

An abstract painting by Bruno Kurz, featuring a dense, textured surface. The top half is a soft, hazy blend of light beige and pale yellow. Below this, a thick layer of vertical, slightly irregular brushstrokes in warm orange and yellow tones dominates the middle section. The bottom third of the painting is characterized by more pronounced, darker vertical strokes in shades of deep orange, red, and muted purple, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall effect is one of organic, layered complexity.

INTEGRAL

THE AMBIENT PAINTINGS OF

BRUNO KURZ



1 Lux 5, acrylic & oil on canvas, 180 x 180 cm / 71x71 in

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ART DEALERS ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
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“We must not stare at our mortal world’s kaleidoscope in fascination or despair; we must watch it closely for the advent of new meanings.”

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Integral: The Ambient Paintings Of Bruno Kurz

by Donald Brackett

For reasons so mysterious that I prefer not to fully examine their origins, once again Bruno Kurz has produced elegant and restrained visual works, often in pigment or resin on metal, which seem to me to convey the immaterial aura of living music. They vibrate at some subliminal wave-length which once found, never subsides, and instead continues to build itself into a silent roar which is not deafening at all but rather is mind expanding. Can paintings ever be like a kind of homeopathic medicine? These appear to be. They take aspects or elements of nature, such as those of the landscape, of light, of horizons, of ice, of fields, of fog, of water, but rather than representing them they use their raw materials to construct spiritual experiences of transcendence. Ambient painting is not aggressive but that doesn’t mean it’s passive. On the contrary, an ambient painting is so quietly powerful that it waits patiently for us to be strong enough to share its company.

After the loud and raucous period of the 1950’s and 60’s, when amplified music reached a sort of peak beyond which the human ear could not follow, several composers and musicians, some of them even emerging from the pantheon of rock itself, began to explore a more contemplative realm. They called it ambient music. The most gifted among them, Brian Eno, also termed what he did *discreet* music, or thoughtful music, sounds which weren’t meant to demand our entire attention but allowed us instead to rest calmly, even *mindlessly*, in their sonic spaces. Likewise in the art of painting, and parallel with the passionately emotional plunges of a Pollock or de Kooning, in the 40’s and 50’s there arose concurrently a sedate and meditative theatre of seeing inaugurated by artists such as Rothko or Stella. The deceptively simple paintings of Kelly and Reinhardt too also ushered us into a domain we can accurately identify as that of ambient painting.

How else to explain a set, a series, a sequence of Kurz works, that invite us to imagine a dance between the material world of nature, the ethereal realm of mathematics, and the invisible world of music such as that prescribed in his images dwelling on the subtle theme of *light* itself as a subject? *Light Embers - Red* (Image 10) and *Light Embers - Yellow* (Image 5) reference the remaining vestiges of a fire as it smolders into oblivion, perhaps on a small stage set of a personal fireplace. While *Northern Light - Red* (Image 2) and *Northern Light - White* (Image 3) bring us the more gigantic scale of the meteorological phenomenon occurring in the skies high above us, perhaps in a galactic fireplace where the shimmering weather is entirely metaphysical.

The push and pull of these two suggested scales is precisely where Kurz most excels, demonstrating the paradoxes at the heart of our lived perception of the phenomenal world. This of course makes him, in my book, an exemplary phenomenologist, the very philosophy founded by that French poet of the senses

Merleau-Ponty, who wanted us all to await the arrival of new meanings for our splendid life without anxiety, by abandoning both the temptation to be mesmerized as well as the appeals of sorrow, in favor of the rigor of “watching closely” instead.

Light usually, we presume, is what allows us to see, but what is it that can permit us that larger pleasure, the ability to see the light itself, literally? *Twilight 4* (Image 15) and *Lux 5* (Image 1, which carries the ancient latin name for light) are likewise both stellar formal portraits of an impalpable substance, illumination, the speed of which according to Einstein was the only constant in the universe. The only other true constant of course, would be perpetual change and impermanent flux, some of the other key subjects and themes Kurz regularly works with as he engages in his ongoing image-documentary on the phenomenology of spirit. Thus, *integral* also refers to that which is necessary to make a whole complete, and what is essential or fundamental, as well as concepts that arise from combining infinitesimal data. Just as these paintings do.

Most certainly, I’m using the term *mindless* here in the most positive way conceivable, especially since I suspect that the true purpose or function of all the arts, whether music, dance, literature, sculpture, architecture, poetry or painting, is to permit us a much needed escape from our minds. To some degree the finest works are always those that permit us a vacation from thinking, or at least from listening to the endless chatter inside our heads, so I’m proposing a style of painting here which evokes the kind of mindless states involved in meditation, which ironically enough is often also described as mindfulness. The reminder to *be here now* is implicit in the paintings that refer to northern climes, however these domains are not located on any conventional cartography: *Northern Passage 3* (Image 13) and *Polar Night 1* (Image 16) both speak to our eyes of a distant glacial site wrapped in enigmatic airs.

Kurz’s painting philosophy makes me as certain as I can be that from a harmonious perspective the twin polarities of mindful and mindless cease to be in contradiction, and his resulting visual artifacts also give us permission to accept and even embrace absolute *uncertainty*. His works are on intimate speaking terms with the unknown, in a zone where pleasure is proportional with surrender. Far from running away from it in search of the known or definable in order to evict the unknown from our lives, they are virtual diagrams of resting in the reality of not knowing, of being completely comfortable and at ease with ambiguity. As such, *Polar Wind 2* (Image 17) and *Polar Lights* (Image 11) also capture further elusive essences, light reflected and wind blowing, in a manner which defies description.

Ambient is also a notion that relates to the immediate surroundings of something, as in the nature of nature, and just as ambient music puts an emphasis on tone and atmosphere over traditional musical structure or rhythm, so does ambient painting emphasize atmosphere over narrative. Sensation over storytelling, I would call it, in the absence of a programmatic plot. An ambient painting is therefore somewhat unobtrusive, it lets you enter its field aimlessly without forcing a theatrical drama on your experience of it. The subtly hovering ambience of two monuments to frozen fluid, *Ice Field 1* (Image 6) and *Ice Field 2* (Image 7) for instance, also introduces us to a pattern of perception that becomes recognizable once we stop searching for meaning and instead simply watch meaning stealthily arrive.

Indeed, water as a substance and the watery nature of our minds is often touched upon simultaneously, as in two of my favourite paintings in this timely series, *Deep Waters 1* (Image 12) and *Fog 2* (Image 14), which are I believe the most commanding and demanding of his recent works. *Fog 2* is an especially magical and mysterious piece, and it most accurately sums up a finely tuned abstract agenda which is nonetheless real and is still all about nature. Such fully resolved paintings need not draw reference to any other world but their own and they do not attempt to recreate nature but rather to reincarnate it within each canvas.

Not staring at the mortal world but intensely observing its web of energies in anticipation of the advent of new meanings is only possible when we suspend judgment and allow ourselves to be transported by the iconic message hidden inside the image. This is where the spirit of the *imago*s is suspended, beating like a colourful heart made of paint. This is the tangible residue of waking dreams and reverie, a place where sometimes even icebergs can be on fire.



2 Northern Light - Red, acrylic & oil on metal, 100 x 100 cm / 39×39 in



3 Northern Light - White, acrylic & oil on metal, 100 x 100 cm / 39×39 in



4 Nordic Blue, acrylic & oil on metal, 100 x 100 cm / 39×39 in



5 Light Embers - Yellow, acrylic & oil on metal, 100 x 100 cm / 39×39 in



6 Ice Field 1, acrylic & resin on metal, 140 x 140 cm / 55×55 in



7 Ice Field 2, acrylic & resin on metal, 140 x 140 cm / 55×55 in



8 Ice Water, acrylic & resin on metal, 70 x 70 cm / 28×28 in



9 White North 1, acrylic & oil on metal, 70 x 70 cm / 28×28 in



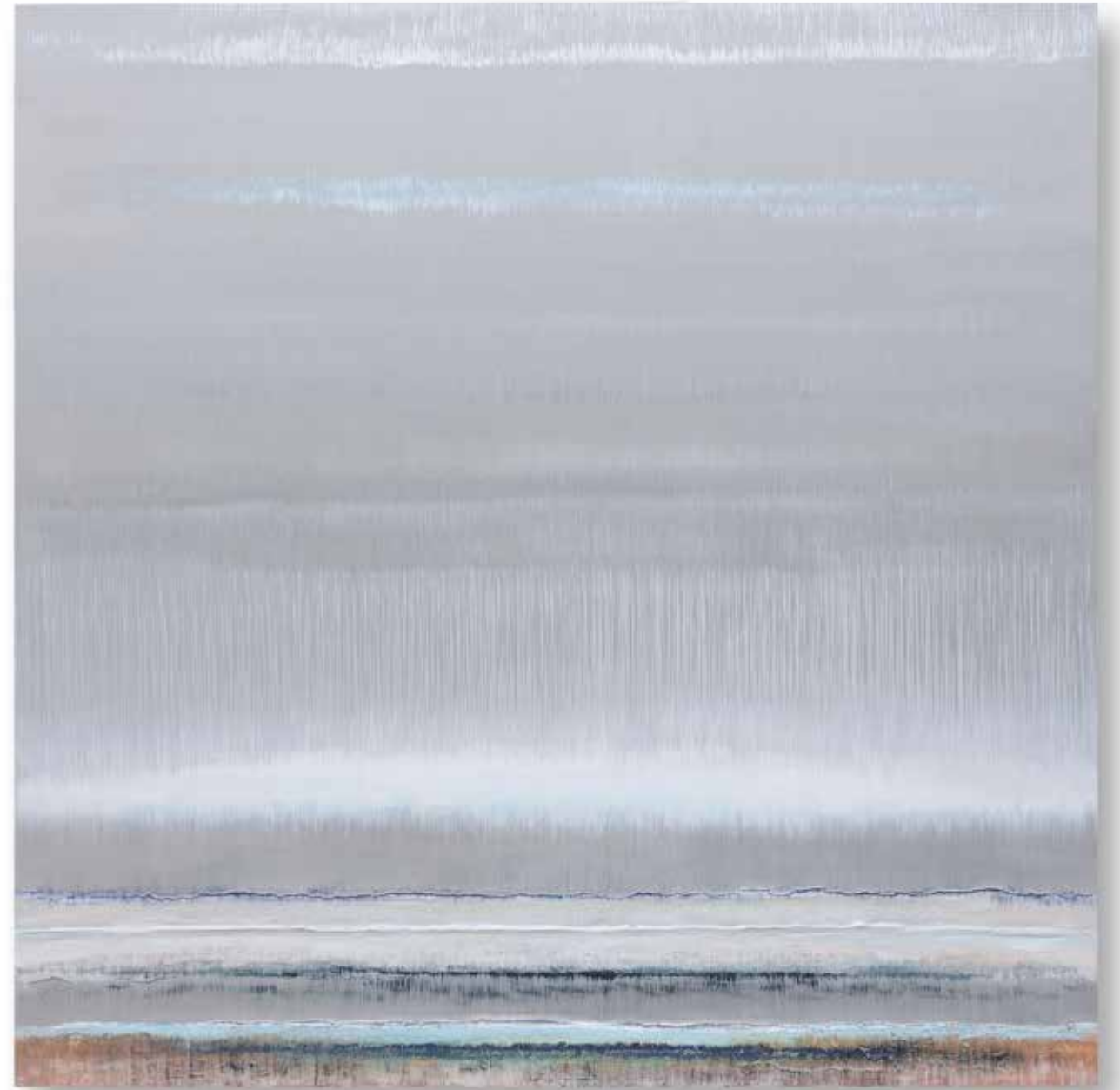
10 Light Embers - Red, acrylic & oil on metal, 100 x 100 cm / 39×39 in



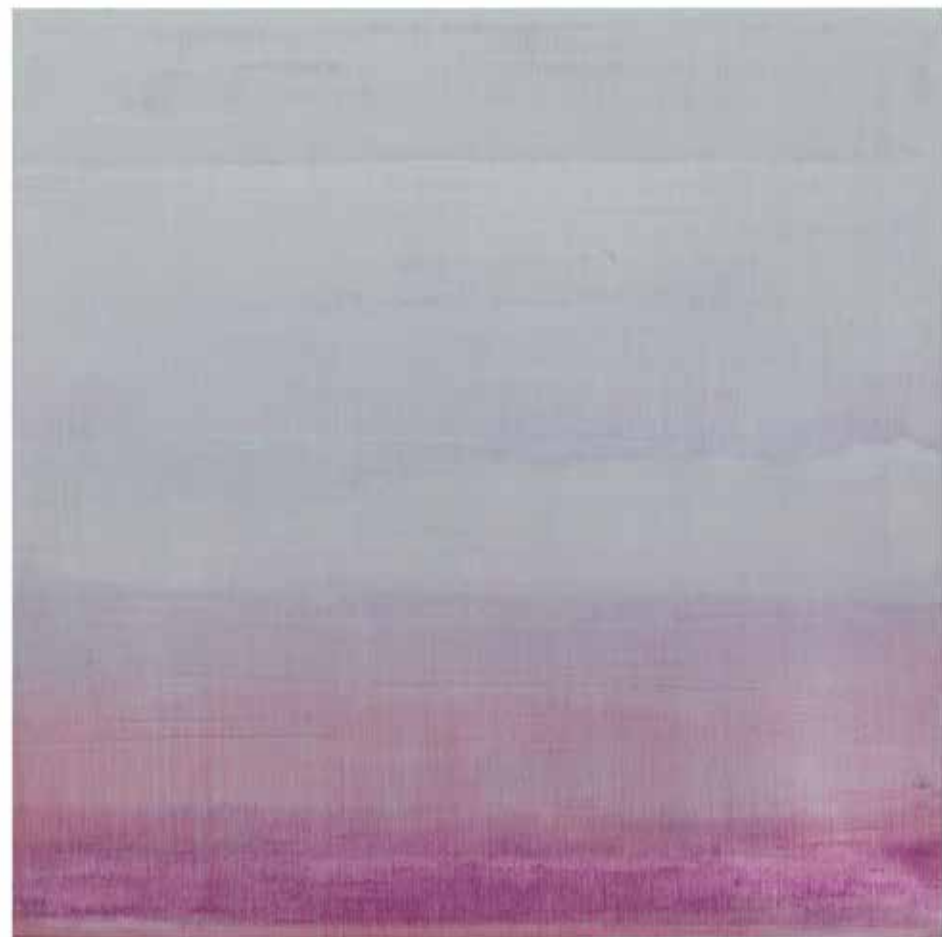
11 Polar Lights, acrylic & oil on metal, 125 x 125 cm / 49×49 in



12 Deep Waters 1, acrylic & oil on metal, 125 x 125 cm / 49×49 in



13 Northern Passage 3, acrylic & oil on metal, 125 x 125 cm / 49×49 in



14 Fog 2, acrylic on metal, 70 x 70 cm / 28×28 in



15 Twilight 4, resin & pigment on metal, 70 x 70 cm / 28×28 in



16 Polar Night 1, acrylic & oil on wood, 125 x 125 cm / 49×49 in



17 Polar Wind 2, acrylic & resin on metal, 125 x 125 cm / 49×49 in

BRUNO KURZ

b. 1957, Lake of Constance

EDUCATION

- 1991-93 Postgraduate Studies in Interdisciplinary Media at Academy of Fine Art, Stuttgart, Germany
- 1981-87 State Academy of Fine Arts in Karlsruhe, Germany
- 1980-81 Independent College of Fine Art in Stuttgart, Germany

SCHOLARSHIPS & AWARDS

- 2017 Member artist federation Baden Württemberg,Germany
- 2006 Project funding of the Federal Cultural Foundation Germany
- 2004 Co-Founder Exhibition Platform “Neuer Kunstraum Karlsruhe”
- 1998 Travel Grant for the project, “Heimat” to Northern Europe
- 1988-89 Grant from the Arts Foundation of Baden-Württemberg
- 1986 Project Grant from the Art Fund Bonn

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, Canada
Museum im Kleihues-Bau, Stuttgart / Kornwestheim
Galerie Mollwo, Basel
One artist show, Art Karlsruhe, Germany
- 2016 Galerie Cyprian Brenner, Schwäbisch Hall
One artist show, Art Karlsruhe, Germany
Galerie P13, Heidelberg
Galerie Reitz, Köln,
- 2015 Galerie Arthea, Mannheim,
- 2014 Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, Canada
One artist show, Art Karlsruhe, Germany
Galerie Schrade, Karlsruhe, Germany
- 2013 Galerie P13, Heidelberg, Germany
Galerie Rigassi, Bern, Switzerland
Galerie Wesner, Konstanz, Germany
One artist show, Art Karlsruhe, Germany
- 2012 Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, Canada
- 2011 Galerie Mollwo, Basel/Riehen, Switzerland
- 2010 Galerie Peerlings, Krefeld, Germany
Galerie Alfred Knecht, Karlsruhe, Germany
Galerie P13, Heidelberg, Germany
- 2009 Galerie Wesner, Konstanz, Germany
Galerie Fetzer, Sontheim an der Brenz, Germany
- 2008 Galerie Mollwo, Basel/Riehen, Switzerland
- 2007 Galerie Königsblau, Stuttgart, Germany
- 2006 Südwest Galerie, Aalen, Germany

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 Kunst Zürich, Kölner Liste, ART Salzburg, ART DÜSSELDORF
- 2016 ART.FAIR Köln, Art Toronto, Kunst Zürich , Affordable Art Fair Hamburg
- 2015 art Karlsruhe, ART.FAIR Köln, Art Toronto, Kunst Zürich , Affordable Art Fair Hamburg
The Sylvia Wald & Kim Art Gallery, New York
- 2014 Art Toronto, Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, Canada
Kunst Oberschwaben 20th Century, Germany
ART FAIR Cologne, Cologne, Germany
Kunst Zürich, Zürich, Switzerland
Galerie Schrade, Karlsruhe, Germany
- 2013 Galerie P13, Heidelberg, Germany
Kunst Zürich, Zürich, Switzerland
Art Karlsruhe, Germany
- 2012-13 Art Toronto, Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, Canada
- 2011 Galerie Mollwo, Basel/Riehen, Switzerland
- 2010 Zentrum fur Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, Germany
Galerie Mollwo, Basel/Riehen, Switzerland
Galerie Schindel, Freiburg, Germany
- 2006 Galerie Mollwo, Basel/Riehen, Switzerland
- 2005 Galerie Mariette Haas, Ingolstadt, Germany
- 2003 Galerie Epikur, Wuppertal, Germany

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Front/Back Cover: Lux 5, acrylic & oil on canvas, 180 x 180 cm / 71×71 in (detail)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Donald Brackett is a Vancouver-based popular culture journalist and curator who writes about art, design and film. He has been the Executive Director of both the Professional Art Dealers Association of Canada and The Ontario Association of Art Galleries. He is the author of the book Back to Black: Amy Winehouse’s Only Masterpiece (Backbeat Books, 2016), and the upcoming book, The Devil in Miss Jones: The Soul Music of Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings, to be released by Backbeat Books in Spring 2018. He has curated multiple art exhibitions, among them a major retrospective traveling show on the mixed media art of Vessna Perunovich: Emblems of the Enigma, for which a substantial catalogue was published, and he is also a regular curator of film-art programs for Cinematheque.

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