be the icon's golden backlight – like images we see when we dream and when our eyes are closed. I could extend this to the concept of death when the eyes of the Egyptian dead stay wide open for the « The Book of Going Forth by Day » – which is the title of the Egyptian Book of the Dead.

The change of perspective during the Renaissance is nothing but an ideological device that downsizes the world to human measures. The universe is miniaturized to the tiny ego frame that supposedly rules at its center. This is really ridiculous and a total desecration of the caves. The human perspective is an insult both to the world and the human race.

Suffice to say that great paintings were made during the Renaissance. Art always does talk the language of unswerving escapism, no matter what traps are set on its path – and it constantly adds to its universal vocabulary.

## **You didn't lose your language ability after the stroke.**

It seems not. In my bedroom I found a shelf full of books that I did not remember. I hated them right away because they were supposed to 'stand' for me. They represented a selection of my taste and upbringing, which I was supposed to identify with upon return. But no way. If you want to take my advice: never identify with what defines you.

## **Did you store those books you found in your bedroom out of sight?**

When I came back from death with all that 'mud' in my head, I had to be absolutely sure that what I was feeling or thinking was really me, i.e. produced by my own present state as opposed to the forgotten self that I was supposed to impersonate. Who is the Doppelgänger? And who is the boss? The books to me were like a costume or a testament that would whine: « Come with us into the grave ». I knew that I had to cut the branch I was sitting on, I felt like the painter in the joke: « Stick to your paintbrush while I am pulling away the ladder ».

So I started to fill notebooks with daily impressions. Every time that I had an idea of mine, a pun, or a clue, I would write it down. And at night, I'd read the notebook. Thanks to this method I could sort what's mine and what's not. It also helped me sharpen my Hermeticism and find a dignified sovereignty. After a while I had completed fifteen notebooks.

## **But what about the books?**

I checked them all out with the same mistrust. I more or less only kept the books by Dostoyevsky and Kafka. I kept the serious shit and threw away the rest. In the end I had a pretty kick-ass starter pack. I started to read all these

'muddy' pages and got fueled with what would become my attitude towards painting. I finally found my place in life again.

**You describe this approach towards finding yourself – but also to painting – as if you were a medium that just had to find a functioning channel.**

Painting is not an accident but the result of an attitude towards the accident.

But one must not interfere with its nature.

My deepest wish is to make something that works like glue, to find a communality in the human form and fix what is shattered, so as to step out of the ranks of murderers and find my way back into the afterlife.

**What do you mean by 'glue'?**

The 'glue' would be a bloc of impenetrable gestures and feelings capable of repairing the world. A forgotten word maybe, or a place, just like animals always seek a corner in which to die. By the way: I refuse the Homo Sapiens label. I choose to remain in the Neanderthal team, for sure the glue-iest people of the mud.

Another advice: Keep clear of social implications, communication and politics. They are based on a system of orders, ideological watchwords, oppression, corruption, domination, and speculation. I refuse to be determined by any ideology, identity, or history.

**In a series of paintings you portray Franz Kafka. Why is he so important to you?**

Franz Kafka is like a flag of equidistance. In his writings, there is a neutralization of all forces inherent – a compensation of all virtualities like in legal texts. I especially like this « Zürau Aphorism »:

*« Die Krähen behaupten, eine einzige Krähe könnte den Himmel zerstören. Das ist zweifellos, beweist aber nichts gegen den Himmel, denn Himmel bedeuten eben: Unmöglichkeit von Krähen. »*

*« The crows assert that a single crow could destroy the sky. This is true, without a doubt, but it proves nothing against the skies, because sky means precisely: the impossibility of crows. »*

Suffice to say that you can read it both ways: Yes, the crows can destroy the sky – no doubt about that. And yes, « sky » means the impossibility of crows. This aphorism puts everything back into place. Everything becomes virtual. And virtual means: complete possibility, ultimate potential in the immanent battlefield of proof. The German term 'sein' both means 'to be' as well as 'to belong to' – whereas in French it means 'boob'.

**I guess Wittgenstein loved this paradox, too.**

I don't know that guy. But since we are talking about language, about virtuality, nomination, poetry and my very own reasoning about painting, I would like to tell you a funny little parable: One day I started a little painting. I put some color on the canvas and made a few scratches and leaned the unfinished painting against a wall in my studio.



The next day my friend André Markowicz entered the studio and saw the raw painting. André is an unparalleled translator from Russian to French. He has done all of Dostoyevsky translations in France and is a very cultivated guy. He spots the painting and exclaims: « Akhmatova! That's Akhmatova. The poet. And I reply: no, André, this is just background mud for a painting that I have not even started yet ». So he takes his smartphone and shows me a photograph of Anna Akhmatova that has the exact same visual coordinates as in the painting. On a very abstract level these two images were identical. I couldn't believe it. So I accepted on the spot that the painting indeed was Akhmatova.

He simply knew better and I had to obey. That's what I mean when I say that I am an impersonal painter. I'm not specific. I am permeable. I obey the thing, which is anyway already there.

### **Was that moment like looking at a Rorschach test for you?**

Painting can be considered as a translating process from forgetfulness to oblivion.

A very strange thing always happens whenever I'm in the process of finishing a painting. I realize that everything I have learned from the painting – all the myths and all the knowledge that the act of researching and painting the picture instructed to me – is disintegrating. It's as if I am clearing my own cache. The painting takes the place of all the information that I had assembled in my head during the process of making it. In Archeology they say that you 'invent' what you discover. Arche means both 'origin' as well as 'commandment'. In that sense archeology is the original term for 'order'. And its Gods are the volcanoes.

### **Can volcanoes be Gods?**

The Vesuvius is art in its purest form. The Vesuvius celebrates its own existence and releases its pressure into the world, and, by doing so, it covered and protected the extensive Pompeii frescoes that otherwise would have been ruined and destroyed by the human time. Paint always take care of paint, and painting constantly plays with itself, like a rain of mud and dust and lava and that's what Pompeii's all about. Or the morning dew – and it's the morning every morning. Gods, like animals, always know what to do, and how to do it. An animal always knows how to live and how to die.



Orsten Groom - PARA SHEMOTH from the CHROME DINETTE Series - Mixed Media - 160 x 215 cm

### **What are your thoughts when it comes to pattern recognition ?**

We don't even know what art is or what art can achieve. Spinoza wrote about this problem in his treaty « The Ethics »: « You don't even know what a body can do, the wonderful things that a baby or an alcoholic or a sleepwalker can do when their mind is asleep, when their consciousness is asleep ». We just can't help but trying to find patterns in every abstraction. That also is the fundamental concept of the ornament: behind everything there is a hidden language. It follows the idea that the world is 'written'. The world is language, which, of course, is a massive Jewish way of thinking. In that sense I can really relate to Talmudism: I embody the heavy 'Weltschmerz' weight of the worldwide verb. I have a head so big I can't lie down for sleep, or else I will die. In that sense I'm just like John Merrick.

### **John Merrick is « The Elephant Man ». Do you like the films of David Lynch?**

David Lynch is fundamentally a painter - and a great one. He is a painter, regardless of the medium he is using. Lynch really embraces everything he does with radical commitment to excellence, precision, integrity and courage. And the best thing is: he doesn't give a fuck. In his films, he is in charge of everything: he directs, he writes, he edits, he composes the music and the sound design, he decorates the set, et cetera. Which I personally find absolutely normal, doing the same.



Or, like Werner Herzog, to mention another hero of mine. But most importantly, he invented an original and genuine language of cinema and a great attitude towards art. He knows how impersonal and intimate life is, the stream of intuition that blends it all. He knows we don't know shit from Shinola, that owls are not what they seem and that nothing ever dies. He really got the 'Mud'.

He's like Sailor's snakeskin jacket to me: He represents a symbol of my individuality, and my belief in personal freedom.

### **Did you ever meet him?**

Yes, I met him at his beautiful Idem studio in Paris where he spends half his time making lithographs. But apart from that, Paris to me is nothing but a very boring city. Even the very young behave like dotards and spinsters - it's very different compared to Berlin. To avoid Paris I either stay working and studying at home or at my studio. This way, I don't get distracted, and it is actually way more fun than enduring the ugly reality in overpriced Paris bars where you are not allowed to smoke and where they serve you Heineken beer instead of Pabst Blue Ribbon. I follow the Nietzsche way of life: I dance alone, ruminating and growing a mustache with crazy eyes. But you know what: I am in the process of permanently relocating to Berlin.

### **What's so attractive about Berlin?**

It's the space. The streets are wide and not narrow like in Paris. The Berlin air and the Berlin sky attract me as they offer a quietness - a serenity of mind. I am an independent man, but I've been struggling all my life: producing my own exhibitions and books and an entire economy of self-reliance. I am not complaining, but a restless mind needs space to breathe. Building the exhibition in Berlin makes me realize how the narrow Paris environment is literally suffocating me. Paris is a narrow space for narrow minds.

On top of that I've always been a Germanophile: I love the German language, German art, literature and romanticism. I'm a very romantic guy, and awfully sentimental, you know? But most of all I have the deepest respect for the German post-war history. Here is a nation that immediately after the war put itself to work and verbalized the disgrace it had caused. German artists like Markus Lüpertz or Werner Herzog were born during the war and were literally raised in ruins.

They belong to a fatherless generation - meaning that either their fathers had died during the war or, even worse, they sold their soul to the Reich. In that sense the generation of their fathers was cursed. Instead, they connected with the generation of their grandfathers and discovered great - German - music, great painting, great literature and poetry. Baselitz is barely 20 years old when he takes hold of traditional Teutonic archetypes with his picture cycle « Helden »: here is a generation of young Germans that psychologically needed art and artists to convoke, to work on and regulate their own culture.

And Beuys of course! An artist like him is absolutely unimaginable in France.



Orsten Groom - ABRACADABRA

**Your new show, « *CHROME DINETTE* » is at Urban Spree in Berlin. It is your first show after having stopped painting for a while.**

I abandoned painting a year ago. I was in a very deep crisis, it was a violent breakdown - you could even call it a meltdown.

But now I feel like I have completed a cycle of self-reliance that culminated with my recent retrospective « *EXOPULITAI* » at the Centre d'Art ACMCM in Perpignan in March 2020, where I showed old paintings of mine. Today it seems like all stars have aligned again and a new meteorite is ready to burst off the ground.

In that sense, Urban Spree has turned out to be an ideal space to reboot myself and to approach my series of « *CHROME DINETTE* » paintings with a complete renewed approach. In these paintings, I experimented with realism and I referred to the ancient Egyptian tradition of bas-reliefs.





Orsten Groom - POMPEII MASTURBATOR from the CHROME DINETTE Series - Mixed Media - 160 x 215 cm

### **What are the new paintings all about?**

The new series is about Sigmund Freud and Moses, the Exodus of Ancient Egypt and the frantic apparition of monotheism, Judaism and the prohibition of representation. Dealing with these topics made me find my way back through my own desert, crossing towards not only painting and fatras as I used to, but this time also including plain literate images, following ancient drawing principles and my own hallucinatory neurosis.

### **So you are coming back from the desert by entering another one. From the Exodus of Painting to the Exodus of the Jews out of Egypt.**

The topos of the desert has actually been of utmost importance for me during this process of quitting painting and eventually coming back to it. Here's the deal: what does the desert become inside the verb « to desert »? In English, in French and even in German 'to desert' means 'quitting', 'abandoning', or 'renegating' the army. I asked myself: Does 'to desert' mean that the void that you leave behind is comparable to leaving behind a desert? I came to the conclusion that the act of 'deserting' is the operation of crossing the desert so as to make a desert of your own 'self'. In the sense like Francis Bacon stated he had wished to paint a face that holds the distances of the Sahara - or like the river of sand that flows without water in Iraq.



## But how would you do that, I mean: in real life?

That is a good question. I tried to find answers in literature but I didn't find any story of artists who surrendered their own vocation. Wait, I found Hugo von Hoffmannsthal's « Letter to Lord Chandos », which really « holds the distances of the Sahara » for me. Of course, Don van Vliet abandoned music so as to be able to paint with his mother in the desert - but he had to desert his band Cpt. Beefheart for this sake.

What shall I say? I am very excited to hear the call of painting again. The Urban Spree invitation to do the exhibition was in that sense extremely helpful because everything suddenly felt so natural again.



Detail from the CHROME DINETTE series

## But what role is Sigmund Freud playing in this context?

This idea just came off the ground like a potato: My series of new paintings is a wide investigation of Sigmund Freud's last book « Moses and Monotheism » as well as the origins of Judaism and the woes of psychoanalysis, of abandoning the concept of the afterlife in favor of the subconscious. And I should add that my very dear Frank Zappa evidently invited himself with his « Sofa Suite », which is mainly sung in German. This song provided a subtitle to this show - « Ich bin der Chrome Dinette, und du bist mein Sofa ». On this sofa I lay my deserted painter self and wonder: Why did the Jews abandon Egypt?



**The Bible says: Because they were held as slaves. With the Exodus they freed themselves from oppression.**

OK, but Egypt back then seems to have been the greatest place on earth, with an entire population under the influence of the best art ever made and endowed to a great mythology of life based on the utterly promising prospect of enjoying an endless afterlife – full of joy and without any complexes. Ancient Egypt was an entire society ruled by art. Why would the Jews desert the afterlife? Why would they abandon this religion of art and images for one that forbids them? For me this is very hard to understand.

But the complexity of the topic allowed me to try out a new method of painting that called and radicalized my grammar, my understanding of what defines an image in its flatness, and, amongst it all a conception of hallucination as hyper-realistic precision. For the first time I did preliminary collages and defined them as backgrounds for my paintings. With an immense 5,000 years range of motifs that gather the clues I found while investigating Moses, Freud and sick poodles.

### **Sick Poodles?!**

Check this out: Sigmund Freud published his aforementioned last book in 1939. This book was his testament. And it was a kind of a bomb as he claims that Moses never was a Jew, but an Egyptian dissident that was murdered by the Jews and then replaced by a Doppelgänger. Which, by the way, was a completely weird gesture in the timely context that the Jews were already blamed for the murder of Christ. After Freud published « Moses and Monotheism » he soon died from mouth cancer. As for a bad-mouth punishment.

### **That is so David Lynch.**

Yes, it completely is. « The Lost Highway Exodus ». But it becomes even more like Lynch. Technically speaking, the book is not Freud's testament. That would be his very last essay that he has done. It's called « Topsy Chow Chow » and it is a weird cheesy little tale about his favorite poodle. And guess what: His « Topsy Chow Chow » poodle had died from mouth cancer. Freud has obviously undergone a fateful transfer from which he received his own fatal rotten jaw. It's such a weird image: The father of psychoanalysis, the 'talking cure' dies from the sick mouth he got psychically transferred from a beloved poodle!

### **That's crazy and 'verrückt'!**

The best is yet to come! The prophet Moses is a stutterer. He's got the 'heavy tongue' and therefore can't talk! But he still forbids all images and representations (of God). To proclaim this he invents his own private double speak with his brother Aaron, who speaks for him with snakes and sticks. It's all about sick mouths. From the word of God and the prophet that cannot speak to Sigmund Freud who invents the talking cure and loses his life from a rotten jaw thanks to his own fixation to a dog's mouth. And then Frank Zappa wrote this oratorio about God as a sofa with poodles all over the place. To me that is complete cosmogony. It screams to be painted. This whole conglomerate made me pick up the brush again.

To cut a long story short: The new show is a very ambivalent inspection of Judaism and ancient Egypt through the filter of this weird poodle story as a flat hallucination. Of course it's very grotesque and archaic but at the same time it turned out to be a very playful chance to juggle with an outstanding repertoire of images. This mouth full of Exodus is my way back into the Promised Land of painting - leaving behind the Mosaic ban on representation, that is, the exchange currency of my surrender. To quote Morrissey: « Bigmouth strikes again! »

### What exactly is the role of the mouth in the exhibition?

The mouth is a battlefield. An inner Verdun of the broken face. « I got no lips, I got no tongue. Whatever I say is only spit! » There is a war between the oral and the buccal. You breath in, you swallow, you digest and you shit. These are the buccal functions. You breath out, exhale and expire, you spit, you vomit, and on top of these recreational activities, you talk: that is the oral side that supposedly distinguishes us from animals.

The paintings in my exhibition are all about the mouth. The mouth is the main pattern and the secret subject. The mouth is like Kafka's sky. Freud says that all that you are saying is not necessarily your own. There is another, deeper voice than yourself talking - the subconscious. In the same way, maybe the prophet is the unpronounceable God's voice's ventriloquist. Nobody likes to be dybbuked and puppeteered, and the first thing Jonah does is to try to run away and to scam God's jurisdiction by taking a boat. But of course he ends up in the big fish's mouth that vomits him where he's supposed to talk. There's no way out.



Detail from the CHROME DINETTE series



**It's the same story as in « Moby Dick » and « Pinocchio ».**

Exactly. But my favorite mouth tale remains Edgar Allan Poe's « The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar ». Valdemar is an old Polish man who gets hypnotized while dying. He dies, but his mouth keeps talking. At some point the tongue itself spreads out of the mouth and starts talking « without the teeth », as Poe puts it - meaning: without the spelling, or like a radio antennae. The tongue speaks by and for itself and starts yelling: « For God's sake! — quick! — quick! —put me to sleep —or, quick! —waken me! —quick! —I say to you that I am dead! » as if the tongue had a panic attack.

**You said it's the first time you've worked with preliminary collages – how did that affect your method of discovering images and contexts while painting?**

I see it as an experimental radicalization of my whereabouts, issues, topics, tools and grammar. In my mind, I saw a gleaming and chromatic dinette populated with spells and totems and taboos and archetypal figures of the psychoanalytical realm, in the context of the almighty prohibition of images - on a journey towards an unreachable Promised Land. This opens up an immense repertoire of images ranging from ancient art to mythical and modern depictions. And I let it crush against a glass, like a swarm of locusts would crush against the windshield of a truck - just like the neurotic and egomaniac truck in Spielberg's « Duel ». Great realism in Cinemascope and Technicolor!

**You mentioned hallucinations as a part of your process of painting, how does that cope with realism?**

Contrary to the commonplace understanding of a hallucination being an ethereal soft layer of blurry spectrums, my personal understanding is much tougher and saturated with more than precise objects, all at the forefront, at once. My eyes see the world in an almost unbearable hyperrealism that destroys the visible by means of excessive sharpness - challenging the readability of what I am seeing to a point of craze.

**At the opening of your exhibition « CHROME DINETTE » you will also perform a piece of music. What are your musical roots?**

I have a selection of favorite records that I'd play over and over again in my studio. The music ranges from Inuit music to this guy who calls himself V/Vm. He superimposed all of Shostakovich's fifteen symphonies into a single stream of exquisite groove. When it comes to the music that I play and record myself I'd say that I have created my very own style which I call the glues - like in 'sticky blues. As you know, I love glue. So that's why I assembled a special glues band here in Berlin with my fellow comrades Jimmy Trash and Big Daddy Mugglestone. The band is called the Poodle Mhund Arkestra and it will perform some tasty desert songs at the opening.

**'Mhund' - with an 'h'?**

You are German. You should know. 'Hund' means 'Dog' and - 'Mhund'! **Sieg Mhund!**



Detail from the CHROME DINETTE series

**Max Dax** is a German writer investigating art, music and pop culture. As editor-in-chief to the magazines Alert, Spex and Electronic Beats, Dax has shaped pop journalism in Germany for more than three decades. As a curator he organized the recent museum shows « Hyper! A Journey into Art and Music » in Hamburg's Deichtorhallen (2019) and Black Album / White Cube in Rotterdam's Kunsthal (2020). As an author Dax has released numerous books about art and music. His first novel « Dissonance - A Replaceable Year » is due to be released in Autumn 2020. Together with Luci Lux, he is running the Santa Lucia Gallery of Conversations.

### **ORSTEN GROOM: CHROME DINETTE**

"Divan, Divan, Weisst du, Wer Ich Bin?"

23.10.2020 - 23.01.2021

Vernissage: Friday, 23.10.2020 from 18:00 in presence of the artist

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Revaler Str. 99

10245 Berlin

Contact & Catalogue: Pascal Feucher (pascal@urbanspree.com)

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