



ARTIST INTERVIEW

Like a Space Where Something Strange Happens**Jonas Burgert in conversation with Sara Buschmann and Christian Malycha
Bielefeld, January 23, 2020****“Sinn frisst” (Meaning devours)—why this title?**

The search for meaning is something that exhausts us! All the time. “It devours” ... often, I create a title that does not really exist as a text. Even though they’re completely normal words, the title is an invention. The combination is strange. Meaning suddenly becomes active and gnaws at you. It’s about the intellectual wear and tear we human beings experience. The idea of a constant search for meaning that causes us to do everything we do, because time is running out, leaves its mark on us. In both the positive and the negative. We can’t do anything but wrangle with meaning, and that’s why it devours us.

How did you conceive the show in Remagen?

That was special! I’d just had a museum show in Italy, for which all of the paintings were on loan. Fifty paintings from collections all around the world. So, when Remagen asked and also wanted to lend, I wanted to make something new. That’s always risky for a museum, because they don’t know what they’re going to get. On the other hand, it’s also exciting, because a group of new paintings that go together can go on display.

In addition, the building by Richard Meier, this box, was actually built for sculpture, for Arp. That means there are very few white walls and a lot of glass and daylight. It’s got a beautiful view of the Rhine, but it’s a little difficult for paintings. During a visit, I finally understood Meier’s system. There are exactly seven walls and a small room containing only walls, a cabinet of sorts. The seven walls are all around the same size. So, I said I would paint seven pictures for precisely these walls. That’s the show. There are another six or seven smaller portraits and a medium-sized painting in the cabinet. As well as sculptures, two new and four older ones. So, all at once there was a whole group of works with a common theme.

In comparison to your earlier works, which tended to be manifold panoramas, something seems to have changed in your new paintings. Suddenly, you find yourself drawn in up close, in the midst of events. The figures are larger, the spaces in between wider, and the whole image deeper. Is that so?

Yes, there’s a change. I have a problem with landscape paintings, always have. I always want to get closer, so to speak. Oddly enough, it’s the way I’ve been getting closer and closer to the paintings over the years. I keep getting closer. Like a room where something strange is happening, which you enter slowly. That’s also the reason why I don’t put a horizon into my pictures. Often there’s a slight aerial view. You look at the scenery from a slightly higher angle and are inside the picture. No horizon, but a sense of “all-over”. The painting surrounds us. The figures come closer and with that, the spaces in between expand. To give the figures more room. They have more room to play. A lot of it you do instinctively, after all. Only afterward do I notice I’ve gotten much closer.

The good thing about such big paintings is that you can really create a situation in which you look at one figure, then empty space, and then the next one only after that. So you yourself are inside the picture, too. We all have a kind of auratic distance between us. This effect arises when I get closer. The distance becomes greater and through that, I feel as if I'm more in the scene.



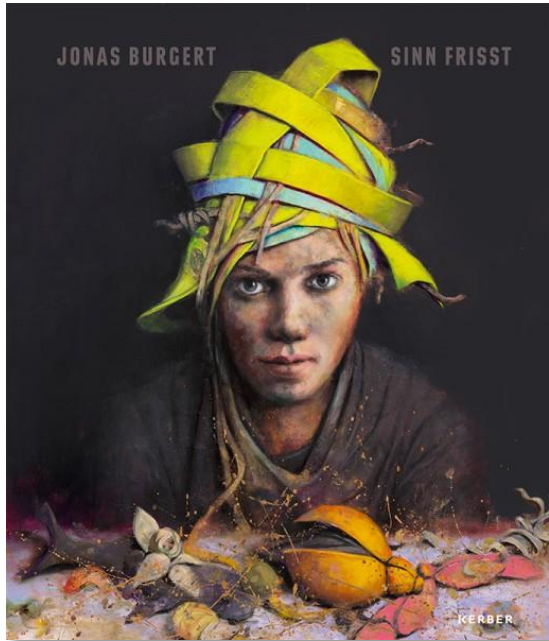
How did you translate that into the book?

You start with the new group of works, which, after all, is the reason for the book. Only then is it true for me that in my visual vocabulary all of the pictures are related. I can't separate them at all. That's why it was important to me to see the book differently. The show was the starting point, and then I very deliberately decided that now it needs this figure and this painting, and then another one from five years ago that would make sense right at this point, in this very context. I tried to give the book a structure that corresponds to my pictorial world. A pictorial logic in which one thing builds upon the next, and so on. I stopped when I had the feeling that everything was rounded out.

For the first time there are literary voices about your work—those of Monika Rinck and Ralph Dutli—which play a very important role in the book.

Now that there are many art historical texts about my paintings, I've asked myself how it would be possible to express through words what I try to say visually in the paintings. That someone looks at my paintings and reacts to them verbally with the same emotions. Jutta Mattern, the curator of the show, suggested inviting Monika Rinck and Ralf Dutli, to provide the book with two literary voices and perspectives. And the texts turned out great! Very different, very freely conceived, and individualistic. It's sheer luck that those two artists are working on the book. I really like that. It's a pleasure! You won't

find an explanatory approach, but there's a close association. Both of them managed that. Realized linguistically, not pictorially, but just as crazy. That was the goal, a different kind of artistic transformation. I'm very happy with it.



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