

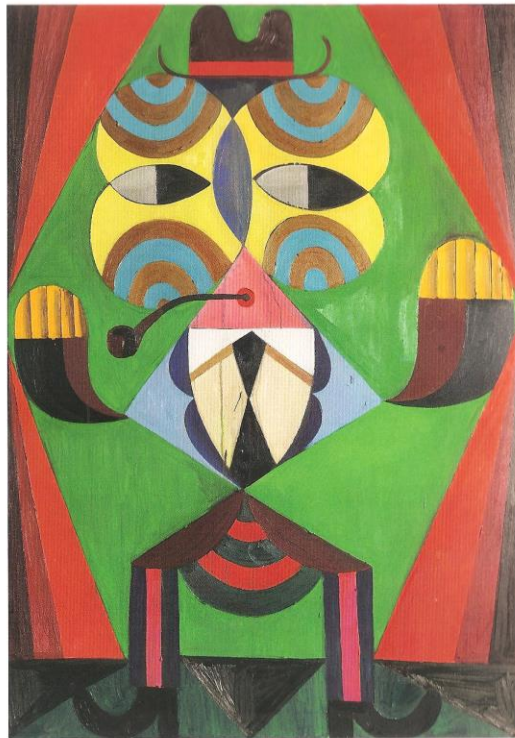


CHRISTOPH RUCKHÄBERLE

Christoph Ruckhäberle is the most conspicuous outsider of the new Leipzig school, which has a reputation for melancholy. There is nothing wrong with melancholy in itself – after all, this quality is often associated with greatness. But a whole group of artists painting sad pictures? In fact, Ruckhäberle's pre-2006 pictures also appear rather gloomy, but he managed to put this characteristic behind him earlier than most of his contemporaries by exploring tendencies already present in his work, most notably bright colour, humour and his affinity with precisely patterned surfaces and ornament. The awkward gestures and oddly twisted limbs of the figures in his pictures make them look like marionettes in a puppet play. Particularly in his earlier works, they seem wooden, as if carved, frozen in time and in mid-movement, isolated and bored. The minimal interaction between the figures and a palpable distancing from the viewer in his skillfully painted compositions have a considerable allure that has propelled him onto the international stage.

Ruckhäberle's coloured lithographs, which began to appear at the end of 2006, demonstrate a more stylized version of his formal vocabulary that has fed back into his paintings. At around this time, Ruckhäberle and graphic artist Thomas Siemon founded the Leipzig LUBOK Verlag publishing house, which came to attention through its 'Bilderbücher': graphic books printed on a 1950s rapid press using the original printing blocks. *Lubok* is a Russian word that refers to satirical folk picture books that were popular in the seventeenth century. Ruckhäberle's printed graphics and oil paintings on paper and canvas owe much to this research. They show individual figures standing, lying, gesticulating and dancing – almost always seen full-frontal and facing the viewer. The single-colour posterlike backgrounds and the suggestion of cloud formations in some of the pictures are clear borrowings from Expressionism and Surrealism.

Sharing a certain sentiment with Tilo Baumgärtel, Ruckhäberle puts masked companies on parade, permeated by the spirit of New Folk – a kind of post-hippie hippie movement that exalts closeness to nature and is interested in folk art and an early European earthy contemplativeness. These children of freedom are searching for new adventures and find them in a return to private mythologies and in cult-like groups. Ruckhäberle's paintings of masks combine horror, humour and superstition, intensified to wild and absurd excesses. He spreads colour around in an endeavour to share sensual and earthly *joie de vivre* and to reconcile it with spiritual ideals. This sounds rather like the output of the band Gogol Bordello; one could imagine that Ruckhäberle's peasant women, circus figures, free wanderers and twisted marionettes are dancing to the band's distinctive brand of folk punk. The resulting aesthetic of these pictures is unmistakable. Ruckhäberle's paintings are curiously accessible – but despite their simplicity, they do not shrink from being confrontational, engaging and challenging. - *Christoph Tannert*



1. *Untitled*, 2010
Oil on canvas
170 x 120 cm

2. *Untitled*, 2010
Oil on canvas
170 x 120 cm

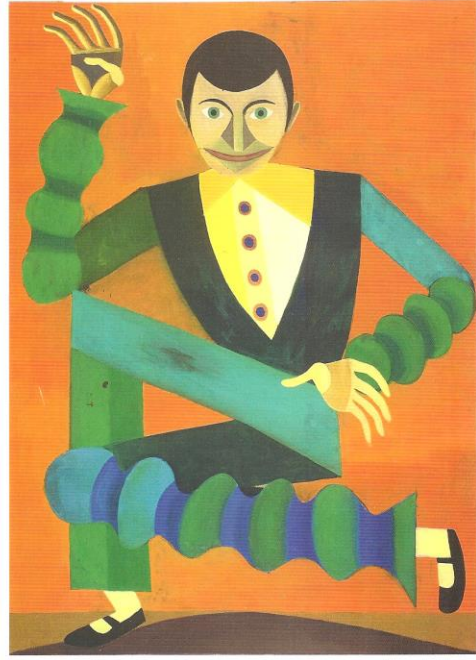
3. *Böcker*, 2009
Oil on canvas
180 x 130 cm

4. *Untitled*, 2009
Oil pastel on paper
207,5 x 203,5 cm

5. *Spring-ins-Feld*, 2009
Oil on canvas
180 x 180 cm



2.



3.



4.



5.