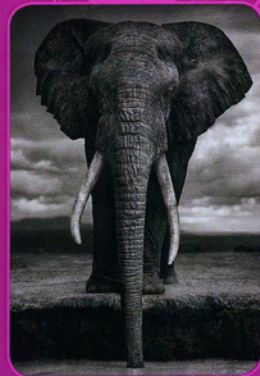
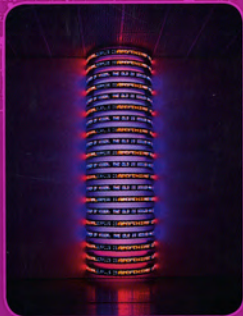




BAUR AU LAC

Views



EXPRESSION OF A LIFESTYLE

some science fiction film. As he later shared with me: «Knowing I would be exhibiting at the armory, I found it funny to have created something with a military theme.» Breuning has blended easily with the artistic universe not only in his native Switzerland, but also in New York, where he has lived for the past ten years – and where he is a towering figure alongside other well-known giants. He has also exhibited at the Langhans Gallery in Prague, Michael Benevento in Los Angeles, the Kodama Gallery in Tokyo, the Conduits Gallery in Milan, the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Zurich and the Gallerie Nicola von Senger in Zurich, to name but a few. An exhaustive list would fill several pages!

To my mind, this meek and humble lad from Franklin Street in Soho is destined to move on to things higher and greater than he can ever imagine, extending far beyond the field of visual arts. Olaf Breuning is a modern day hunter – a hunter who has caught a scent. His work invites us to pick up the trail with him and follow wherever the elusive prey of meaning may lead...

On a balmy day in September 2009, I ventured out to **Brendan Cass'** atelier in the Southberry Tower on Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn, New York.

To my amazement, I was confronted by seven larger-than-life canvases clearly crafted by a discordant cacophony of brushes and sticks and containing obviously intentional, fastidiously excessive blobs of paint. And I began to wonder: Is this the essence of 21st century conceptual landscape art? Brendan Cass certainly knows his trade...

In conceptual art, the idea is the most salient aspect of the whole work process. Cass is tirelessly devoted to one fundamental idea: producing phantasmal landscapes that glow in the incandescent space between abstraction and realism. Perhaps these are the direct descendants of painting sprees with his brother when the two kids were growing up in Boontown Township in the rural part of northern New Jersey. Cass' works are colorfully challenging. At the same time, they are revelatory of his profound desire to create what he calls a portal of cities and localities in varying seasons as if he were actually present in each adventure. Oftentimes, his ideas are derived from, say, the picture of a castle on a puzzle box, or a strikingly colorful scenario on a postcard, or maybe a simple advertisement, which he whimsically recreates with a free-flowing flair that is impossible to emulate. Verona, Finland, the Netherlands and even Switzerland's imposing Matterhorn peak have all fired his vivid imagination. Although his parents are American, his grandparents on both sides of the family are of European extraction, blending Irish, Welsh, Dutch, British, French, Polish, Czech, German and other influences. Hence his fascination for all things European; his embrace of the rest of Europe too is perhaps only a logical outgrowth of these deep roots. Characteristically, the themes depicted have an air of lightness to them, tinged by just a dash of palpable elegance. By contrast, other works convey a sense of forlorn heaviness. Whenever the proper balance is struck, however, Cass' landscapes shimmer with a push and a pull that reverberate like the basses and trebles of the great wide world!

His conceptualized paintings draw on the language of brisk forms, hues from the hefty to the featherweight, and masterfully conjugated lines. The result? Singularly profound compositions every time. Abstraction retains its high visibility, revolving primarily around themes such as contemplation and the timelessness of the moment. Cass' approach to the abstract evokes action without movement, places without addresses, individuals without identities. His panoramic landscapes plunge us into a fantastical universe suffused with fluorescent colors of a type rarely seen since the halcyon days of go-go and neo-geo – and pulsating with barely subliminal energies, emotions and obsessions. The artist's obsessive attention to detail indeed births surreal narratives in oils. His canvases betray a vision of the world that unveil a truly unique alternative. They also reflect a highly personalized take on reality into which viewers are invited to escape and immerse themselves.



Donald Baechler, whom Cass met at a lecture in 1995, has unquestionably influenced the artist's mindset. Stephen Westfall showed great discernment in bringing to light his way of perceiving colors. Kathy Bradford's influence likewise deserves a mention. And John Kovalis, an art instructor at a summer arts institute, constructively challenged his manner of painting. Brendan Cass received his formal artistic training at Milton Avery Graduate School for the Arts; Bard College in Annandale, New York; the School of Visual Arts in New York; and the State University of New York in Purchase, New York. He has presented his own exhibitions at galleries such as Stellan Holm, New York; Freight & Volume, New York; Kenny Schachter conTEMPorary New York; Galeria Leyendecker, Tenerife; and Velge & Noirhomme, Brussels.

The artist's latest works are (at the time of going to press) currently on show at the Lars Bohman Gallery in Stockholm, Sweden. They clearly blend the influences of Jackson Pollock and PBS painting guru Bob Ross. Alive? Yes indeed! Dramatic? Yes, very much so! Desirable? Yes again! In my view, it is absolutely fair to say that Cass' works transport the viewer into another dimension. Though conceptually diverse, each painting explores abstraction in its most sublime form. Drawing inspiration from everyday news clips, advertisements, books, travel guides, pamphlets and the like, Cass pays homage to the places that arouse his emotions and inspire him to create yet another picture. While his imagery varies, the scale and technique remain consistent. His voluminous, eye-popping canvases transform ordinary, everyday places into wistful dreamlands! Who wouldn't jump at the chance to visit some far-off destination where peace, harmony and prosperity prevail? I, for one, would be first on board!

Cass plans to exhibit his works at the Forsblom Gallery in Helsinki, and also has an upcoming solo show at Galeria Leyendecker in Tenerife, Spain. Brendan Cass may be only 35 years of age, yet his distinctive vision of familiar landscapes has propelled his travels to horizons far beyond the merely geographic – and that at such a tender age. Bon voyage, Brendan!

It sounds too far-fetched to be true, but I first met **Jani Leinonen** at the Lucky Strike restaurant on New York's Grand Street on September 11, 2009 – just as the presidential helicopter was touching down at Ground Zero for Barack Obama to address the crowd assembled to commemorate the attacks on the World Trade Center.



I must have been out of my mind to make an appointment on a date when the traffic would be backed up at every intersection! My cab didn't have a chance. Somehow, though, I still managed to get there a split second ahead of the appointed time. Meeting Leinonen – with his tousled hair, black-rimmed glasses and a smile as wide as the Red Sea – was like experiencing a cool, fresh breeze on a balmy day!

Leinonen was born in Hyvinkää, Finland, in 1978. He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki in 2002, and has since developed a playful approach to the use of discarded objects and materials found on the street, which he then magnifies with larger textual contexts and meanings. In his works, Leinonen directs criticism at a range of issues, from nationalism and organized religion to art history. Even the very concept of an art museum comes under attack. The artist thus uproots our conventional understanding of the world around us. A sane bystander would love to approach Leinonen's art with a gesture of frailty, though one is forced to conclude that his painterly compositions evoke differing modes of abstraction and narration through an emphasis on the quality of presence. At a certain point, his words appear transient and precarious, opening and unfolding fragmented narratives such as the ones I saw in his exhibition at the Venice Biennale last November. What does become apparent is his allegorization of current events and his stark relationship to the now. I consider it a privilege to have met this young, fun-loving star!