

AMUNTHALLE

FAEL

19. JANUARY - 23. APRIL 2014

EVERYTHING
NO ONE EVER
WANTED

TOBIAS SPICHTIG

In painting, drips are to be avoided. Generally considered blunders, they are thought to interrupt what a painter might otherwise be trying to represent: this is what painting tutorials will tell you. Except Tobias Spichtig doesn't seem to agree.

Conspicuous drips can be found on nearly all his canvases. They flow, without the Swiss artist wishing to tame them, from the peaks of his mountain abstractions, the feet of his nudes, and from sullen faces—each a portrait of a friend, model, designer, or actor. To make the latter, he primarily works from photographs, rarely from live models, often looking to several different images to create his composite vision. Frequently, there is enough of a likeness that you might (just) recognize the subject. Still, with or without their eyes painted in, this is an eerie bunch, all cheekbones and contouring, as pale as vampires seen in raking light.

That they all seem undead is not just formal because, for Spichtig, it goes deeper than that: “There’s something embarrassing about vampires,” the artist declares. “Like Udo Kier in the film *Blood for Dracula* [1974]. He’s totally embarrassing. Maybe painting is a vampire. It’s endlessly embarrassing. Both the act of painting and paintings themselves.”

Perhaps that explains the self-deprecating quality of the title *Everything No One Ever Wanted*. It amounts to an assertion that within this exhibition is unloved stuff, worthy only of rejection—*EN* forlorn and without value. Yet, of all of Spichtig’s exhibitions, this one—his largest to date—marks a turning point at which the artist has abandoned his tendency almost to conceal his paintings, as if in embarrassment. Here, the “unwanted” is not just not hidden but, in fact, finally exposed. Ostentatiously.

In the past, it was barely possible to circulate within the artist’s exhibitions. He filled spaces with accumulations of used domestic consumer goods (worn couches, yellowing mattresses, phased-out air conditioning units), rendering his paintings on the walls behind them often only partially visible. The latter peeked out “like penises from under fig leaves,” as one critic wittily noted. Now, the artist doesn’t push the visitor out of the room. Instead, he installed a massive stage, and visitors have almost no choice but to step up onto it and have their gaze raised to view the paintings.

But make no mistake: Spichtig’s attachment to the stuff often left on the side of the road persists. He now simply compartmentalizes: the exhibition’s second room is filled with various used wardrobes, with a single uncanny portrait stuck upon rather than behind them. They are a reminder of what his accumulations had always hinted at: commodities cannot fully satisfy the covetousness they are designed to elicit, which we know even as we still consume them. So, we discard them, only to consume again new ones like them. Capitalism has made vampires of us all.

In the last room, a trio of nickel-plated gravestones stands as if propped on earthen mounds, all shimmering and silvery. A blood-red carpet lay beneath. The gravestones are carved with the artist’s characteristic scrawl, spelling out “All I Never Wanted” or “I Still Love You,” like sappy pop song titles. Slightly cartoonish but also inescapably morbid, this endpoint to the exhibition conveys a brooding *Twilight* vibe, while cinching the contradictions across Spichtig’s oeuvre, between the absurd and the sincerely serious.

Entrancing minimalist guitar riffs echo in the spaces. Spichtig asked the musician and composer Mick Barr (Ocrilim)—whose music the artist listened to avidly while painting—to develop a specially conceived soundscape for the show. The idea was to render each

ROOM 3

1
I Still Love You (Tombstone), 2023
Nickel plated copper
113 × 54 × 38 cm
Courtesy the artist and Eugster, Belgrade

2
A Star in the Sky (Tombstone), 2023
Nickel plated copper
107 × 54 × 38 cm
Courtesy the artist and Eugster, Belgrade

3
All I Never Wanted (Tombstone), 2023
Nickel plated copper
107 × 54 × 38 cm
Courtesy the artist and Eugster, Belgrade

4
Glance, 2023
Oil on canvas
220 × 65 cm

ROOM 2

1
Tom, 2023
Oil on canvas
120 × 80 cm

2
Empty Wardrobes, 2024
Used wardrobes
Dimensions variable

ROOM 1

1
Life, 2023
Oil on canvas
280 × 155 cm

2
Pretty and Ugly, 2023
Oil on canvas
210 × 140 cm

3
Blackhaine, 2023
Oil on canvas
120 × 80 cm
Courtesy the artist and Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin / Basel

4
Eiger, Mönch und Jungfrau, 2023
Oil on canvas
40 × 30 cm
Private Collection

5
My Broken Little Heart, 2023
Oil on canvas
205 × 260 cm

6
Sorat, 2023
Oil on canvas
120 × 80 cm

7
Berge / Mountains, 2023
Oil on canvas
180 × 120 cm

8
Michella, 2024
Oil on canvas
120 × 80 cm
Courtesy the artist and Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin / Basel

9
Don't hate me because i'm cute., 2023
Oil on canvas
210 × 140 cm

10
Izzy Spears, 2023
Oil on canvas
120 × 80 cm

11
Der Teufel / The Devil, 2023
Oil on canvas
250 × 155 cm
Courtesy the artist and Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin / Basel

12
Alpen, 2023
Oil on canvas
85 × 50 cm

13
Please stop haunting me., 2023
Oil on canvas
195 × 300 cm

14
Pink Rose, 2023
Oil on canvas
260 × 80 cm

15
We Could Be Angels for Just One Day, 2023
Oil on canvas
195 × 250 cm
Courtesy the artist and Jan Kaps, Cologne

16
Shumon, 2023
Oil on canvas
120 × 80 cm

17
Studie für ein Gesicht / Study for a Face, 2023
Titelgeschichte (Geistige Figuration Teil 1) / Cover Story (Geistige Figuration Teil 1), 2023
Stupid Sadness, 2023
Oil on canvas
Triptych; 210 × 140 cm, 260 × 100 cm, 210 × 140 cm

18
Rick Owens, 2022
Oil on canvas
120 × 80 cm
Private Collection

19
Sam (Reclining Nude), 2023
Oil on canvas
210 × 260 cm

20
earthheater, 2023
Oil on canvas
120 × 80 cm

21
Martina, 2023
Oil on canvas
120 × 80 cm
Courtesy the artist and Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin / Basel

22
Alpenpanorama, 2023
Oil on canvas
300 × 210 cm

23
Model Sitting, 2023
Oil on canvas
200 × 125 cm

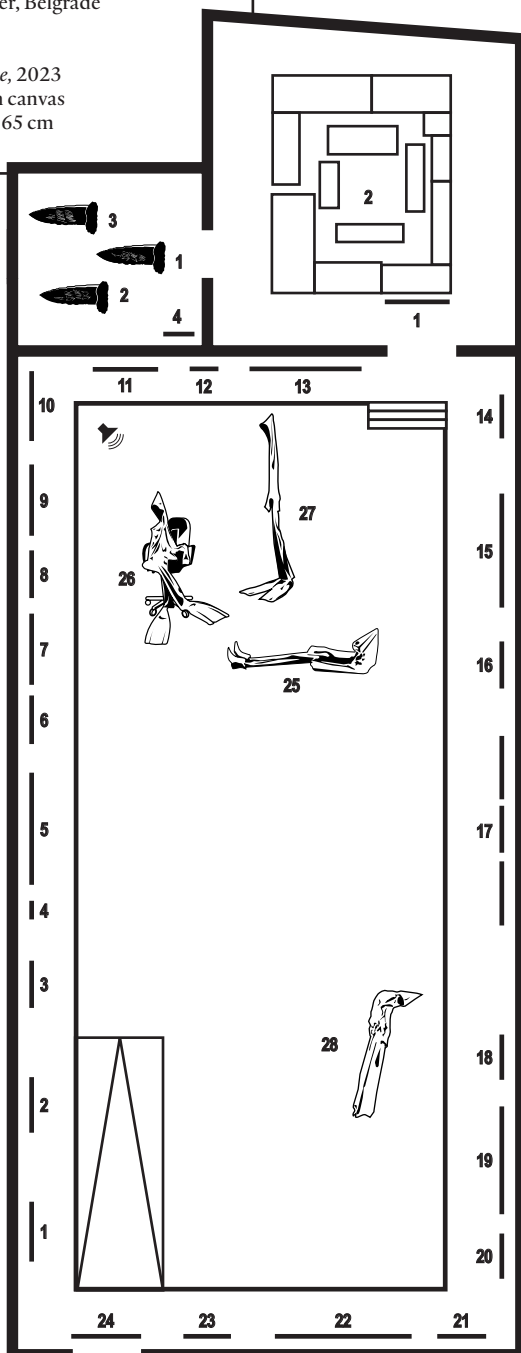
24
Hand Holding the Void, 2023
Oil on canvas
159 × 125 cm

25
Good Old Feelings, 2020
Nickel, resin, textile
180 × 74 × 49 cm
Courtesy the artist and Eugster, Belgrade

26
Mitarbeiter / Co-Worker, 2023
Found objects, metal, resin, textile
143 × 45 × 80 cm
Collection Niklas Bildstein Zaar

27
Me in the Studio, 2023
Fiberglass, found objects, oil, resin, textile
223 × 42 × 35 cm

28
I prayed to god but you were listening., 2020
Nickel, resin, textile
163 × 40 × 52 cm
Courtesy the artist and Eugster, Belgrade



 Mick Barr (Ocrilim)
Oonvwm, 2023
Sound piece
54 min 54 sec, looped
Developed with Tobias Spichtig
Commissioned by Kunsthalle Basel
Courtesy Mick Barr (Ocrilim)

LANDING

1
Nude (Psyche), 2023
Oil on canvas
200 × 200 cm
Courtesy the artist and Jan Kaps, Cologne

All works, unless otherwise mentioned, courtesy the artist; Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin / Basel; Jan Kaps, Cologne; and Meredith Rosen Gallery, New York

artwork a protagonist in something larger than itself: “The models and portraits are a bit like actors, a cast for the show. The exhibition thus becomes somewhat like a tragic comedy, with its own soundtrack.”

Spichtig’s giant stage/plinth in the first room is surrounded by his take on painting’s traditional genres: the portrait, the still life, the landscape, the nude. Yet to call these latter works “nudes” may be misleading, as the term suggests art history’s canon of voluptuous females—Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (1534) or Édouard Manet’s *Olympia* (1863). His, on the other hand, are often androgynous and always angular, uneasily posing in their abstract backgrounds. Their hair is stringy, they have thickened black slits for eyes, just as in some of his portraits. They hunch forward or lean back, stick-like and emaciated, more humanoid praying mantises than people.

Besides a stray rose or a disembodied hand (“still lives”), several “landscapes” appear across the exhibition. The assembly of pointed forms against textured black backgrounds is named for the Alpine mountains of the artist’s youth but barely manages to evoke them. They are composed of rough brushstrokes whose awkward triangulation more readily recalls colored witches’ hats than the serenity of snowy Swiss mountains.

Through Spichtig’s brush, bodies, faces, flowers, or mountains never quite emerge from their planar surfaces. His particular approach to painting eradicates depth and volume, delineating people and objects by means of hard lines, ensuring that each picture’s subject holds its pose in strange, morbid stillness. They remind more of works by much-maligned French Existentialist painter Bernard Buffet—revered in the 1950s, then fallen from art world grace—than so much celebrated contemporary painting. You might ask if all of this, Buffet or Spichtig, is simply bad painting. Spichtig persistently queries what counts as interesting or accomplished in art while doggedly trying to avoid the pitfalls of artistic convention and the consensus of good taste. The result courts a look of amateurism while reminding us that the “amateur” is the lover of a thing. And it is evident in his research into painterly techniques, art history, and attempts to capture a person or mountain in paint that Spichtig *loves* painting.

No matter the represented genre, the vacillations in and out of representation feel weirdly earnest and obsessive, naïve and spooky all at once. The artist admits: “I guess I believe in some sort of material spiritualism. Some

animism. That material is always itself and something else as well. I still find it quite magical that we can put some material on a canvas, and suddenly, there’s something that makes one feel a certain way and starts to tell a story.” It’s this feeling or the emergence of a story that Spichtig is after. A little bit goth, a little bit mystic, the characters in his exhibition-as-theater seem doomed, hailing from some alien otherworld. They look straight at you, almost through you, to the point of making you wonder if—although mostly without eyes—they can actually see you.

Spichtig’s sculptures are as gaunt and elongated as his painted figures, built as they are from used clothing dipped in resin that is sometimes additionally nickel-plated. Hoodies and pants create their own readymade anthropomorphics. Like contemporary versions of the bodies found in Pompeii, forever frozen in lava, Spichtig’s sculptures seem embalmed, mummified in their branded sportswear. Are they harbingers of our era’s coming catastrophes? Here, his entourage of eviscerated bodies are caught, casually perched on an office chair, wearing a suit and scuba fins, or, in one nickel-plated example, “legs” stiffly stretched out, shoes perfectly pointed up. For all their nonchalance, like the paintings, they insinuate an unspecified malaise.

And fittingly so. Spichtig said he started making his so-called *Geister* or “ghost” sculptures because he felt lonely and wanted to fill his apartment with friends. He considers them “classic, figurative sculptures,” which invariably recall dystopian versions of that other Swiss sculptor of emaciated humanity, Alberto Giacometti. Giacometti repeatedly articulated figures, all but removing the singularity of personhood in a way that rendered them anonymous but universal. Spichtig’s figures are, too, both blank and haunting, no one and everyone.

Is all of this what no one ever wanted? For years, Spichtig has looked to fashion, domestic consumer goods, and other desirable things as inspiration for his paintings, even as he partly hid the results. Now, he revels in not hiding at all. If, in his exhibition, the artworks tremor with malaise, angst, or intimated catastrophes across their shared ghostly pallor, it may be because Spichtig has finally found the apt painterly tone for our contemporary condition. And though he is trying to overcome being embarrassed by the act of painting, Spichtig will not spare you a feeling of complicity in his emotion, whether you want it or not.

Tobias Spichtig was born in 1982 in Sempach, CH; he lives and works in Berlin and Zurich, CH.

The exhibition is supported by the Ernst Göhner Stiftung, the Perić Collection, and the Ernst und Olga Gubler-Hablützel Stiftung.

ERNST GÖHNER STIFTUNG



The mediation projects are realized through the generous support of the Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne and the Canton of Basel-Stadt.

Thanks to
Andrea Abegg Serrano, Mick Barr, Carolin von den Benken, Alex Berns, Michella Bredahl, Bruno Brunnet, Caroline Busta, Daliborka Dimitrijevic, Jan Eugster, Alexandre Goffin, Agnes Gryczkowska, Sonja Hägeli, Nicole Hackert, Katharina Hajek, Eleonore Hugendubel, Jan Kaps, Nik Kuenzler, Jean-Francois LaPointe, Samuel Leuenberger, Matt Moravec, Michelle Nicol, Mato Perić, Léo Pflimlin, Meredith Rosen, Fabian Schöneich, Hanna Schoenhof, Rudolf Schürmann, Corinne Linda Sotzek, Sepp Spichtig, Theres Spichtig, Martin Stoecklin, Julian Wadsworth, Scott Cameron Weaver, Melina Wilson, Christian Wirtz, and Niklas Bildstein Zaar

With special thanks to
Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin / Basel; Eugster, Belgrade; Jan Kaps, Cologne; and Meredith Rosen Gallery, New York

Kunsthalle Basel / Basler Kunstverein is generously supported by the Canton of Basel-Stadt.



Support for Kunsthalle Basel's yearly program is provided by Saint Laurent.

SAINT LAURENT

GUIDED TOURS THROUGH THE EXHIBITION

Public guided tours on every first Sunday of the month in German

04.02.2024, Sunday, 3 p.m.

03.03.2024, Sunday, 3 p.m.

Guided tour by artist Tobias Spichtig in German

21.01.2024, Sunday, 3 p.m.

Guided tour by curator Elena Filipovic in English

11.02.2024, Sunday, 3 p.m.

Tandem guided tour in German

07.04.2024, Sunday, 3 p.m.

Kunsthalle Basel and SAM Swiss Architecture Museum offer a joint tour of their current exhibitions, highlighting the intersections between architecture and art.

MEDIATION AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Concert by Mick Barr (Ocrilim), Basel Museums Night 2024
19.01.2024, Friday, 10 p.m.

In the context of Basel Museums Night 2024, Tobias Spichtig presents a half-hour concert within his exhibition by musician and composer Mick Barr (Ocrilim).

Mal•Mal, in German and English

24.01.2024, Wednesday, 6–8 p.m.

Draw from a live model in the exhibition; material will be provided.

Theater Basel workshop in German

13.02.2024, Tuesday, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

In cooperation with the Theater Basel, a performative workshop will take place in the exhibition.

Mal•Mal – Nude drawing in German and English

20.03.2024, Wednesday, 6–8 p.m.

Nude drawing from a live model in the exhibition; material will be provided.

Art mediation project in German

April 2024

In cooperation with the Brunnmatt-Schule in Basel, a performative art mediation project will be held in conjunction with the exhibition. Further information and events at kunsthallebasel.ch.

In the Kunsthalle Basel library, you will find a selection of publications related to Tobias Spichtig.

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More information at kunsthallebasel.ch