



TRANSFIGURED THE HIGH BRIGHT NIGHT OF BRUNO KURZ



ART DEALERS ASSOCIATION OF CANADA ASSOCIATION DES MARCHANDS D'ART DU CANADA

198 Davenport Rd, Toronto ON M5R 1J2 Canada | 416.962.0438 or 800.551.2465 | info@odonwagnergallery.com odonwagnergallery.com

O sieh, wie klar das Weltall schimmert! Es ist ein Glanz um Alles her...

(How brilliantly the universe shines! There is a radiance around everything...)

— Richard Dehmel, 1899

Transfigured: The High Bright Night of Bruno Kurz

By Donald Brackett

From the moment I first set eyes on this series of luminous images by Bruno Kurz I began to hear the sounds of Schoenberg's *Transfigured Night*, a string sextet in one movement composed in 1899 and first performed in 1902 to the astonishment of those in attendance. I can't account for this, and luckily I don't have to, but these darkly intimate painterly gestures manage to convey a certain musical quality not unlike that of expressionistic and atmospheric soundtracks for dark, disturbing but beautiful films usually unfolding in cool northern climes. One almost expects the cloaked figure from a Bergman film to come looming out of their mysterious expanses. There is a lot of dark ice in these paintings, but they also have a light heart. And it beats in pure colour.

That emotional distance known as the visual aura always involves the interruption of any work of art by "the expressionless", the beckoning but ever receding aesthetic edge of what can be known or shown, that borderland of the inexpressible, where what Benjamin called the "truth content" of a work of art resides, at the very edge of its potential. These works are virtual diagrams of that limitless limit. Hallucinatory, reverie inducing, simply splendid, they invite us to view the transfiguration of the commonplace. Perception itself is their true subject.

One image in particular sets the tone for what this subtle visual orchestra will later reveal to us when the rest of the instruments join in to the swelling sounds of spatio-temporal vision on display: *Easter Vigil 12* (Image 1) plunges us into a compelling nocturne which is at once elegant and harrowing. Interstitially layered

and complex, paradoxically both far distant and immediately up front, one cannot resist the sensual gathering of feelings available to the viewer who turns off their mind and lets their eyes do the thinking. The push and pull tension it sets up between an ultra-flat modernist stratification where what we see is what we see and the earthy delights of organic space, where what we feel is inexpressible yet physically profound, is perhaps an ideal vector for the wrestling match between reason and passion in our lives.

The great poet Wallace Stevens once defined poetry as "the search for the inexpressible", and in that sense, this painting and its relatives are all visual poems. They point at something deep, delirious, demanding: a sensation which would be unavailable without their quiet pointing. The way some music points at silence (Cage or Schoenberg for example) they point at the invisible. They all do this, in different ways and means but with equal emotive impact: their serial nature suggests embedded geological time itself unfolding in a circular sequence without a beginning or an end, a sequence non-narrative in nature but one which still has a story to tell. A story occurring at the very edges of sight.

The *Vulcanic Island* series (Images 22-24) for instance, especially numbers five, six, and seven, have a raw elegance and savage beauty in which their resinous colours seem to not just *depict* the flow of lava contained in their construction but to actually *transmit* it to the surface from deep within some unknown underwater world of fiery furnaces plunging upwards to the air, towards our waiting but unsuspecting eyes. They literally appear to

be cooling before our eyes, which in turn feel gently scalded by their strangely intimate grandeur. The molten magic they carry is arrested and yet still seems to continue flowing in front of us in a state of permanent flux. In the absence of a discernible figure to ground relationship, one quickly realizes that they are the ground and we the viewers are the figures. There *is* a horizon in each one, multiple horizons in fact, though it is not a fixed domain in space but is rather an inscape attuned to the dimension of time. Tantalized, the viewer feels urged to address them as four-dimensional paintings, and doing so provides unexpected gifts which privilege the haptic realm, the zone of the physical as well as the metaphysical.

This remarkable body of work, in its harmonious entirety, is the opposite of the hyper-speeds of technology and celebrates a perceptual slowness at the heart of all true seeing. This is still a special kind of ancient and arcane technics, one focused organically and exclusively on sight and seeing. In almost every single painting the actual subject and theme is the transmission of light and its impact emotionally on the viewer. Actuality shines through.

Aura and affect are utterly unified in this suite for illuminated inner colours, a sequence which is both meditative and aggressively active simultaneously. In fact, one of the many charms of these works is how they function as floating constellations which orbit and interact with each other as structural units in a larger scale drama. The themes unfold in shocking harmony and are predominantly focused on time, colour and light as executed in a carefully crafted minimum of means for maximum effect. Time and its seasonal disguises are explored delicately, as in A Touch of Spring (Image 18), with its full frontal embrace of subtle tonalities, or with the more muscular impact of Flickering Sea (Image 26), a bold confrontation with an elemental power too huge to be grasped or controlled. We are mute witnesses to what used to be called the sublime.

Shifting rapidly from smooth to rough, from gleaming to dark, this body of work contains polarities and dichotomies that many artists might be tempted to separate and emphasize, but Kurz takes a bolder approach, allowing not only paradoxes but also contradictions to be celebrated the way most artists settle for assumed certainties. Kurz however does not settle, he explores the very nature of nature: perpetual change and renewal, as illustrated so clearly by his Autumn Storm series (Images 16 & 21), notably numbers four and five. Here, one doesn't just see the transformations inherent in season shift, growth, decay and rebirth, one feels it in the blood, which of course is what so many of his images resemble in the end: they appear to be biological entities, because that is precisely what they are, living things rather than representations of things.

Early Morning (Image 13) and Early Evening (Image 17), for example, both capture the essence of impermanence and the transitory nature of our experience, just as Very Far Away (not illustrated) elicits the paradox of intimate distance, both physical and emotional.

Atmospheric conditions have seldom been either explored or depicted with such an ironic combination of active elements dancing with passive forms in the perfect ratio of stillness to dynamism. Dark Light 1 (Image 27) and Dark Light 2 (Image 28), for example, two of the finest works in the suite, capture something indefinable about our relationship to landscape, time and light. So it is with Coloured Light, Winter Light 2 (not illustrated) and Northern Lights 2 (Image 14), a grouping in which rarely has so deceptively simple a subject been revealed in so complex and nuanced a manner.

Likewise his remarkably fixated study of fjord forms. Fjords are long narrow inlets with steep cliffs created by glacial erosion, and ironically, in infrared enhanced images of actual fjords the snow appears grey, glaciers appear bright blue and lands surfaces with vegetation appear red, where glaciers tumble down lakes like frozen waterfalls. In the end, portraying *frozen time* itself seems to be one of this painter's special gifts

Evening in the Fjord, Fjord Illuminated, Rainy Day in the Fjord, and Arctic Ocean 1 (Images 12, 11, 6, 5), all attempt and succeed in capturing the grandeur of a geological



2 LIGHT FOG IN TURQUOISE (LIGHTS SERIES) acrylic and resin on metal, 28 × 28 in.

time zone much longer and larger than our intellect but not nearly as huge as our imagination, which readily adapts and plunges us happily into their marvelous visual splendour. Words can only approximate the impact of these works on our retinas. They are retinal vacations in the best sense of the word.

This heightened organic quality is largely the result of the artist's labour-intensive process, and in fact one can comfortably call these process paintings, sharing the vestiges and ghosts of textile canvas which is echoed by the occasional use of either gauze, or abrasively sanded underpainting to establish the texture and reflection that suits his intention. That one technique could achieve the brilliantly diverse revelations of *Winter Fog in Green, Light Fog in Turquoise*, or *Lucifer - Emerald 3* (Images 19, 2, 4) (mythology tells us that emeralds originated by falling to earth from the crown of the fallen angel) is a testament to their maker's visual skill and painterly acumen.

Any honest but untutored notions that abstraction as an image format requires less technical virtuosity than more traditionally realistic renderings can easily be dispelled simply by a glimpse into the working methods and painterly processes of German-based artist Bruno Kurz. His mastery of ground preparation, glazes, textures and the palpable presence of an echoing landscape figuration in his work demonstrates at least as much attention to detail and absorption with the magical properties of reflected light as that more usually found in the visions of a Vermeer or Turner. So much so that one feels that if Vermeer or Turner had lived in our century, they too may have embraced metal (in this case, aluminum), the ultimate resistant surface, rather than the romance of canvas, as the delivery field for images that attempt to render the amorphous and elusive energies of the many layered and rugged environments which live and breathe before us.

The work of art in the age of digital reproduction, especially that of painting, is often believed to be a fugitive medium, trying frantically to keep pace with an ever expanding multiplicity of mechanical means for disseminating images. But nothing could be further from the truth, since as we all proceed deeper into the digital night itself, the analog mode of painting has risen and will continue to rise to the rarefied level of an almost fetishistic spirituality. Kurz's body of work is ample evidence of this obvious fact, and his family of forms clearly evokes the earthy power and quality of landscapes which live, not just in front of us, but inside us as well. They resonate like tuning forks in unison, each one enhancing and amplifying a central horizon motif until we feel not just as if we are witnessing portraits of the natural world, but rather self-portraits of our own mindscapes in relation to it.

The best, the greatest experiences of that special kind of conscious and creative daydreaming known as painting are always somewhat coercive: we simply submit to them whether we want to or not, pulled into an ineluctable vortex caused virtually by being in the proximity of their field of vision, and within sniffing distance of their aura, their extinction. We are transfixed in a state where we would happily remain until something in everyday life compels us to drag ourselves away and do something supposedly more practical. And yet, what could be more productive and profitable than watching frozen music melt? The fact that their delicate visual content is hovering on a thin skin of alloy only enhances our curious sense of jamais vu throughout their serial journey. It is that unique sense of witnessing something *never* before seen which accompanies these images. They offer a dream-like poetic experience to the viewer who accepts their invitation, their palpable invoking of geological time. Whatever they evoke for you will be equally accurate, once you submit to their transfiguration, that is the mercurial charm of their strange magic.

These landscapes, or perhaps mindscapes would be more accurate, accruing as they do in a series of montage-like frames of near identical scale, afford the viewer a somewhat cinematic experience, a looping sequence that establishes, quickly and emotionally, a set of places which are being mapped metaphysically. They are maps of a territory which everyone recognizes, whether or not we have visited them personally: the artist visits them on our behalf. In the case of the hundreds of horizons arrayed before our eyes, these inscapes form aggregates together, merging into a series of reciprocal structural units: a constellation of *locations* presented through a muted orchestra of deeply darkening colours. They are a suite of images conversing with each other and us, precisely the way a sextet is an interactive suite of sounds for shared instrumentation. It is the later, larger scale string orchestra version of Transfigured Night which these layered lava-like images evoked for me. Again, the poetry of Richard Dehmel, which provoked Schoenberg into composing his innovative sextet piece in the first place, somehow manages to convey some of Kurz's pictorial magic:

"Two people are walking through a bare, cold wood, as the moon keeps pace with them and draws their gaze. She walks on, suddenly stumbling, she looks up, the moon keeps pace, her dark gaze drowns in light, while their breath embraces the air, as two people walk through the high, bright night."

Welcome to the high, bright night of Bruno Kurz. Welcome back to dreaming with open eyes.

Donald Brackett is a Vancouver-based art critic/curator for whom painting remains primary.



3 WINTER OCEAN 1 (LA MER SERIES), acrylic and oil on metal, 59 × 59 in.









"Aura and affect are utterly unified in this suite for illuminated inner colours, a sequence which is both meditative and aggressively active simultaneously"



8 DAY BETWEEN NIGHT 3, acrylic and oil on wood, 49 × 49 in.









"Hallucinatory, reverie inducing, simply splendid, they invite us to view the transfiguration of the commonplace.

Perception itself is their true subject"



13 EARLY MORNING (NEW SKY SERIES), acrylic and oil on metal, 49×49 in.





















22 VULCANIC ISLAND 5 (LAVA SERIES), resin and pigment on metal, 16 × 16 in.
 23 VULCANIC ISLAND 6 (LAVA SERIES), resin and pigment on metal, 16 × 16 in.

"There is a lot of dark ice in these paintings, but they also have a light heart. And it beats in pure colour"











BIOGRAPHY

BRUNO KURZ, b. 1957, Lake of Constance

EDUCATION

1992-93 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

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

SELE	CTED	GROUP	EXHIBITIONS

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS		SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS		
	2014	Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, Canada Galerie Wesner, Art Karlsruhe, Germany Galerie Schrade, Karlsruhe, Germany	2014	Art Toronto, Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, Canada Kunst Oberschwaben 20th Century, Germany ART FAIR Cologne, Cologne, Germany
	2013	Galerie P13, Heidelberg, Germany Galerie Rigassi, Bern, Switzerland	2017	Kunst Zürich, Zürich, Switzerland Galerie Schrade, Karlsruhe, Germany
		Galerie Wesner, Konstanz, Germany One artist show, Art Karlsruhe, Germany	2013	Galerie P13, Heidelberg, Germany Kunst Zürich, Zürich, Switzerland
	2012	Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, Canada	2012-13	Art Karlsruhe, Germany Art Toronto, Odon Wagner Contemporary,
	2011	Galerie Mollwo, Basel/Riehen, Switzerland	2012 13	Toronto, Canada
	2010	Galerie Peerlings, Krefeld, Germany Galerie Alfred Knecht, Karlsruhe, Germany Galerie P13, Heidelberg, Germany	2011 2010	Galerie Mollwo, Basel/Riehen, Switzerland Zentrum fur Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, Germany
	2009	Galerie Wesner, Konstanz, Germany Galerie Fetzer, Sontheim an der Brenz, Germany	2006	Galerie Mollwo, Basel/Riehen, Switzerland Galerie Schindel, Freiburg, Germany Galerie Mollwo, Basel/Riehen, Switzerland
	2008 2007 2003	Galerie Mollwo, Basel/Riehen, Switzerland Galerie Konigsblau, Stuttgart, Germany Galerie Alfred Knecht, Karlsruhe, Germany	2005	Galerie Mariette Haas, Ingolstadt, Germany Galerie Epikur, Wuppertal, Germany
		<u> </u>		

CREDITS

CURATORIAL Odon Wagner

Rafael Wagner

Caitlin McCullough

LAYOUT

Caitlin McCullough Michael Zikovitz

DESIGN

Solisco Québec

PRINTING Solisco C

Front Cover: FJORD IN GRAY 2 (WESTFJORDS SERIES), acrylic and oil on metal, 39×39 in.

Back Cover: WIND OF THE GODS 2, resin and pigment on metal, 28×28 in.

Photo: B. Kurz, on the excursion: Westfjords, Iceland, 2014

For all works in exhibition, please visit odonwagnergallery.com



198 Davenport Road, Toronto, ON M5R 1J2 Canada 416.962.0438 or 800.551.2465 info@odonwagnergallery.com ISBN: 978-1-927447-14-7 National Library of Canada "Transfigured: The High Bright Night of Bruno Kurz" Copyright: Odon Wagner Gallery, 2014 odonwagnergallery.com



ODON WAGNER

CONTEMPORARY