

# Scotto Mycklebust

## Recent Paintings

### **Interview with New York artist SCOTTO MYCKLEBUST in June 2004**

***I believe you mentioned in our last meeting a German artist that you were very interested in these days? What is it about the artist that moves you?***

I was speaking about the German artist Martin Kippenberger. I came across his work in 2000. I had heard of him and read a few articles about his large installation piece entitled "The Happy End of Kafka's Amerika". The piece is made up of many different cast-off furniture pieces; desks, tables and chairs arranged in a large room on green Astrotruf. The work intrigued me. It was somewhat 'out there', against the rules, so to speak.

I had never seen any of his paintings, except in art publications until I went to an auction preview at Christy's Auction house in May 2000 for contemporary art. There was a painting of his up for auction.

After that, I started to look at his work more. Metro Pictures art gallery in Chelsea represents him and they had a few works on view now and then. I missed the last show of his paintings at Metro called, "The paintings Pablo couldn't paint anymore". They're fictitious portraits of Pablo Picasso's wife Jacqueline Picasso. I saw the series when I went to his retrospective exhibition at the Museum für neue Kunst in Karlsruhe, Germany in April of 2003. It was a very impressive show. I was very excited about painting after seeing it. I had gone to Karlsruhe, to see the exhibition and to meeting with Ralph Melcher the Museum's Director and Chief curator of the Kippenberger show. The meeting was to introduce my Public Art Squad Project. I was looking for help and institutional support to produce the project in Germany.

When I first started looking at Kippenberger's paintings I found there was something about his work that said something to me. I could not put my finger on it. But, I felt connected to his ideas of painting and his way of think about art making. What I like about his work is the 'risk factor' he projected in the works, and the idea that painting, and art for that matter, can be anything the artist feels, thinks, observes and or wants to be included in the work, however obvious or absurd. A sense of freedom to create, with out the baggage of the history of art.

Another thing about Kippenberger's work I like is he seems to break the rules, while keeping the rules of art in hand. It may be an illusion, which is what makes his works all the more interesting. I also like his sense of color and how he used the geometry

of the picture plane to structure the senseless space in his pictures. This senseless space is undefined, yet has a natural feeling of 'grounding' the picture. There is also his use of layering images, which I have a familiarity too.

In November of 2001 I was working to two large canvases, called Octopus Garden. They started out as large still life with large blocks of colors and drawing on the subconscious factors of line. I saw a work by Kippenberger, while working on Octopus Garden. I started to look at painting differently during the process of painting them. These two paintings are where Kippenberger's influence or inspiration came into my work, at least consciously. The first painting was entitled "Save Me". The painting includes the title as text in which the direct references to context started to appear in my work. The next painting I painted was dedicated to Martin Kippenberger. It's called "Kippenberger", with title as text on the canvas. The painting is about bringing two concepts together, the plastic form and context.

***You have several descriptions of your painting of George W. Bush, GW Presidential. Do you feel it has different relevance today?***

The portrait of GW Bush, is not that old, I started it in December 2001, and painted it in January 2002. Because of the way the world was moving towards, a more aggressive tone. I felt compelled to comment. The result was GW Presidential. It was a time when Bush's presidency was being re-defined in terms of September 11th. In fact, at that time there was great discussions in the mass media and in political circle saying George W, Bush was floundering as a president. September 11th has been the only thing that defined him, and the popular press coined it as "Presidential".

Today, the painting has even more relevance, especially with the Iraq invasion and the war. The painting pre-dates the invasion. It even predicts his presidential actions of the last year and half. It's symbolic of what he has become and how he is perceived in the world community today.

The viewers of the work will bring their own personal interpretation to the painting. Be it a positive or negative impression of Bush. It depends on their politics, and their political point of view about the world today, and whether Bush is seen a good guy or bad guy.

The ambiguity of the painting is one quality of the work, which I feel is relevant today. It somewhat mirrors the uncertainty that prevail so much in the world today. The uncertainty whether you will have food or not, a job today, or lose it tomorrow, whether you'll be alive today or die tomorrow, especially in warring lands around the world.

***You have said that recent world events, such as America's muscular foreign policy, has influenced, of course, GW Bush, but how exactly has it influenced your painting of the 12 Kings series?***

The 12 Kings paintings came about as a desire to depict a political figure and discuss painting at the same time. The king symbolizes the ruler. He is the ruler of all the land. Of course the king is a monarchy, but a dictatorship at the same time. I think of the King series as a Shakespearean play somewhat. Each king represents a different character and characterizes their persona as a Ruler. In part, the King series was also a vehicle for me to painting a series of works, which were constant. The king served as a foundation, were the subject that was the same, but each one could be treated as I felt. Colors and brush stokes could be experimented and explored. The text in the paint, gives each their meaning. The King series also is a metaphor and speaks about the current state of the world. With the end of the cold war in the late 1980's, and the birth of America, as the sole super power, with all the military might. The King paintings depict the absolute ruler. One who controls all the land and brings taxation to the people to provide the means and wealth of the empire to rule the land and war with all those who oppose or threaten the kingdom.

***You have said that Martin Kippenberger's works have inspired you. What paintings of your do you think were most influenced by his work? Are there any specific Kippenberger works that are your favorites?***

Earlier I mentioned two paintings of mine, "Save Me", and "Kippenberger". These are the first two paintings I did were Kippenberger's work played a role. There are several others works I've made that have followed since them. A few which are important to me include "REV", a painting of the word 'rev' in large red letter on a pinkish background, with wood gain contact paper glued to the canvas. This work led me to develop an installation piece with the same title, entitled "REV a sound piece of F-18 fighter jets flying over ahead". It's a multi-media installation, which includes a composed 2:30 minute sound track, 4 speakers, CD player, black/yellow caution tape, and a live actor dressed in an orange flight suite. The guard stands over the installation piece for 4 hours not moving. The word REV is projected on the gallery wall. The sound track of the jets flying overhead is played at a very loud volume.

There are several other works from a series of paintings entitled "New Painting Series" which Kippeneberger was an influence. They include: Dientag 19 März – Speicheldrüsen, and Blue boy. These were painted in 2003 and have colors or compositional qualities, which were inspired by varies Kippenberger works.

During 2004 I painted several paintings I would link to Kippenberger for inspiration, they are "Tank 53", depicting a US Tank in front of the pillage Iraq National Art Museum. Another is "Plan B"; Kippenberger inspired the figure in the painting and colors. There's a series of paintings on the nude: "This is nice, nude", a large busty

glamour model posed in lingerie, and another entitled, "Our Lady of Guadalupe", a double portrait of a sexy nude girl in pig tails, with a small brochure about Our Lady of Guadalupe glued to the canvas. A few others include: IOOF painting, WDM, World Death Mask.

There are several works by Kippenberger that I especially like. They include: War wickered, 1983. His hand painted picture series Untitled, 1992, Untitled- Jacqueline, from the series "The paintings Pablo couldn't paint anymore" and my all time favorite painting German Egg-banger, 1996, Untitled, 1996, and his sculpture Metro-Net Entrance (crushed).

***What are you currently working on and what is inspiring you these days?***

I just started working a series of paintings on 'The Last Supper', which depicts Jesus sitting at the table, arms stretch out and food. I am combining the image of Jesus with an image of camouflage pattern. I am not such what the painting is about yet. I was inspired by a color illustration of Jesus and the Last Supper that appeared in the Metro NYC edited. It was an illustration used in an article about dieting and the food that Jesus eats. It was absurd. I liked the illustration style and color so much, that I decide to use it for a painting. It has spawned a whole series of work on the subject. The first "The Last Supper" painting is of Jesus at the table with a small square of camouflage pattern place over Jesus. I like the contradiction and corner point the camouflage pattern creates and the color palette. I think the work has something to do with the resurgence of conservatism and the problem the church has experienced lately in America.

The other work I am working on is somewhat related, a series of painting on camouflage, very optical and symbolic. The first piece is called "Camo Target"; it's a monochromatic painting in black, white and grays of a camouflage pattern, with a large target superimposed over the camouflage pattern. The painting is related to an installation piece entitled "Untitled Target", which I designed and submitted to Exit Art's Terrorvision's request for artist's proposal. The piece was not selected.

***You had mentioned another country was interested in granting you a show. How did you hook up with this gallery? (Is there someone I can contact or do you have any quotes from this person in regards to their thoughts about your work?)***

The gallery is a new venture located in Oslo, Norway. Tina Fjotland, who is starting a gallery in Oslo with a group of other partners, contacted me. I meet her ten years ago. She worked with a girl I was dating at the time. They both work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She remembered me from than and had been to my studio. She looked me up on the Internet and found my web site. She was in New York in April and contacted me about arranging a studio visit. We meet for 2 hours at

the studio, the day she was to go back to Norway. She liked the "American Masterpiece" series, and thought the paintings would be a good fit for the new gallery.

I sent her a set of color photographs of the series, which is made up of 12 paintings. Her gallery partners liked the paintings and agreed to show the work. I have been in correspondence with them answering questions and such. The gallery has not yet opened. They are still in the planning stages. I have no quote from them about the work, but we could ask. They have only seen the color photos of the paintings I sent and what's on the web site. It might be helpful to have you contact them. Lets talk about it.

***What are your thoughts on today's art world, both domestically and internationally?***

I could write a book on this subject. But I have a few comments to start with. First off, New York is not the center of the art world anymore, Thought much art is still bought and sold in New York, people still come here to view, and purchase art for their collections, institutions and homes. It just is not the epicenter it was. Since the early to mid 1990's the epicenter of art has moved from one city to another, shifting as globalization redefines the world over the years. From New York, it shifted oversea to London and moved around Europe for most of the 90's into the millennium. Today, Germany is having a rebirth in the influence of contemporary art, along with selected other cities and art communities around the global. Though New York still exerts its desire to lead. But, with the political landscape in America, and with the conservatism, one mindedness and the commercialization that prevail today in America. America is finding it difficult to keep up, or even lead the way in support to artists, culture and the arts.

The commercialization of the gallery system and art institutions in America has changed the support system that artists had participated and relied upon throughout the 60's, 70's, 80's and 90's. That changed during the 90's when it became evident with a shift in the market and how galleries operate. Galleries started to compete with the artists, vying for attention and media exposure as the artists had during the 80's. The galleries became more capitalistic in the approach to art and business, the buying and selling works, and how they manage the artists and products. The gallery system has become more like a merger and acquisition style business. In today's gallery system, a gallery only considers an artist, if they have something to bring to the table. Such as, a book of business, i.e., collectors, market value, press attention, celebrity. It seems to be less about the work, and more about how the image and value of the gallery can be raised. Though, this is important from a business point of view, it tends to repress the art.

In the last year or so I have noticed the work displayed in New York galleries and institutions has become much more conservative and cautionary in what is shown. This is also happening to other forms of expression, in culture, the arts, and entertainment. It is especially evident in the press, radio, film, literature, music, television and cable programming. That is not to say that contemporary artwork in America today is conservative in its ideas and subject matter. But, it indicates, the selection of art and culture, which is exhibited is selective and predetermined by conservative attitudes. There is a sense of self-censorship that has started to prevail domestically in our culture and in the arts.

Internationally, there is an explosion in the contemporary art today. Of course, much of which is produced outside America. When I was in Germany, in April of 2003, I was greeted as an artist with respect and admiration, which is hard to find in the U.S. The artworks I encountered in Germany, new and old, were far more thought provoking and visually stimulating. There seems to be freshness in what I was looking at. I can name several German and international artists, which I had never heard of before. Their works seem to radiate with ideas, colors, texture and expression. I have noticed in the past six months these artists are showing up in American galleries and museums. And will continue to invade our artistic sensibility here.

***Are there any young, new artists that blow you away?***

To my surprise there are no young new artists, which blows me away today. There are many artists, whose work I like and respect. But, no one I would champion. A couple of weeks ago, I went to the Whitney Biennial, the day before it closed, to catch the Museum's selection of the latest and greatest new art in America. I am sad to report nothing. I couldn't even find an artist's work, which I thought was terrible, or bad, out of the need to vent. There was nothing to say about the works that were exhibited. I liked one piece in the entire show, a sculpture. The piece was a highly polished black square platform. The look of black lacquer with chrome drum stands and cone-like shapes arranged on the platform. I just like it visually. Unfortunately, I don't know who the artist is.

***Do you come from a family of artists? If so, what type of art?***

As far as I can tell I am the only artistic individual in my entire family. I am the black sheep so to speak. My mother and father had never been to an art museum until I took them to one, in the late 1970's. It was when we were visiting my sister over the Christmas holiday. She lived in Denver. We went to the Denver Art Museum. It was not a very good introduction to a fine art institution. The collection was very limited, cowboy and folk art more or less.

***Do you remember the first time you knew that all you wanted to do was paint? Did you have a mentor, or someone who supported your talent early on?***

Yes I do remember, but it was more about being an artist than about wanting to paint. Painting is just one form of expression, but the most respected in the fine arts. It was in the early 70's. I was in college and took an elective course called 'Humanities'. The professor was very creative in his teaching projects. I liked them. They always involved design and creative. He said I had a good sense of design and was good at making creative projects. He encouraged me.

I did not have a personal mentor, other than the artworks and paintings I saw in museums. They were my mentors. I did work for two museums, the Minneapolis Institute of Art and at the Walker Art center in Minneapolis in the 1980's. I worked with; meet and talked to a great many famous artists who came through the museum working on varies projects, performances and exhibitions. Many of them became my mentor for a day, a week, or a month. The experiences provided me with a great deal of exposure to other artists, great art and support.

***What kind of support group do you have now? Do your loft mates help continue to motivate you?***

My support group is as varied as the friend and people I meet. My relationships with people I know and become friends with are a large part of my support at this point. Some of them are collector, people who help me out from time to time and supported me as best they can. My studio mates are supportive and we motivate each other. But in a limited way, especially when it come to the art work it self. I guess it's the competitive nature in each artist. We do talk and discuss many things from political, to the state of the world, to the state of art and what it all means. We look at art together, going to exhibits and museum shows, always sharing, comparing notes and expressing our opinions to each other.

***If you weren't able to paint, would you still be a fan of the arts?***

Yes, it's part of my life. Something I could not separate out from my life.

***What is your favorite medium? Sculpture? Painting? Performance? Multi-medium performance art?***

This is a difficult question, it dependents on the day more or less. Sculpture is effortless and always fun and inventive. I do not have to think about it much. Painting on the other hand can be effortless at times. But always poses challenges. It makes one think. I like the dialogue painting sets up between, the canvas and the

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artist. There are always surprises in painting. Performance does not happen much any more. Thought, I'd like to get back to sometime. Multi-medium performance art is something I want to expand upon, The Public Art Squad project is part of this desire to expand my work into the public realm more. But, painting is my favorite.