

Cluj Connection

by Valerie Knoll

April 2007

REVIEWS



Christine Rebet, *Tell Me About Your Dreams*, 2006, ink on paper, 12 1/2 x 9 1/2".

as patient and therapist. As electronic music builds to a frenzy and towering bookshelves wobble ominously, the tiger leers over his patient, stretched on a chaise longue, until the screen bleeds orange and bursts into flames. Making a strong visual link to Salvador Dalí's iconic painting of a tiger leaping across a supine female, *Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate, One Second Before Awakening*, 1944, Rebet explicitly declares her affinity for the Surrealists and the theater of the unconscious. In Rebet's work, as in Dalí's, we discover the paradox that the creature, although in motion, is eternally stopped in its tracks.

In her use of sound, Rebet continues to subvert the impetus toward the authentic through the carnivalesque. Her re-creation of *Fighting the Flames*, a small sculpture of a fireman circling the top of a tiny plinth, as in a music box, follows the beat of a horse's gallop—actually a repeated loop from the *Tell Me About Your Dreams* sound track. But like the tiger's roar in that film's final scene, this is not a recording of sounds made by a real animal but rather of an amusement-park approximation. It is the endless repetition of our own imaginations.

—Lillian Davies

ZURICH

"Cluj Connection" HAUNCH OF VENISON

Until recently, the art scene in the West has been fairly indifferent to work from Central and Eastern Europe. A few artists have made names for themselves internationally, but for many years any analysis or art-historical interpretation of work from these regions has been carried out in a very piecemeal fashion. Now cultural theorists, curators, gallerists, and the artists themselves are engaging in a more critical discourse, and the entry of several Eastern European countries into the EU has facilitated communication. For the exhibition "Cluj Connection," the British art critic Jane Neal brought together seven young artists from Romania: Mircea Cantor, Adrian Ghenie, Victor Man, Ciprian Mureșan, Cristi Pogăcean, Șerban Savu, and Gabriela Vanga. All of the artists trained at the Institute of Art and Design in the city of Cluj in Transylvania and are part of an active art scene there. But what truly links them is a common desire to move beyond local boundaries and to enter an international discourse on art without renouncing their own regional and historical contexts.

Cantor's film *Deeparture*, 2005, shows a wolf and a deer moving gracefully past each other in an enclosed empty white cube; the wolf makes no attempt to attack the deer. Close-up shots and nearly motionless frames, photographic in character, shift the viewer's attention to the behavior of the animals and the beauty of their pulsating bodies. Both the animals' propinquity to each other and their presence in this artificial space have a disconcerting effect and produce an atmosphere of tension. The work functions as an allegory, making visible social disparity and latent violence, but without offering any moral guidelines. It is impossible to overlook the reference to Joseph Beuys's 1974 performance *I Like America and America Likes Me*, in which he locked himself into a gallery with a coyote for three days. In

this calm yet extremely tense space, ontological questions can be asked.

Ghenie is a painter whose pictures are mostly of dark, mysterious interior and exterior spaces and architecture, populated by shadowy silhouettes. By incorporating unusual perspectives and gradations of mainly gray and black tones, he evokes an uncanny and suspicious atmosphere; the somber compositions recall the visual language of film noir. Ghenie's paintings are frequently inspired by dark chapters from twentieth-century European history. This is particularly evident in an untitled work from his "Ironic Histories" series, 2006, which shows the unmistakable silhouette of Hitler teaching his dog to sit; the Führer is portrayed as a man with human qualities in a private moment. Yet it is exactly this infinite discrepancy between what is portrayed in the painting and its subject's unimaginable crimes that renders this figure so grotesque and ridiculous.

Mureșan often interweaves references to twentieth-century art, elements of contemporary art practice, and popular culture. His video piece *Un chien andalou*, 2004, is a remake of the famous scene from



Mircea Cantor, *Deeparture*, 2005, still from a color DVD, 27 minutes 10 seconds. From "Cluj Connection."

the 1929 Surrealist film classic, but here the animated film character Shrek cuts through the eye of his wife, Fiona, with a razor blade. Just as Buñuel and Dalí's film proposed a new way of seeing and broke with convention, this adaptation critically questions today's cultural paradigms and strategies of appropriation and reproduction.

—Valérie Knoll

Translated from German by Jane Brodie.

Jochen Kuhn PETER KILCHMANN

"Recently I visited a bordello for the first time. Well, actually it was an erotic massage parlor. That's naturally beneath me. I don't need anything like that." A middle-aged man is troubled by moral misgivings as he goes to a brothel for the first time in his life. Wearing a trench coat and a hat, he worries that someone will see him; on the stairs, he meets his neighbor, who immediately asks: "What's happening here? Are you going to the bordello?" Like the four films of the same title that preceded it, Jochen Kuhn's fourteen-minute *Neulich 5* (Recently 5), 2004, is a brief, absurd observation of daily life told from the viewpoint of a surprised narrator. These are neighborhood stories, trivial tales recounted in a clever, humorous way. Kuhn tells disarming stories through small moments in the lives of his characters, the heroes of an unglamorous world.

Kuhn began to paint in the '70s, but his paintings did not generate much interest. Not wanting to give the art critics a chance to rip his pictures to shreds, he destroyed them himself. But before doing so, he decided to film the painting process itself, and, in so doing, created short stories. The process of painting produced storyboards,