

REGEN PROJECTS

Schatz, Matthias, "Paranoid Westerner: Daniel Richter Paints Crowds, Harlequins, Terror," *Bloomberg.com*, July 24, 2008 (ill.)

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A handout photo, provided to the media on Thursday, July 24, 2008, shows artist Daniel Richter. Source: Elfie Semotan via Bloomberg News.

July 25 (Bloomberg) -- Daniel Richter's world is populated with shocked ghost-like figures, thronging mobs and aggressive animals. Like large holes, eyes stare from white or red heads into darkness, from which bodies emerge in green or yellow.

The creatures seem to be born out of a fevered imagination, yet they are rooted in reality. "I am inspired by the view from the periphery," says the 45-year-old painter, settling into a chair in his Hamburg apartment.

Though he has a studio in Berlin, he has kept the apartment on the so-called "Fleetinsel," a block of old warehouses alongside a "Fleet," the Hamburg term for canal. It's close to a lively square with restaurants, bookshops and galleries.

Richter says many artists live there because the rent is comparatively cheap. He moved there six years before one of his paintings, "Those Who Are Here Again," fetched a record \$824,000 in 2007, according to Artnet. Now he uses the apartment mainly for weekends with his theater-director wife Angela and their child.

Dressed in a casual shirt with a week's worth of stubble, Richter says the way people look when they have taken drugs and the pictures of infrared surveillance cameras are sources for his style. "They are the viewpoint of the paranoid westerner -- and I'm also a paranoid

westerner," he says.

Richter could be described as a sensitive "seismograph" of fears and moods in troubled times. He's also been called a history painter -- the amassed people in the foreground of many of his images refer to this tradition in painting -- and he says he "absolutely" agrees with that description.

Tackling Terror

The painter, whose days in the radical left-wing "autonomist" movement are far behind him, turned his attention to terrorism a year before the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The large canvas "Phoenix" is based on a photograph taken after the assault on the U.S. embassy in Nairobi in 1998.

The title is an inversion which is characteristic of many works by Richter. It refers to the impression of a reversed world -- in this case a world where the ancient bird "Phoenix" is falling into the ashes, rather than emerging from them.

The picture shows people carrying someone over a wall and it has also been read as a reference to the fall of the Berlin Wall and its consequences. It was painted around the 10th anniversary of Germany's reunification.

"History is the biggest proof of ideas," Richter says. He thinks it's "amusing that we talk about the ideas, concepts, utopias and criticism of nowadays, and yet in reality we can always find a blueprint for them."

Provocation, Wit

This attitude is very different from that of Richter's friend Jonathan Meese, another star on the German art scene. Both studied at the Hochschule fuer Bildende Kuenste art college in Hamburg, both grew up in towns north of Hamburg -- Richter in Luetjenburg, Meese in Ahrensburg -- and both work mainly in Berlin.

Still, Richter says Meese "represents kind of the opposite of my reasoning." While Meese escapes to his own world, Richter deals with modern society. While Meese provokes, Richter analyzes with a sharp wit. "He has longer hair, more success, and he talks more nonsense," Richter says with a smile.

While Meese's paintings appear wild and accidental, Richter's seem more thought-through compositions. This also applies to his early abstract paintings. It looks as if the figures, which appear in his works from the year 2000, have emerged organically from the patterns of lines and colors that preceded them.

In Richter's latest works, the crowds have been replaced by lonely figures, often dressed as harlequins. In Richter's words, they "represent people who believe that there will be change, and have to find out that there is none."

In "50 Cent," a title reminiscent of the notorious rapper with the same name, a sad Uncle Sam sits slumped in a chair, like a failed vaudeville act -- an ironic twist on the American dream. "Failure and betrayal are big movements in our societies, and also in my brain," Richter says.

Richter's works are on show at [Denver Art Museum](#) from Oct. 4.

This interview with Bloomberg television will be aired today and at the weekend.