

LOS ANGELES | BRUSSELS | NEW YORK | MARFA

BENDIX HARMS – German Contentist

My Contentism is based on painted subjects who are operating as determiners and decision-makers - sending precise orders to my brain.

It feels like being a reciever of commands that can only be processed, when the relationship between me and the subject climbs on a steel-like level - achieved through love, hate, overmotivated behavior, unexpected physiognomies, humans who put names to things and animals who put names to things.... then the subject overtakes the command-center - like my wife Mari with her square-built-rascal-face, the blackcap bird with his concrete-grey body and his unscrewed black monk's head or Rufus the black cat - the former owner of the farm we bought in Denmark. All are able to determine and all are able to be formally reduced for generating a repeatable stamp - in my brain and on the canvas.

These stamps let my right arm work like a machine - equipped with any kind of spatulas and scrapers, liquids for dripping and paint tubes for squeezing out words and linear elements....

The selected subject shouts his precise orders: generate me only in that way, because it's adequate for me, its adequate for your paint, for your tools and for art-history - in the end of an artist's life only one thing matters: the difference of the work in relation to history.

For me it felt like a liberation from the traditional expressive brushstroke, because each new painting could start differently: dripped, scratched, thickly spackled - completed in one session or in 100 sessions....the narrative motif is the decisionmaker, and my job is to paint them in order to make them speak.

Østerfælden, Endversion, 14.04. 2020

Bendix Harms (b. 1967 in Munster, Germany; lives and works in Allerup, Denmark) received his MFA from the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg, Germany. He has been included in numerous exhibitions at important institutions such as the Hall Art Foundation, Redding; Hudson Valley Center of Contemporary Art, Peekskill; Nationalmuseum, Berlin and the National Academy Museum & School, New York. His work is represented in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Deutsche Bank Collection, Germany; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

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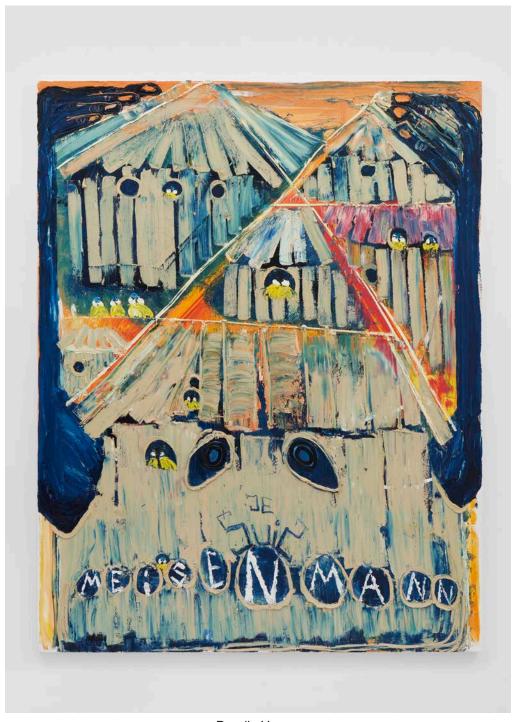
SELECTED WORKS

LOS ANGELES | BRUSSELS | NEW YORK | MARFA



Bendix Harms
Blue Tit Architecture, 2022
Oil on Canvas
70 7/8 x 55 1/8 in
180 x 140 cm

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Bendix Harms
Je suis Meisenmann, 2022
Oil on canvas
70 7/8 x 55 1/8 in
180 x 140 cm

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Bendix Harms MY Content, 2022 Crayon on paper 19 3/4 x 27 1/2 in 50 x 70 cm

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Bendix Harms *Hunger*, 2009 Oil on canvas 90 1/2 x 74 3/4 in 230 x 190 cm



Bendix Harms
Mamon Dalton, 2019
Oil on canvas
98 3/8 x 74 3/4 in
250 x 190 cm



Bendix Harms *Mamoon*, 2018 Oil on canvas 86 5/8 x 78 3/4 in 220 x 200 cm



Bendix Harms
Wie es sich anfühlt Mamon zu sein, 2019
Oil on canvas
98 3/8 x 74 3/4 in
250 x 190 cm

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Bendix Harms

VATA Fatum (Why Me), 2019

Wax crayon on paper

27 1/2 x 19 3/4 in

70 x 50 cm



Bendix Harms
Frau Grenadier, 2019
Oil on canvas
74 3/4 x 59 1/8 in
190 x 150 cm



Bendix Harms

Nichttöten durch Weggucken, 2018

Oil on canvas

82 5/8 x 59 1/8 in

210 x 150 cm

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Bendix Harms
Rufus (Ein Zeichen), 2018
Wax crayon on paper
27 1/2 x 19 3/4 in
70 x 50 cm

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Bendix Harms
Ein Geist - Ein Zeichen - Rufus, 2018
Oil on canvas
66 7/8 x 55 1/8 in
170 x 140 cm

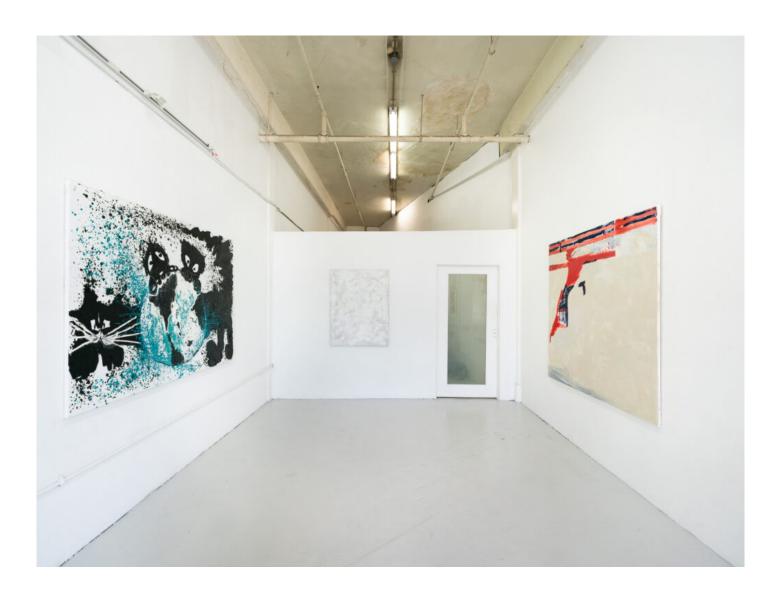


Bendix Harms
Kein Mensch - Kein Tier, 2018
Oil on canvas
59 1/8 x 51 1/8 in
150 x 130 cm

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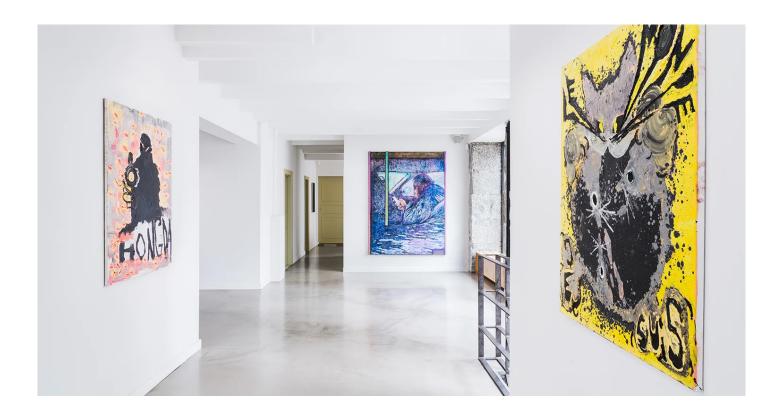
INSTALLATION VIEWS

LOS ANGELES | BRUSSELS | NEW YORK | MARFA



Installation view of Bendix Harms'
Notre Monde, 2019
at Supper Club
(March 25 - April 22, 2023)
As It Stands, Los Angeles, CA, US

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Installation view of Bendix Harms'

HONGDA draws the Colt before HONDA is able to shoot, 2020 &

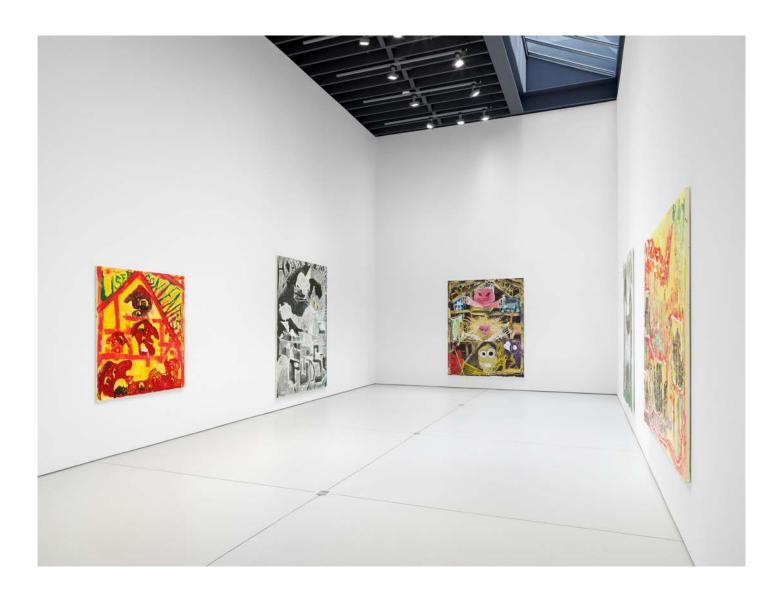
Je Suis le Monde, 2020

at Trust in Mortals

(September 16 - October 18, 2022)

BRIGADE, Copenhagen, DK

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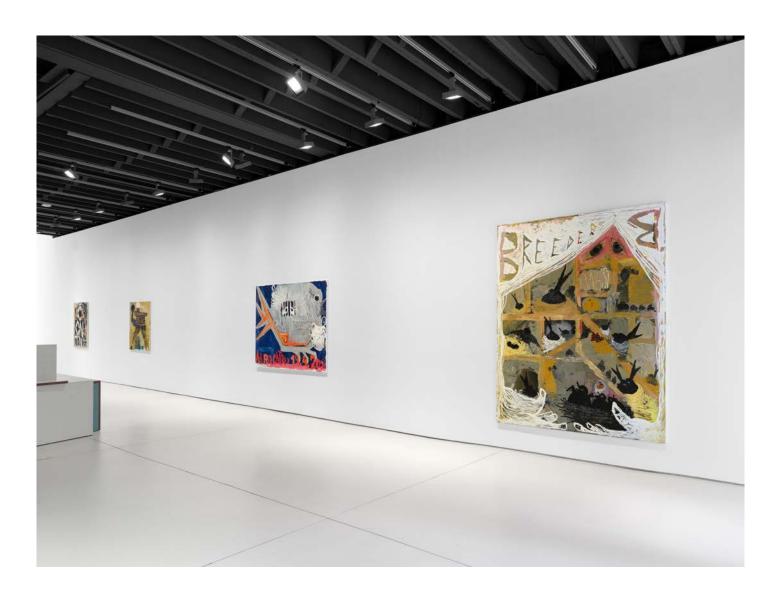
Installation view of Bendix Harms'
Houses of Content
(May 20 - June 26, 2021)
Anton Kern Gallery, New York, NY

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Installation view of Bendix Harms'
Houses of Content
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Installation view of Bendix Harms'
Houses of Content
(May 20 - June 26, 2021)
Anton Kern Gallery, New York, NY

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Installation view of Bendix Harms'
Hunger, 2009
at Inaugural Exhibition
(February 6 - March 6, 2021)
Nino Mier Gallery, Brussels, BE

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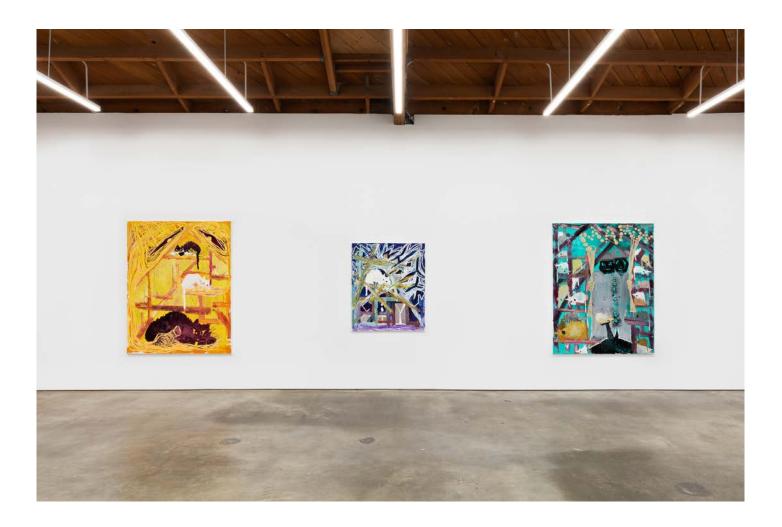
Installation view of Bendix Harms'
Reversed Evolution-How it feels to be Mamon
(September 12 - October 17, 2020)
Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

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Installation view of Bendix Harms'
Reversed Evolution-How it feels to be Mamon
(September 12 - October 17, 2020)
Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

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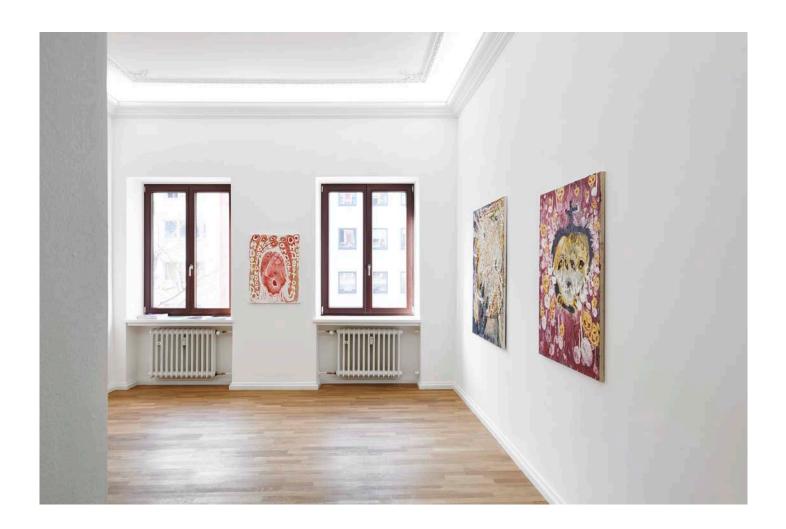
Installation view of Bendix Harms'
Reversed Evolution-How it feels to be Mamon
(September 12 - October 17, 2020)
Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

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Installation view of Bendix Harms'
Ein Geist - Ein Ziechen - Rufus, 2018
at Five Year Anniversary Show
(June 27 - August 4, 2020)
Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

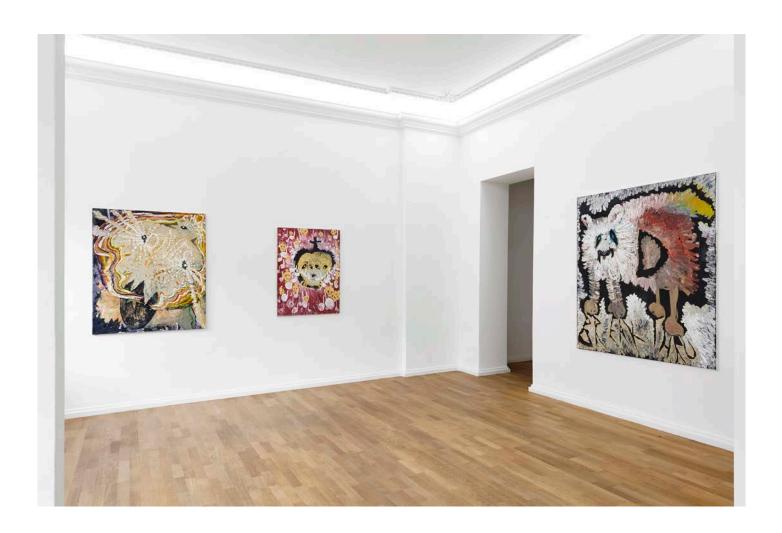
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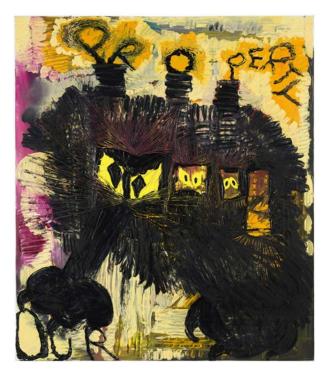
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MOUSSE

OCTOBER 2018

The Subject Tells The Story: Bendix Harms

In conversation with Ross Simonini



Bendix Harms, Our Property, 2018. @ Bendix Harms. Courtesy: the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New York

The German painter Bendix Harms has done few interviews, and so far, all of them have been on his own terms: published by his gallery, and conducted with friends and fellow painters. The talks provide an opening into his lexical world, a place where he invents words to better approximate the meaning in his mind, and where he breaks the restriction of directly answering questions. He uses words with the poetic freedom of his ecstatic brushwork. Likewise, his pictures never illustrate: the narratives they depict are irreducible to common sentences.

In the following interview, which was conducted in several rounds over email, Harms is often frustrated by the language I aim at him. Like a careful contrarian, he circumambulates explanations and critiques the phrasing of my questions. All of this gave our dialogue a nice, satisfying crunch. Here is a fellow artist who embraces the beautiful impossibility of communication, and I am grateful to have spent some time miscommunicating together.

ROSS SIMONINI

Why haven't you done any magazine interviews until now? **BENDIX HARMS**

In painting, the last decade was occupied by any kind of abstract patterns and quotations of Russian Constructivism—tasty and dumb. It's different today. Perhaps all is possible, but I don't want to be addicted to

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coincidences—a situation where the wide gap left by Philip Guston and Martin Kippenberger, the last narratives without any fearful excuses, seems to be an unexpected gift, a huge field with dark and fertile soil.

ROSS

Are you as purposeful about your daily life as you are about press?

BENDIX

"Purposeful" sounds straight. But: a painting depends on thousands of decisions, and an artist is always searching for a unique and singular problem that only an artist can solve. All these decisions make it interesting, and the big challenge of each day is not to fail—or to fail 1000%. Each day-life is the complete opposite for me. I am one of the worst decision makers in this world. One single day-life decision can obstruct my brain for days. The real world can be the biggest enemy and the biggest friend at the same time.

ROSS

Do you work with a schedule?

BENDIX

It feels like my inner schedule tells me what to do every day—what makes sense and what is senseless.

ROSS

I've never seen a picture of you. Would you say that you withhold or restrict your image from the public?

BENDIX

"Restrict" is a word I'd never use. For many years there was one black-and-white photo on the web from an opening in Munich, where I looked thoughtfully at the floor. Now it's gone, and it feels better.

ROSS

Do you think your image affects the perception of your paintings?

BENDIX

YES. An image has the energy. It has a big impact because everything has a meaning and is connected. You can't separate your physiognomy from your work—how you live, what you eat, how you think, and how you work are always readable. It's like a visible fingerprint, steered by lifelong experiences.

ROSS

You mentioned Guston and Kippenberger. Do you think about your work in relation to art history?

BENDIX

Art history seems like an endless film loop playing in the darkness of my brain. Sometimes a light is burning to look at it, and sometimes not. The darkness, in the meantime, is important to be thrown back into one's labyrinth of thinking. Having the opportunity to find your own exit through these millions of paintings and attitudes.

ROSS

Is German painting important to you?

BENDIX

German Expressionism is always on my mind like a trinity: thick paint, colorful paint, and fast painted. That's okay, and some of those paintings are interesting, but they forgot to treat different subjects in a different way. Guston had the same problem: unique and fantastic narrative paintings, but always painted in the same way, with tons of white as a background and his red and black tones wet-on-wet. Always looks good and works 100%. I miss coincidences, accidents and—again—different treatments of different subjects. But anyway: Guston was the most sovereign narrative painter of all, a hero of the last century.

ROSS

You recently moved from Hamburg. What's your new studio like in Denmark?

BENDIX

Currently it's a mix: an outdoor studio during the summer in the yard, including a garage for when it rains or when it's too hot. Running around in this yard with paint on my palette knife, sometimes singing, sometimes shouting, and sometimes—when a finished painting feels like a victory over the whole of art history—stretching my right fist toward the god of paint—who obviously doesn't exist—it could feel like hitting a totally chromed Freedom. There is also a winter studio on another farm because we still don't have a master plan for a new and heatable building on our grounds. A huge real-world decision.

ROSS

Language is important to your work in a way that it isn't for many painters. Do your paintings have a verbal narrative behind them?

BENDIX

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Language is a kind of concrete—it's the main material for the foundation of Contentism. Without its own terminology, all will become a big nothingness. A lot of my titles, sentences, and words are the result of a daily battle with my Danish wife, Mari, who is also a painter and has many antennas for the German language. All word-creators are welcome, like John Bock's son Linnart, who gave me titles like *Mit Töten* (With Killing), or *Pfreiheit* (a new word for freedom: Pfreedom), or Martin Kippenberger's *The whitest white woman I've ever met* (his comment when he met Mrs. Thea Westreich for the first time), which becomes *The whitest white cat I've ever met*. But: EVERYTHING can become a source: doorman videos, books, beach life. Any kind of experience: a forest that begins to talk, or a bird that starts to whistle. The main thing is always the same: what it has to do with me and my view of the art (world) and how could it influence me. This is the tipping point where it works or not. Are you really affected? Is there really an atomic and expandable relationship to the subject, or is it just this kind of attitude: I have to do something because I'm an artist? In that case you will die a long and unnoticed mush-death, and this is lifelong torture.

ROSS

What do you mean by "Contentism"?

BENDIX

CONTENT DETERMINES THE HOW.

ROSS

Do you ever tell yourself stories with words while you're painting?

RENDIX

No. Because my subject is the determiner, and I can't paint without its precise orders. The subject tells me the story. **ROSS**

That sounds mystical. Are you a mystic?

BENDIX

No. Actually I'm more a victim of the real world. In a positive way. Like walking around in the woods with my adored orange chainsaw in order to saw and saw and saw. This kind of monotony allows you to lose yourself and to be far away from the real world while staying within it—a circumstance that can be very similar to the vacuum of a painting session.

ROSS

Does your relationship to language come out of reading and writing?

BENDIX

My personal holy bible for many, many years was *At Swim-Two-Birds* by Flann O'Brien, a book that is completely addicted to Surrealism and from which I took many titles. My one and only self-written book was titled *Tülp* (1997)—very thin, only short stories, and very, very absurd. A big influencer at that time was my former teacher Werner Büttner at the academy in Hamburg, a pale, book-devouring man with splendid book recommendations. When it came to talking about painting he was a dumb white sculpture with big, melancholic eyes. Art is his big enemy and words are his huge passion. A very special mix. From that time on, Mari and I always battled about "the best sentence" or "the best title", chronically creating new words for our own language that is different compared to the university-based-ordinary-art-language. Since 2004 I have been working with Anton Kern Gallery, where the level of emailing was and is almost always on a poetry level, which kicked me, too.

ROSS

How did it kick you?

BENDIX

It's always the same: it feels like a counterpart where I can smell a certain claim for writing. This sparks the word-machine in my head. And the second reason is: they don't write and talk like car dealers. I've never got an email containing the truism: "... yes—I confirm."

ROSS

Did you publish your short stories?

BENDIX

I didn't. Maybe because of my awareness that pure absurdity couldn't be the summit of writing.

ROSS

Does language as visual art interest you?

BENDIX

Language as art never touched me. Basquiat is interesting, but his written words are often interchangeable. There is one sentence from Jenny Holzer in my mind: "Protect me from what I want." A brain burner, with pathos, partly psycho a perfect contradiction... Great!

ROSS

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You seem to have a contentious relationship with language. You like to play with meaning, and yet you also refuse certain kinds of specificity around your work and life, as you've done in this interview a few times. I find this kind of resistance to be true of most artists. Often, it seems like an avoidance to be pinned down, to fight off reducibility, to preserve freedom in the work. Is any of this true for you?

BENDIX

It feels like you can smell the answer: No. It's the opposite, because my Contentism works 100% contrary and I love to be pinned down. That's the oxygen of Contentism: to name things. Or in German: *Die Hosen runterlassen*, like, "let the trousers fall." Some examples for naming: it's not "a" cat, it's Rufus the black cat of the farm; it's not "a" bird, it's the Red Cardinal of Manhattan; it's not "a" woman, it's my wife, Mari; it's not "a" farm, it's Østerfælden, the name of the farm; and it's not "a" man, it's Mr. Schuette, the owner of the red-brick farmhouse in Lower Saxony, or it's me, the German painter with hanging eyes and a big nose. All are painted, all are named. The biggest advantage in naming a subject is the closeness to the subject and therefore being much more criticizable. Often it feels totally naked, but at the same time it sharpens my arguments.

ROSS

The animal scientist Temple Grandin has said that animals think in pictures, not words. You paint a lot of animals. What's your relationship to them?

BENDIX

It's always the same procedure: when I reach a certain level in a relationship to a subject, then I conquer the boiling point—which is very similar to falling in love—then the big WHAT and the big WHY lose their meaning. Then it runs on automatica. The subject is the determiner. It happened in the same way with my newest subject—THE RED CARDINAL—in New York. At four o'clock in the morning an incredible sound began in the street: didididi-DUDUDUDUDU! My first thought: new sound system of the police or ambulance. Or a signal to help blind people cross the road. BUT: too early and too loud. So I got up and stared through the window, and after a while I found a very small red dot on an antenna, singing at full throttle and with such energy and pressure. An American bird I'd never seen or heard in Europe: pure beauty and atomic power melted together—a new friend—a new subject!

ROSS

Who is Rufus?

BENDIX

Rufus the black cat was a special case because he lived for many years on the farm of Mari's parents in the northern part of Denmark before we bought it. So he was the owner of the property and the decision maker who decided that we had to buy the farm. This eighteen-year-old black dot in the green fields was such a strong counterpart. Now he is dead. He died at the end of 2017, and I dedicated two solo exhibitions to him: *Deathless Rufus—Defend Østerfælden* in Los Angeles and *Sankt Rufus* in New York. It's a little bit difficult to continue to paint this summer because I've never had such a steely relationship to such an animal before. Rufus! Where you are?

ROSS

What about scenes of people and ships and cars? Are these also subjects with which you have fallen in love? **BENDIX**

I wrote "... is similar to falling in love"... not "I fall in love"— it's a big difference to me. It depends on the steely and over-boiling relationship where the question "what should I paint?" becomes redundant. That's the main point, and I don't distinguish between animals, people, and things. As painted subjects they are all equal. Actually, all kinds of Contentism started because of a red-brick farm building in Bleckede, a town in Lower Saxony, Germany, where Mari lived at the time. I was in Hamburg, and we wrote many letters with drawings to each other—drawing-letters. On the first one was the farmhouse with Mari as a landlord. This became my first content painting for the professional art world. Mari has continued to be my main subject until today: the headquarters of content.

ROSS

Can you fall in love with your own work?

BENDIX

No. But sometimes a painting is so close to me that it feels like a part of me. A painting of Rufus could be my knee. It's impossible to send it to the art universe without pain. BUT: that's the price I pay for Contentism based on my own experiences. Maybe it would be easier to send paintings with rectangles and dots on to the galleries without any pain. But to me, pain is a barter trade, a currency that makes me electric. And the idea that paintings with Mari in them are hanging in New York, paintings with Rufus in them are hanging in Los Angeles, and paintings with my testicles in them are hanging in Munich and New York—that makes me even more electric.

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Bendix Harms (1967 Münster, Germany) lives and works in Denmark. Recent exhi- bition include: SANKT RUFUS (Anton Kern Gallery, New York, 2018); Deathless Rufus: Defend Østerfælden (Morán Morán, Los Angeles, 2018); ÄMEN (Anton Kern Gallery, New York, 2017); Hope and Hazard: A Comedy of Eros (Hall Art Collection, Reading, VT, 2017); Implosion 20 (Anton Kern Gallery, New York, 2016); Don't call me when you are rich or famous. Call me only if you are in the gutter (Grice Bench, Los Angeles, 2016); The Great Figure Two (The Journal Gallery, Brooklyn, NY, 2016); Shout for Tomorrow (Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York, 2016); Colliding Alien Bodies (Marlborough Chelsea, New York, 2016); Independent Art Fair (Anton Kern Gallery, New York, 2016); Love: The First of the 7 Virtues (Hudson Valley Center of Contemporary Art, Peekskill, NY, 2015); SELF: Portraits of Artists in their Absence (National Academy Museum & School, New York, 2015).

Ross Simonini is an artist, writer, musician, dialogist, producer, recorder, teacher, editor and generalist. He splits his time between New York and the California redwoods.

Originally published on Mousse 65

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The New York Times

DECEMBER 2004

Art In Review; John Box Bendix HarmsBy Roberta Smith

Anton Kern Gallery 532 West 20th Street, Chelsea Through tomorrow

Through video, performance and installation art, the German artist John Bock has become known for an inspired, unpredictable clownishness, so it may be fitting that his third solo show here incorporates both hits and misses.

The misses are two sculptures made of the artist's signature sewn and stuffed forms supplemented by cold-rolled steel, in which he cleans up his act to a dismaying degree. The hits are two videos in which Mr. Bock's messily imaginative grasp of the medium continues to develop, effortlessly merging formalism, documentary and transgressive fantasy into a hallucinatory Process Art that is often created as we watch.

In "Astronaut," a spacey space odyssey to a tune by the Cure, Mr. Bock alternates between a crudely conjured spacecraft, where he is ritualistically smothered in goo, and open terrain, where he roams around wearing one of his stuffed sculptures, playing air guitar and going eyeball-to-eyeball with nature. The camerawork is especially good.

In the second video, visible on a monitor in the front gallery, Mr. Bock conducts one of his zany lecturedemonstrations, making a sculpture that incorporates the freshly cut hair of a trusting assistant. The action occurs in a cramped crawl space -- available for viewing by the exceptionally limber -- beneath the floor of a large steel cube in the middle of the gallery.

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CV

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BENDIX HARMS

Born 1967 in Münster, Germany, DE Lives and works in Allerup, Denmark, DK

EDUCATION

1991-97 Hochschule für Bildende Künste (HfBK), Hamburg, DE, MFA

SELECTED EXHIBTIONS

2023	BIRD NATION, Brussels, BE (forthcoming) Supper Club, As it Stands, Los Angeles, CA, US
2022	Trust in Mortals, Brigade, Copenhagen, DK
2021	Houses of Content, Anton Kern Gallery, New York, NY, US
2020	Reversed Evolution – How it feels to be Mamon, Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA US Old Technology, Anton Kern Gallery, New York, NY, US Five Year Anniversary Show, Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, US Pas de Deux/Part I, Sabine Knust Gallery, Munich, DE VATA FATUM- Das frühe Ende einer jungen Hofdiktatur, Sabine Knust Gallery,
2019	Munich, DE Kein Mensch – Kein Tier – Frau Grenadier (No Human – No Animal – Mrs. Grenadier) Salon Nino Mier, Cologne, DE
2018	Bendix Harms: SANKT RUFUS, Anton Kern Gallery, New York, NY, US Bendix Harms: Deathless Rufus: Defend Østerfælden, Moran Bondaroff, Los Angeles, CA, US
2017	Bendix Harms: ÄMEN, Anton Kern Gallery, New York, NY, US Hope and Hazard: A Comedy of Eros, curated by Eric Fischl Hall Art Collection, Reading, VT, US
2016	Implosion 20, Anton Kern Gallery, New York, NY, US Don't call me when you are rich or famous. Call me when you are in the gutter., Grice Bench, Los Angeles, CA, US The Great Figure Two, The Journal Gallery, Brooklyn, NY, US Should for Tomorrow, Hirschl & Adler Modern, New York, NY, US Colliding Alien Bodies, Marlborough Chelsea, New York, NY, US
2015	Love: The First of the 7 Virtues, Hudson Valley Center of Contemporary Art, Peekskill, NY, US SELF: Portraits of Artists in their Absence, curated by Filippo Fossati, National Academy Museum & School, New York, NY, US
2014	Call and Response, Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York, NY, US
2012	The Killer Rabbit Ranch Rodeo, Nationalmuseum, Berlin, DE
2010	Drawing group exhibition, Tanja Pol Galerie, Munich, DE

	Love and Friendship in the Nuclear Age, group exhibition, Galerie Dana Charkasi, Vienna, AT
	The Cannibal's Muse, group exhibition, Patricia Low Contemporary, Gstaad, CH
2009	Bendix Harms: Sog, Sabine Knust, Munich, DE Until the End of the World, Andres Melas Presents, Athens, GR
2008	Bendix Harms: Lebenslieben, Anton Kern Gallery, New York, NY, US Friends and Family, Anton Kern Gallery, New York, NY, US Bendix Harms, Galería Heinrich Ehrhardt, Madrid, ES
2007	Bendix Harms: Burg Uns, Sabine Knust Gallery, Munich, DE Size Matters: XXL, HVCCA – Hudson Valley Center for Contemporary Art, Peekskill, NY, US The Sorcerer's Apprentice: Late Picasso & Contemporary Painters,
	Galleri Faurschou, Copenhagen, DK [cat.]
2006	Bendix Harms: Solid As A Rock, Anton Kern Gallery, New York, NY, US Bold Moves, Scenic, New York, NY, US
2005	Prague Biennial, Prague, CZ
2004	Which Feeder?, Two-person show with John Bock, Anton Kern Gallery, NY, US
2001	Musterkarte, Modelos de pintura en Alemania, Galeria Elba Benitez, Madrid, ES; Galerie Heinrich Ehrhardt, Conde Duque, ES
	Tirana Biennale 1, National Gallery + Chinese Pavillion, Tirana, AL Major Sponsen – ahead, Galerie Heinrich Ehrhardt, Madrid, ES
2000	Bendix Harms, Galerie Karin Guenther, Hamburg, DE
1998	Bendix Harms: Harms Hirsig Jung, Galerie Philomene Magers, Cologne, DE Salon 98, Galerie Bärbel Grässlin bei Tishman+Speyer Properties Messeturm, Frankfurt, DE Bendix Harms, Hirsig Harms Jung, Galerie Heinrich Erhardt, Madrid, ES
BIBLIC	OGRAPHY
2021	Houses of Content, New York, Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, and Galerie Sabine Knust, München
2018	SUMMER OF LOVE, Freight+Volume, New York, NY, US ØFzine, Anton Kern Gallery, New York
2016	Bendix Harms: Chosen Ones. New York: Karma, Anton Kern Gallery, and Galerie Sabine Knust., Munich, DE
2008	Destination Du, Heinrich Ehrhardt Gallery, Madrid, ES
2006	Against mush-death [in:] Bendix Harms Solid As a Rock (cat.), interview by Mari Susanne Kollerup.

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"Bendix Harms," The New Yorker, February 13 & 20

"Embracing His Emotion With Open Harms," Julia Butareva, *Colombia Daily Spectator*, February 21. Henry, Max.

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