



René Schoemakers
Genius|Loki

RENÉ SCHOEMAKERS
GENIUS LOKI

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Curated by Peter Wilde

Text

Comforting Complexity

A conversation between Wolfgang Ullrich and René Schoemakers
about the series *Genius Loki*



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Wolfgang Ullrich: We want to talk about your group of works "Genius Loki.", which you have been working on for about three years now. It consists of a still growing cycle of paintings in which you develop something that could be classified as 'private mythology' - as it has been practised by numerous artists since the 1960s. It is about identifying motifs that are important for one's own life, relating them to each other and symbolically transcending them. One of the first parts of the series is a diptych ("Genius Loki (Klever Skizze 2)"). Its right panel shows a self-portrait. But you are not seen there in a natural way; instead, you look partly as if you were a sculpture. And two horns come out of your forehead. The eyes with which you fix us viewers, on the other hand, seem utterly real. All this together makes a rather uncanny impression. In any case, you do not present yourself as someone one would trust. Instead, one wants to keep a distance, to question carefully what is going on. And the fact that you offer your counterpart a small apple only increases the distrust. Are we to be

seduced here - by a devil instead of Eve - but then have to atone for it even more?

I wonder why you are presenting yourself here as a dangerous, unsympathetic figure. And, moreover, as someone who, at first glance, seems to have a surprisingly strong resemblance to Donald Trump?

René Schoemakers: In fact, this work implements an element that recurs throughout the series. It is really about the association of "wooden sculpture". The Genius Loki series takes me back to the Lower Rhine, where I grew up, a very Catholic area. And in the churches, you often see sculptures that are not coloured, but only varnished or stained.

After the *Weltgeist* series, which reaches more directly into the political, I take a step back with *Genius Loki*. But only in order to take up the universal again in a more private context. Whereas in *Weltgeist* I thematised ideological blindness in the more political sphere, in *Genius Loki* it is more in the general ideological sphere. And that was first of all the taken-for-granted Catholic milieu.

But your association with "private mythologies" is quite accurate. One can assume that the term "private" is perhaps considered somewhat sceptically today, that one would perhaps prefer a direct



statement, an unambiguous, almost activist, positioning. But I think that art is always particularly stimulating to debate when it obviously demands the exploration of an individual view of the world. Otherwise, one could also exchange general thesis papers.

That is why there is also the explicit ambivalence or ambiguity in my paintings. The individual is always recognisable. But it is always also recognisable in a role in the picture. Naturalistic painting then makes this perceptible to the viewer.

I was thinking less of Donald Trump. But now that you mention it, I also find this interpretation very funny. My idea was that I appear as "Loki", that is, as a "trickster". The artist as a seducer who lures you onto false tracks. Whereas with Trump that might happen rather without control...

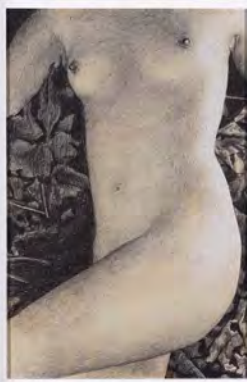
The distance you perceive, however, works exactly as I intended. I don't consider immersion to be a particularly good quality of art. Ultimately, immersion is always bought with illusion, the illusion of immediacy.

Wolfgang Ullrich: I can only agree with you! I like the fact that you don't ingratiate yourself with the audience, but warn them of yourself as a trickster,

thereby also prescribing a very specific attitude on how to perceive your work: One should approach your pictures as analytically-critically as possible, detective-like, watching out for where one might be seduced or deceived. One could also say that your self-portrait shows you as a Platonist, since it was Plato who equated fiction with lies and always saw deception, even something dangerous, in what painters and poets do. But the fact that you, as a painter, propagate such a view is surprising and courageous. After all, you are criticising your own profession.

Or do you want to show all the more sovereignty as someone who is his own harshest critic? In any case, one wonders how broken or unbroken your relationship to yourself as a painter is.

René Schoemakers: My relationship to images is ambivalent. They have great power, but you can never trust them. They always refer to themselves and to something else at the same time. Painting has always been the best medium for me to create such images. The painted image is recognisably a material object, something manufactured, and yet, as an image, it refers to something beyond the painting itself. Photography always forces a completely different attitude of reception on the viewer. Even if one is aware of image manipulation



Genius Loki (co|rework #2; eiidolor™)

2022, Acrylic on canvas, ball pen on paper, framed, 100 x 90 cm (each canvas 40 x 30 cm, each paper 30 x 20 cm)

and image generation, the idea of the ray of light from the object through the lens to the eye or photographic image remains. In the painted image, the implicit basic idea is the empty canvas and then the hand of the person painting. That is a different receptive apriori.

Historically, I have always found painting interesting also because it has developed all possible forms of pictorial representation in its history and has integrated all competing media of representation. You can transfer pretty much anything into painting and, moreover, it has the aspect of its materiality.

What never interested me were the discussions about the value of painting as a "supreme discipline". Also, ideas of "painting with painting against painting" always seemed pretentious and "academic" in a bad sense to me. If you joined a traditional painting class at art school in the 90s, you were at the bottom of the food chain. Any other medium was more respected.

Perhaps it wasn't very clever to begin a kind of painting that, with its sensual persuasion potential, gave - and still gives - many viewers the idea that this aspect is the very core of my work. The naturalism of my paintings, however, is only a technique

that almost always depicts carelessly constructed stagings with an utmost precision. In this respect, I would be a liar squared in Plato's sense. But perhaps that is just the position of the greatest possible closeness to truth. I also don't know whether "painting" is really my profession or professional milieu. I can't claim that painting colleagues embrace my work enthusiastically. There is often scepticism. On the other hand, I am also a bit fishy to my non-painting colleagues - being a painter...

Wolfgang Ullrich: I am pleased to note that you call yourself a liar squared in Plato's sense. So not only are the paintings as such 'fake', but you also paint dummies - that is, objects that pretend to be something different than they are, and which you only build for the purpose of being able to paint them afterwards. In a way, your approach is comparable to that of a photographer like Thomas Demand, who also builds the motifs of his pictures first and does not strive for a perfect illusion but wants the illusion to be visible as such. Within your series "Genius Loki", for example, there is a painting in which a woman - the central protagonist - sits under tracery, the kind we know from Gothic churches. The tracery, however, is obviously not made of stone, but cut out of cardboard and hung with clothes pegs, which you also paint. So you



deconstruct what you construct - this is a typical postmodern method.

And again, a strategy to educate your audience to more mistrust - to get used to a detective's eye in order to identify the illusion behind the illusion as such. This strategy, however, is against the whole of modernism, in which the viewer should appear as humble as possible in the face of the authority of the work of art; he even should entrust himself to its autonomy and submit to it. How do you see yourself as a painter between modernism and postmodernism?

René Schoemakers: A painting can give a viewer an extraordinary experience. It can lead to the most diverse reactions, stimulate reflections, cause emotions. And yet all this remains profane. But this is not to be understood in a pejorative way. It is about human experiences, interpretations and perspectives in the artwork. And we have nothing more than these experiences, interpretations and perspectives. And because these are generally human, there can be no hierarchy between the viewer and the work or artist, because there are no hierarchies between humans by definition.

So if modern art is supposed to be associated with such a hierarchical concept, that would not be

appropriate regarding my work.

On the other hand, one can of course classify the deconstructive characteristics of my work as postmodern. But making narratives and meta-narratives visible as such in fact just allows a reflexive access to them. Everyone knows that fairy tales are fairy tales. And yet fairy tales fulfil functions that can be seen in a positive light. And if you know to what extent fairy tales are fairy tales, you can add other, new fairy tales to the old ones.

It seems as if fictions (a kinder term than illusions) are unavoidable and in a sense good for our understanding of ourselves and the world. After dealing with - mainly right-wing - ideological narratives in the last series, in *Genius Loki* the focus is on, among other subjects, fictions that I was confronted with in my younger years living at the Lower Rhine. A very dominant and unquestioned Catholicism, for example. But it's not necessarily about trauma or criticism. Rather, it's about finding out through the paintings what it's all about. Twenty years ago, someone wrote about my paintings that they were "painted performances". I would rather say they are re-enactments to enable new insights. I let the viewers experience this. And they get in wherever they are.



Genius Loki (co|re work #1)

2022, Acrylic on canvas, print on plywood, various materials, 88 x 70 cm

So yes: I tend to position myself in a postmodern way. But with the proviso that some narratives are more coherent than others and that objectivity is not necessarily illusionary and repressive. There are objective facts. Their interpretation and evaluation can be discussed. Perhaps I am making my contribution to this with my work.

Wolfgang Ullrich: I appreciate your plea against hierarchies, specifically your decidedly profane concept of art. We obviously operate on the same grounds. And with a postmodern attitude, it is easier to recognise narratives and varieties of fictionalisation as such - and above all to acknowledge that these are not just surface phenomena under which the actual and essential is hidden, but that this is the only thing up for discussion and disposition. I find it interesting how you now approach the analysis of narratives. It seems obvious that a single painting is not enough to do this, but it is apparently not determined for you from the start how many paintings you need until you have shed light on what is significant for you.

Or what is it with "Genius Loki"? Does one painting lead to the next? Or are the basic motifs fixed from the start and only differentiated in the execution? Or how should such a working process be imagined in your case?

René Schoemakers: Genius Loki begins with the already mentioned self-portrait as a trickster. In the preparatory process, it was clear to me that I wanted to get back a little closer to my own person. That came about by chance when I noticed that at the very beginning, at the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s, I referred to right-wing ideas in my work when I was still at secondary school. But this was also specifically in relation to Kleve, where I come from. So I wanted to go back and play through what connects me to Kleve. And there is this early imprint through a self-evident Catholic milieu, the inescapable figure of Beuys, who attended the same school as I did, only 50 years earlier, and the fact that from 1987 onwards I operated in a constellation of two, painter and model, so that this constellation, which has also been played out in art-historical terms in the most diverse variations, would also be an aspect of this series.

But I always start from the visual, without a precise plan, and collect associations and motifs. This is not systematic research but a piling up of material, mostly images but also texts, which is repeatedly looked through and expanded until nodes emerge that become image ideas. These gradually become more concrete and at some point the first idea is clarified to such an extent that I can get down to





Scenes from a 15-minute film documentary of the preparatory work for Genius Loki

concrete preliminary work. Most of the time, three or four ideas for paintings are fixed. While these are being prepared and built (which takes a while), I go through the material again and again, add new things, so that it is an organic growth that is guided by some regulative ideas. But in the end it's always the visual power of an idea for a painting that decides where it goes. It is important not to forget that imagination is rather limited. That's why a lot of things often change during the preparatory work and, of course, during the work with the living model. Then comes the phase of the digital preparatory work, the transfer to the canvas and the execution, the actual painterly realisation. There, too, things often change. It is precisely the long phase of preliminary work that gives a lot of room to clarify or change ideas about the painting.

Interestingly, it never happens that I develop ideas for exactly one work. Just as often, I return to aspects of older works or series and recontextualise them. I do try to make each painting as compelling and sensually captivating as possible, but if you know the series, you get more out of it.

It's about "half-time" now with Genius Loki. The first works were shown in the gallery's last exhibition, now another part. But the whole "Beuys" complex is still to come. So far, there is only the "Adoration

Box" as a counterpart to the "Intuition Box" by Beuys. Moreover, the landscape of the left half of the self-portrait mentioned refers to Beuys as it does to my biography. In this respect, this would be a kind of thematically condensed nucleus of the series.

Wolfgang Ullrich: The way you describe your work on a series, I could actually also describe the work on a book. First you have a few motifs, around which more material gradually settles, in the ongoing process completely new motifs are added, others perhaps lose their significance. But whereas in writing you end up with a single text, in your work you end up with a plural of formally highly diverse paintings.

And not only that: a series can also include objects, as in the case of "Genius Loki" - like the "Adoration Box". So the parts of your work are much more heterogeneous than those of a theorist or author. And I ask myself how to interpret this heterogeneity. Or as a question addressed to you: Why don't you stay in the medium of painting? You could also paint such a box, for example - so why does it have to be made of wood?

René Schoemakers: Part of the answer to your question could be that I actually started to create



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something in all kinds of genres or media more than 30 years ago. Very early on, at the age of eleven or twelve, the urge was strong to create something that contained an interpretation or version of reality. I set up an office to produce a fictional newspaper with entirely made-up, rather absurd, stories. Little by little I used all possible means, everything I could get my hands on. I wrote, drew, photographed and made music, you saw the guitars and the amplifier at your studio visit in Kiel. Even today I would like to work as intensively in all areas as I do in painting. But the day only has 24 hours. Why painting became my main medium, I can't really say myself. You can do it alone, it has a craft side - I don't know exactly.

On the other hand, I have to say that from the beginning I always had works where the painting had more of an object character in space and not just as a window into a virtual space. My final project at the art academy was an installation involving paintings. And early on - but rather with an accusatory or challenging undertone - the question came up whether I didn't have "enough confidence in painting alone".

But that is not a category as far as I am concerned, "painting". I work with images and often the form of the painted image seems to me to be the

appropriate medium, but often also combinations of canvases with drawings and other, also three-dimensional parts. Genius Loki also includes some works where this is the case, besides the "Adorationskiste". "co|re work #1" has a frame with a three-dimensional figure and a printed wooden panel next to the canvases. But this is merely a continuation of what the painted canvases show. We have different idioms or systems of signs: the naturalistic style of painting, a childlike painting and, on the printed panel, a comic-like representation. Moreover, on the larger canvas, the painted person stands in a posterior area, located behind a pane of glass in the painting. At the same time, all motifs and layers are not found randomly somewhere, but come from the personal environment. The "comic" is also based on drawings that I have digitised so that I can continue to work with them in this way. And finally, this continues in the title. Here, too, there is a breaking up or overlapping of layers. "co|re work" can be read "core work" "co-work" and "rework". Reducing complexity and enabling reference to reality by increasing the complexity of the work. ("Genius Loki" is after all not a typo or bad Latin...)

Concerning the "Adoration Box", it was probably the idea that I wanted a box of a similar size to Beuys' "Intuition Box", in order to make the refer-



1 Coat Stand, Man Ray

- replica changed: Individual face, it repeats the face of the figure behind it, which also is visible in contrast to the original and looks in the direction of the male figure
- "sticker": emoji can be read as commentary, at the same time it adopts the features of the original (Man Ray) face, which appear on the right side of the painting
- face as line drawing: reference to *Wiegenlidschatten*, on the left of the painting
- the face is therefore on three levels, or four including the right painting

2 Couple constellation, man-woman, model-painter

- *Coat Stand* is recontextualised, as an image, created by a male artist
- the woman detaches herself from the "invisible" position, fixates on the man/artist
- the woman stands, the man sits

3 Trademark

- „eudolor“ typographically as a trademark, designed in such a way that the „u“ becomes two „i“, the mirrored „r“ can also be read as a Greek „v“
- contraction of „eu“ and „dolor“ and „εἰδωλον“, a Greek-Latin co-production
- artistic trademark: the good pain in the eidolon
- „fittings“: shapes, fits, montages - construction
- „est b. c.“: from the very beginning...

4 Tinkered stick of dynamite

- reference to *Wiegenlidschatten* and *The Unencumbered Self (Liegenzweig)*
- since then a sign for the greatest possible distance to direct substantial action and purely artistic play
- in heraldry: the best sign of artistry...

5 Pruning shears

- reference to the Lower Rhine, which is stereotyped by the image of trimmed pollarded willows
- (will become clearer through later works in the series)

6 „Planets“

- see: „Ego“, internal reference to *The Unencumbered Self (Prologue A)* and *The Unencumbered Self (All The Seats were Occupied)* where similar spheres or random patterns can be found in the paintings



7 Ego, The Living Planet (Marvel)

- direct reference: name - Ego wants to bring the entire universe under his control, ruthless, deadly; artist ego
- indirect reference: comes from the song of the same name by *Monster Magnet*, resulting in an internal reference to the painting *Too Bold to Rock'n'Roll I*

8 Cardboard room

- reference to further paintings in the series with similar setting
- greatest possible profanation of gold ground as a sign of the ideal space of salvation history

Genius Loki (Wiegenlidschlag)

2022, acrylic on canvas, 140 x 290 cm



9 Man/Artist

- levelling: unclothed, like model
- „imperial orb” and „sceptre” as insignia of authority: plastic ball, toy with the original motif of Man Ray's Coat Stand, sceptre crowned with the head of a Punch and Judy figure
- artist's head tripled in the painting: Ego, model, Punch; the Punch on the stick is also reminiscent of tambour sticks from the Rhenish carnival, in Kleve at that time school-free „Brauchtumstage” (customs days)
- glowing Punch's head takes up a meaning that is already processed several times in *The Missing Kink* (iconography of the flame above the head as a sign of „exaltation”)

(SOME) HINTS & CUES

(Disclaimer: The artist accepts no liability for misunderstandings or misinterpretation, for whatever reason)

10 Kneading machine

- ὕλη/μορφή - artistic activity as work on the play dough machine, which has to be equipped with various small moulds (a solo exhibition once had the confessional title *Hylemorphinism*)

ence clear. I also wanted to have at least one real piece of wood in the series to make the reference clear. This is where the medieval wooden sculptures and the box by Beuys meet. Finally, the lettering "Adoration" should actually glow, as the greatest possible inversion of Beuys' very restrained pencil writing.

In any case, I don't feel myself to be a figurehead in matters of painting tradition or the guardian of painting history. And when someone praises the quality of my painting, it's usually an inconvenience to me. Because that is not the point. It's a means to an end.

Wolfgang Ullrich: Let's delve a bit deeper into the purpose - the purpose you are pursuing with the "Genius Loki" cycle. It doesn't seem to me that your aim is to convey a certain worldview or experience to your audience, as your works are too enigmatic and require too many prerequisites. Even the detective-like perspective we talked about doesn't necessarily lead to a clear result. On the other hand, I can't imagine that it's just about self-discovery, that you're essentially in a kind of self-conversation and we as viewers can only participate as distant onlookers at best. What, in your opinion, would ideally happen if a recipient with a certain level of perseverance and art experience

dedicated themselves to "Genius Loki" (or another one of your series)?"

René Schoemakers: "Purpose" is obviously a dangerous term. In the context of my work, it does not imply an end-means relationship that involves the viewer. By "purpose" I meant the context of a certain artistic intention that can be better or worse realised through the means of painting or expressive dance. Although you cannot presume that the artistic intention is formed independently of any considerations concerning the medium. My first intent was to make it clear that my considerations are often tied to painting because I like the possibilities of the medium. Not the medium per se.

But your question obviously has a more far-reaching implication. I don't want to simply suggest or recommend the perception of the world represented in the works of the series to anyone. As already mentioned, it is itself a deconstructed worldview, thus a view of a worldview. In this sense, there is a space being opened up in which viewers can navigate without necessarily having to "adopt" anything. In each work of art, two subjective conceptions (of conceptions) meet, through the work as mediator. In this context, the clichéd question of "what the artist is trying to tell us" is of minor importance.

Viewers may encounter certain structures and contexts in the artwork, that can be understood as representations of certain ideas in reference to the world. Viewers can react to these. Rejecting, agreeing, interested, bored, fascinated, or euphoric. I have no control over this, nor do I aspire to. It can rather be understood as a conversation in which a certain story is told to which the viewer can react. To be honest, there is an undeniable hierarchy here, because there is first the work, then the viewers, who then mostly react for themselves in silence. But several recipients can start a real conversation in front of the work or - since social media at least partially level the mentioned hierarchy - react to a work with their own creations. In the field of literature, the phenomenon of fan fiction exists. In the field of visual art, less so. But in fact I have occasionally been sent copies of drawings made by school classes in response to my work. Or a letter from a class inviting me to a workshop after seeing some of my works in an exhibition. That has happened more than once.

What strikes me about Genius Loki, for example, is that it again addresses the phenomenon of cultural role attributions for women in several places. Not only when it comes to the female figure sitting under the tracery in a pile of objects, all of which are attributes of female Christian saints. The figure

seen behind Man Ray's iconic "Coat Stand" can also be seen as a commentary on this complex. Because from today's perspective, the work is actually quite sexist. This is repeatedly reframed in "Genius Loki (Wiegenlidschlag)". However, the same applies to the male figure. Numerous art-historical, but also pop-cultural references overlap in the picture. This can be investigated "detective-like", as you describe it, and a space of reflexive reference gradually unfolds. If viewers appreciate this "detective work" and also feel addressed by the sensual quality of the painting, then it is rewarding for them to engage with it. Otherwise, they will look around for other art. Then there is no point or purpose...

Wolfgang Ullrich: I find your reference to fan fiction quite interesting. The open form of your series of works certainly favours that active viewers can have the feeling that they, for their part, could add one or the other element, even continue what you have initiated. On the other hand, however, your art is particularly challenging, precisely because high-culture and pop-culture references appear in equal measure, but most people are only halfway familiar with one area at most. The intersection of those who, for example, both recognise what the 'Loki' in the title refers to and have Man Ray's "Coat Stand" in their visual



memory is probably quite small.

I ask myself whether you don't even deliberately and somewhat systematically make sure that the references of a group of works are as heterogeneous as possible, and sometimes even a little peripheral. But why? Do you ultimately want to be the artist that no one can reach? Who always has a head start? Who is therefore also superior?

René Schoemakers: It is certainly not a question of any kind of "lead". When two people meet, one always has an advantage over the other through the additional information of the person's introduction. In this respect, I don't know what knowledge, what influences the viewers bring with them. I have to accept these perspectives. In this sense, they cannot be "wrong". Rather, they can be witty, witless, shallow, ambitious, detached or profound. They can be more or less well founded, more subjective or more concerned with generality.

From my side, it's not about distance, advantage or superiority. In my artistic work, I base my work on what defines me and what interests me. And so the works naturally reflect a certain tendency towards complexity. Complexity calms me, simplicity worries me. Reduction always means reducing complexity to simplicity. That is the beginning of all bogus

ideas and ideologies. I am aware that the references of my work are far-reaching. But that is me. In the best case, the viewer takes this as an opportunity to go on a journey with me.

I don't include an instruction manual or a key with the works. I can't explain everything myself either. But perhaps the field of references is indeed systematically so extensive in order to avoid the danger of backward-looking academicism as well as a flat adherence to the present. I am not a traditionalist, but I also don't want to just drift on the surface of contemporary discourses.

On the other hand, I try to offer artist talks or guided tours of my exhibitions when I can. Or to compile explanations and notes for the museum team, which can then be used as source material for guided tours. I am particularly willing to offer appointments for school classes. They are usually more open and curious than habitual exhibition visitors.

If I can choose, I prefer on the whole to have an art historian or art theorist comment on my work. Writers are also welcome, as in my last catalogue. Together with the paintings, this gives a more comprehensive picture in which I might also learn something new myself.



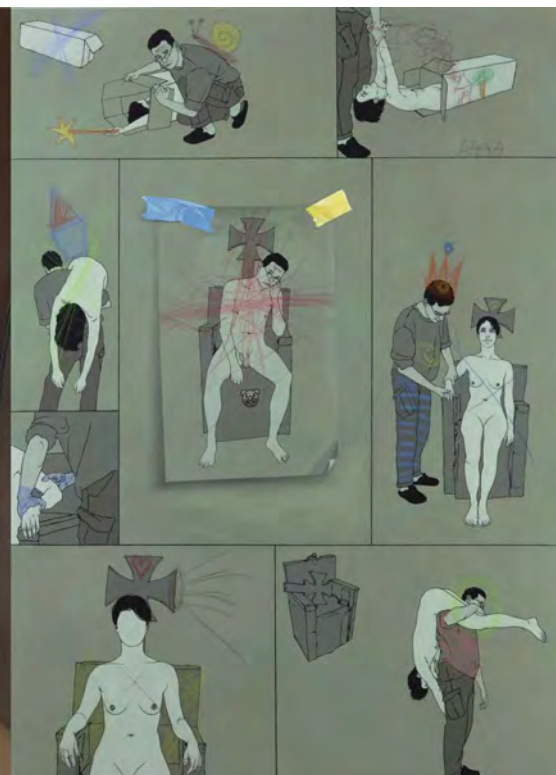
Wolfgang Ullrich: I find it a very important remark that complexity comforts you. Not only does it credibly show that you are not trying to intimidate others with the many and diverse references in your work, but it also seems to me to express a typically postmodern attitude. Complexity serves as a reassurance against supposed certainties, as a remedy against rigidity and ideology. An extreme complexity is at the same time an excessive deconstruction. And if I initially classified your work into the tradition of 'private mythology', I must now qualify that. You are indeed deconstructing motives that have shaped your biography, not to develop a closed narrative with a unique symbolic world, but rather to question each motive, to put it in an "as if" position, and thus to undermine it. While private mythologists spin themselves deeper and deeper into their world, your goal is to become increasingly independent of it, or at least to develop and maintain a sufficient distance from yourself. Or can you not recognize yourself in this description?

René Schoemakers: Yes, that sums it up very well. Actually, what can be read as "private mythology" in my work essentially works just in the same way as the naturalism of my painting. They are very much like tools. Their use is very deliberate. I perform individual idiosyncrasies for heuristic purposes.

They are picked out and are not the painting, but in the painting. This also explains the rather unusual naturalism down to the last corner of the painting. This is more of an encouragement to the viewer to look closely, also to avoid letting oneself fall too indulgently into "the painting" but establishing a distance that enables understanding. Presumably this also has to do with my philosophical profession. In philosophy, a clear and systematic analysis of one's own ideas is part of the work. In philosophy, however, one would rather strive for an objective analysis that can be communicated as such. When I paint, the painting is about finding a form for ideas that do not dissolve into objective communicability but are nevertheless accessible to viewers for their own reflections - perhaps precisely because they are to some extent unfamiliar. But they are not intended to be hermetic or esoteric.

By including more aspects that are public and not "private-mythological", my works have opened up more clearly to viewers at least since the series "The Missing Kink" from 2014/15. Probably in the 15 years or so before, the aspects that were more strongly related to my own personal world were more dominant, even if they were not the only formative ones.

So there are more points of reference for the



Genius Loki (Wiegenlidschatten)
 2022, acrylic on canvas, 140 x 290 cm

viewer. Nevertheless, the chances of my pictures becoming a hit with the public remain rather low. They are perhaps too much at odds with what is currently being noticed and accepted as art.

Wolfgang Ullrich: I believe that it is only the complexity of the references of your paintings that prevents them from being a hit with the public. As far as painting styles are concerned, people are very tolerant today; all arguments about representationalism and abstraction, about realistic and non-realistic depictions are a thing of the past. So you would not gain more recognition if you painted in an expressionist or surrealist style. But if you were to restrict the range of your references, e.g., to refer only to Christian motifs or only to material from popular cinema, then you would probably quickly have 'groupies' who would be delighted to be addressed and challenged by you in their own education. The fact that you resist such a temptation speaks for you, because of course your works are more interesting and unique precisely because they have that complexity. Perhaps you just need to make them more of a topic as such.

You should therefore play with your cards on the table and explain what prompted you to choose individual motifs. You don't need to do this for all

the elements of "Genius Loki", but for one or two of the paintings. I am sure: the number of people who appreciate your art will immediately increase!

René Schoemakers: I don't intend to shy away from this and show my cards for once in the catalogue...

I have talked about my work again and again in individual conversations and in the previously mentioned types of events. On the other hand, Goethe's only half-quoted "Bilde Künstler, rede nicht!" has even made it into the t-shirt and accessory shops of the internet. In contrast, I was pleasantly surprised by the very detailed interpretation of my work in the award speech for the Wilhelm Morgner Prize last year as a kind of deconstructive redefinition of history painting. Something like "There you go!" went through my mind.

Also because over the years, very superficial to humdrum statements have often been predominant. Sometimes I was "the painter who always paints his wife" and then, on top of that, dubious, because the depiction of the unclothed body was suspected by some to perpetuate traditional role models of "painter and muse". Yet I appear as a male model equally unclothed because I use the body as a direct vehicle of expression and every



form of clothing in the picture must legitimise itself in terms of content. "Clothed" has to legitimise itself no less than "undressed". In this context, I found it encouraging that in 2018 and 2019 I was invited by female curators to participate in exhibitions that were explicitly feminist in their approach.

I don't want to generally disagree with your optimism about the artworld embracing all kinds of varieties of figurative painting. In fact, the disdain was much greater during my time at art school. But my use of painting is still somewhat suspect to many people.

It is rather the case that painting currently finds approval above all when it makes itself opaque as a medium, that is, when it signals that it is painting. This has led to the widespread establishment of painterly mannerisms in figurative painting: Colour noses, motifs exempted by colour seams, areas left open, etc. Not only does this suggest artistic sovereignty over the medium, it also creates empty spaces where viewers can hook in. The exposure of the painterly facture enables a quicker identification.

Perhaps I only emphasise this in order to describe ex negativo what makes access difficult in my case on the painting element.

Wolfgang Ullrich: I think it's very good that you at least reveal the cards for one of the paintings in the series! What one might already suspect while looking at the paintings is so impressively confirmed: No element, no matter how small, does not have at least one meaning. What you do reminds me not only of forms of ancient high culture, but even more of varieties of today's pop culture. Think of music videos in particular. There, too, every element has a meaning, even if it can only be seen for a fraction of a second. The many coded elements, however, are primarily addressed to fans. You want to give them enough material to speculate, research, discuss, you want to keep them happy, give them the chance to experience success. In this respect, your pictures are in fact designed for a potentially large community of fans - more than for conventional recipients who are looking for edification or a clear message that is quickly recognisable as such.

I think many of the elements are great - and funny. What an idea to choose a kneading machine as a thing-object for artistic activity! And then a play dough machine for children! As an artist, you obviously don't want to claim to do everything yourself, from within yourself, rather you like to make use of technical assistance. So radical autonomy is not the goal, but rather a combination

of skills and options. At the same time, as an artist you want to be as naive, innocent, free as children at play. Yes, art should obviously have a playful dimension for you. This is a tried and tested topos, but it has been given a completely new foundation and code with your thing symbol.

You could go through every element in this way, it would be great fun. In no way does revealing meanings disenchant or disillusion anything. On the contrary. In fact, I would like to see an exhibition where an explanatory panel hangs next to each picture - or where you can get all the explanatory information via QR code with an app.

René Schoemakers: Well, theoretically, one could indeed include information in the exhibition. However, that would perhaps be too much of a challenge and not always easy to manage aesthetically. Above all, however, my idea is that everyone should first take a close look themselves, completely unencumbered. That's why it's a rule in my solo exhibitions that there is no labelling at first. Especially museums have a hard time with that. In the Museum Angerlehner it was the case that after a few days the pressure of the visitors became too great, who wanted to have their usual signage next to the pictures. It was not that this was refused. There were flyers in every room at the entrance

with the details of all the artworks that you would normally find on the signage. And above all, there was a QR code that led to a microsite about the exhibition that contained further information. So you could go deeper into the exhibition and still follow the whole thing at home after the exhibition. The charm of this solution is that everything is possible, from complete ignoring to more in-depth research, just as you like. But no one is forced to do anything in front of the painting. Nevertheless, at the time, the museum buckled and added signage later on.

I used this approach to present the "Cranach Suite" in the Schleswig-Holstein State Museum as well as the two large retrospective exhibitions in the Museum Angerlehner and the Museum of Art and Cultural History in Dortmund. And that was 1000 square metres of exhibition space each.

As for the play dough machine - that is, of course, an ironic self-diminishment on the part of the artist. But on the other hand, it is also an indication that material and form are also basic creative parameters in modelling clay. Hylomorphism in the children's room, Aristotelian metaphysics and creativity at the kneading machine, where there are pre-formed shapes, but also the possibility to freely combine and shape. The artist AS a knead-

ing machine... In this respect, I agree with Hofmannsthal: "You have to hide the depth. Where? On the surface."

(German Version)
Deutsche Version des Gesprächs
mit Wolfgang Ullrich







Genius Loki (Chimera's Wreck)
2023, acrylic on canvas, 140 x 190 cm















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