

REGEN PROJECTS

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Daniel Richter DENVER ART MUSEUM

With the turn of the twenty-first century, painting boldly reasserted itself in German art, which for a decade had been dominated by photographers such as Andreas Gursky, Thomas Ruff, and Thomas Struth. Among those leading the country's latest burst of painters is Daniel Richter, whose work is being showcased (through January 11) in a midcareer survey at the Denver Art Museum. Richter's first solo museum exhibition in the United States is a modification of a show organized in 2007 at the Hamburger Kunsthalle by Christoph Heinrich, who became the Denver Art Museum's curator of modern and contemporary art later that year.



Daniel Richter,
Introspection, 2007–
2008, oil on canvas,
84¼ x 114¼ x 1¼".

Richter often packs so much stylistically and narratively into his paintings that they seem on the verge of exploding. But he manages to hold all the competing elements in balance, with the ever-present hint of instability only injecting frisson to his electric compositions. Having begun painting in 1995, he focused at first on producing colorful, kinetic abstractions. But in recent years, he has developed a distinctive brand of semi-abstracted figuration, and in

doing so has garnered an international reputation.

Narratives (some explicit, but most stubbornly elusive) run through these theatrical scenes, which evoke an array of moods from the mystical to the malevolent. Richter draws from myriad sources, including dreams, comic books, newspaper and magazine photographs, and painting from centuries past (the reclined pose of the central figure in *Ferbenlaare*, 2005, for example, is borrowed from Carl Spitzweg's *Der Arme Poet* [The Poor Poet], 1839).

Clearly reveling in the manipulation of paint, Richter employs a dazzling range of applications, such as translucent washes, supple drips, and unconventional masking, and, as Heinrich notes in the catalogue, frequently produces flashes of bold color mimicking strobe lights and thermal imagery. His complex technique is exemplified in *Junas*, 2000, a dark, enigmatic, and strangely alluring forest scene, with one figure seemingly grasping a tree and perhaps the sliver of another along the left edge. The main figure and trees are rendered in black silhouette, with ghostly, phosphorescent white illuminating the central clearing and outlining some of the trunks and leaves. Painterly effects abound, including unexpected spots of nonobjective color and a vibrant section of abstract, gestural brushwork.

Although he has tried to free himself from the confining influences of German postwar art, Richter readily admits that he has not been completely successful. While it is difficult, at least stylistically, to tie him directly to some of his predecessors, such as Anselm Kiefer or Georg Baselitz, a portion of the angst and questioning inherent in their work also seems to inform his paintings. And like these artists, Richter has been unable to escape the weight of modern German history. *Captain Jack*, 2006, for example, a disturbing scene depicting a pistol-toting army officer before a crowd of cowering skeletal figures, can only conjure the Holocaust. But if Richter has not completely slipped the constraints of his German heritage, he has loosened them by drawing on a host of other cultural, historical, and stylistic influences and establishing a distinctive, unmistakably contemporary artistic voice.

—Kyle MacMillan