



WER DIE MALEREI
NICHT PRÜGELT,
HASST DIE MALEREI !

SOFIA
SILVA:
WERNER
BÜTTNER
OR WHO'S
AFRAID OF
INTELLI-
GENCE?

Wer die Malerei nicht
prügelt, hasst die
Malerei, (Those who
don't bash Painting,
hate Painting). A
yellow stain, the title,
a red strip; perhaps a
map.

Büttner is one of those rare painters who manages to describe the most serious events in the world while remaining within the realm of painting. Social injustice, the idiocy of populism, the rhetoric of the Welfare State: it's all just waiting to be turned into colour and shape, social conflict is pictorial conflict. Art that purports to be officially heroic follows in the grotesque footsteps of political power, with which it shares the same objectives. Werner Büttner thinks. Rather than transferring his own thoughts into imagery, Büttner translates them through the dismemberment of imagery (which is not the same as its deconstruction); it's like seeing a builder who, before leaving the worksite, takes apart the building that he has just erected. The activity of building-painting – destroyed through a use of intelligence – does not leave behind ruins, but an anti-monument.

The comparison is somewhat farfetched but it has its motives: Fernando Pessoa used a great number of heteronyms to write his books and other works. While one poem might be written with the authorship narrative voice of a poor peasant, another would call for that of a Latin-spewing physician. At times Büttner also appears to use heteronyms, however far he might be from imposing actual names upon his figures; to speak of the things of the world, he evokes pictorial codes that would not appear

to belong to his nature nor sentiment. Nevertheless, he envelops these codes in his own nature and sentiment, turning them into Werner Büttner, metabolising them; ensuring the heteronyms never turn into postmodern trinkets, his blending of styles is lifted from sovereign painterdom and from hard-core collage alike. Werner Büttner's collages are thus both instantaneous and aphoristic.

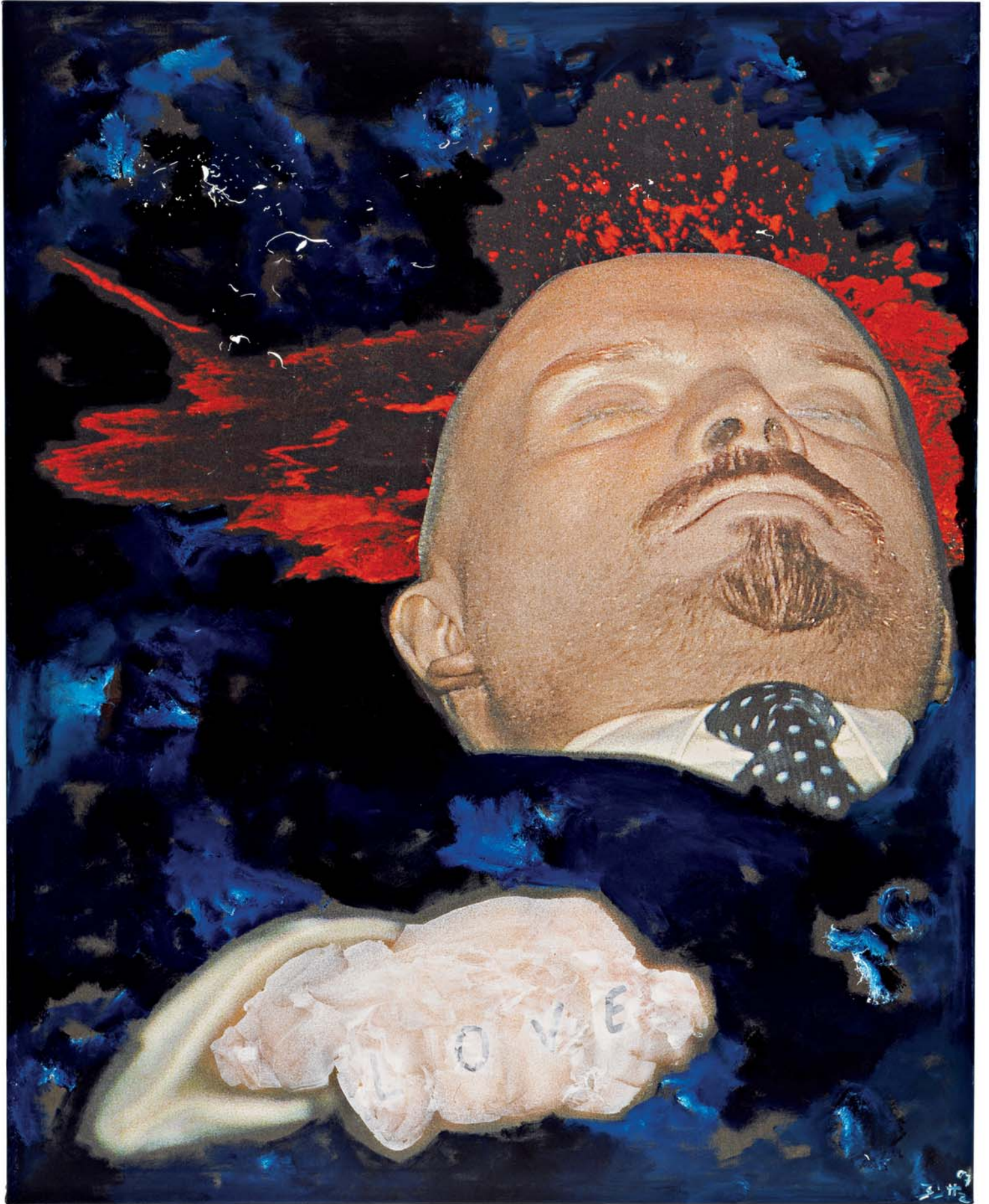
Wer die Malerei nicht prügelt, hasst die Malerei, (*Those who don't bash Painting, hate Painting*, 1999). A yellow stain, the title, a red strip; perhaps a map. It is, in my opinion, one of the breakthrough paintings of Werner Büttner. While previously, every painting was a seaquake, a convulsive neo-expressionist brush-thrust, this work shows a sea after the tempest has calmed, on whose surface lies the flotsam and jetsam pushed offshore by the storm. I repeat, such debris is never a postmodern fragment, but rather the waste, the existential and intellectual residue, of a furious yet attentive soul.

Every dryness, every aridity in the surface or in the colour range is a lexical choice; *virtuosismo* is a weapon to be grasped by the blade, just as Büttner always does. Think of all the times Büttner has derided Romanticism and its backwater, Sentimentalism. Of course, he must also have found a certain pleasure in painting those cute little animals, the bouquets fluttering in the wind, stains of yellow against the silky blues, that red virtuosity against the most watery and mannerist of greens... *Der romantische Imperativ* (*The Romantic Imperative*, 2007). A sausage lies on a paper tray with Rococo edging, looking like the mother-shell of Venus, and glistens amid the boughs of a dark forest. And then again *Tod im Blütenmeer* (*Death in a Sea of Flowers*, 2012): a requiem for a toad with its slimy chin pointing in the air, just like Lenin's in *Opus Magma* (2007).

It will not be the angry, but those tired of being angry who sense

Wer die Malerei nicht
prügelt, hasst die
Malerei
(Those who don't
bash Painting, hate
Painting)
1999
Oil on canvas
150 x 120 cm

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Previous page:
Opus Magma
 2007
 Oil on canvas
 150 x 120 cm

Tod im Blütenmeer
 (Death in a Sea of Flowers)
 2012
 Oil on canvas
 150 x 120 cm

Opposite:
Der Romantische Imperativ
 (The Romantic Imperative)
 2007
 Oil on canvas
 240 x 190 cm

All images: © Werner Büttner
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Moderne Kunst kann man verstehen, moderne Welt nicht
 (One can Understand Modern Art, but not the Modern World)
 1985
 Oil on canvas
 150 x 120 cm

Humor ein Konzept der Natur?
 (Is Humour a Concept of Nature?)
 1992
 Oil on canvas
 240 x 190 cm

All images: © Werner Büttner
 Courtesy of Marlborough Fine Art

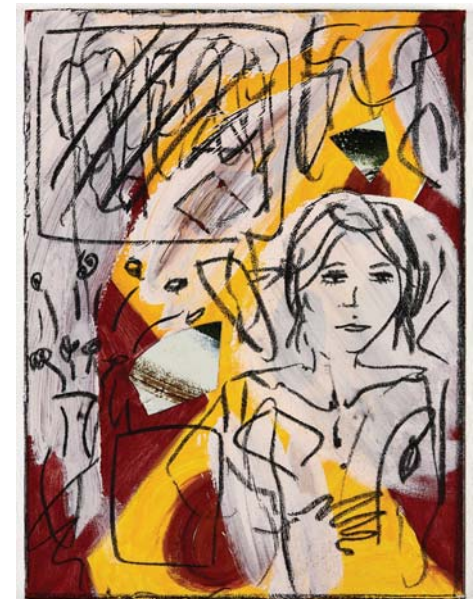
Werner Büttner's painting most deeply. While irony is always a little bitchy, a little gormless, Büttner takes us beyond irony. Apart from the embarrassment pettily offered by irony, there is no sense of the grotesque but rather of the establishment of a severely ridiculous world.

Ist Humor ein Konzept der Natur?

We are asked by a 1992 title: Is humour a natural concept? Two toy T-Rexes wearing checker onesies perch on little fluffy clouds; behind them yawns a totem pole, displaying a single tooth. Prehistory, decoration, the fetish of prehistory and decoration; it's all dominated by idiocy and the monument, and run through Büttner's sieve.

Büttner's world is one of monkeys transporting self-portraits of the painter into the abyss, it is a mysterious world of thieves, assassins and non-flying Icaruses, of totems and bacteria, of hooligans, of shapes tired of being shapes, of stains that would like to be shapes, of rabbits who would love to hop straight out of their still lifes, of still lifes that grab the rabbits back again and suck in a few temples while they're at it, of starving totems and normative taboos, a world of Fascist busts that dictate magnetising aesthetics. Dry and translucent, European, Russian and African, assembled and disjointed, bogs and kitchens, philosophers in the kitchen and philosophers in the bog. In 1985, Werner Büttner titled a painting *Moderne Kunst kann man verstehen, moderne Welt nicht*. (*Modern Art can be understood, the modern World cannot*).

In the painting field, 'intelligence' is a word going through its own personal Dark Age. For many, the 'intelligent painter' is whoever deviates from supposedly 'real' painting of the knee-jerk, gut-reaction kind. But the intelligent painter is really much more than that; intelligence in painting is knowing how to express a circle without tracing any circle, how to draw a single straight line to mean a vase full of flowers, how to make a political statement exploiting the sole absence of tonal contrast. Gut instinct may lead to the discovery, but it's intelligence that transforms it into an invention capable of being forever original. More than anyone else, Büttner underlines the fact that a painter who is not intelligent is nothing.



Sofia Silva
The Paduan Painter
 2017
 Oil and charcoal on canvas
 40 x 30 cm