



Andreas Lutz and Anders  
Guggisberg  
*Tasmanian Devil*  
2007  
Mixed media on canvas  
160×240 cm

*Aargauer Kunsthau, Aarau, Switzerland*

In this exhibition entitled 'Leben im Riff' (Life on the Reef) by Swiss artist duo Andres Lutz and Anders Guggisberg, the work on show created a strong suggestion of something having gone completely out of control. The duo's first survey exhibition in the ten years they have been working together featured key works in new, precisely choreographed constellations - modelled on the grand bourgeois home, with an emphasis on the study, the library and the living room - which contested the cosiness and orderliness of Western domesticity, our educated middle-class penchant for smart art and comforting nature.

The first room was the study: behind a central desk hung a huge painting (a ghostly scene of faces and masks, painted in a faux-Expressionist manner), lining the walls were large shelves filled with sculpted birds. The elements were almost those of a normal study, yet things were strangely out of kilter: the desk looked too rough-hewn and a huge mound of earth welled up behind it (*Le Bureau, The Office, 2003*); the birds - crudely fashioned from plaster or wood - were half scorched and far too numerous (*Die Pilger, The Pilgrims, 2006*); and what appeared to be an air-conditioning unit was overgrown with Irish moss. At first glance, the next room seemed to pursue this theme of nature getting the upper hand: wood chips on the floor, spades and rakes against the wall, more birds, partition walls made from bare planks used as notice boards. But the nature in evidence was less that of the great outdoors than the back garden. The adjacent room continued the theme, but offered a further twist on it. Reminiscent of a natural history museum, birds of prey stood about on crates with their wings spread wide, which created an uncanny, morbid atmosphere.

Lutz & Guggisberg's *Bibliothek* (Library, 1999-2008) functioned as a veritable bulwark of a sentiment pervading the entire exhibition - the bourgeois yearning for nature. The work includes a collection of fictitious books with titles such as *Der Buchfink* (The Chaffinch),

and landscapes painted in the style of the Old Masters. Our preoccupation with perfecting and ordering culture proceeds, it implies, at the expense of nature, which we now only tolerate in tamed, romanticized or trivialized form. But Lutz & Guggisberg's charred and headless birds, with gaping holes instead of necks, will not be driven away, even if they are just crudely cobbled together, rotting away on racks and crates.

*Ich sah die Wahrheit* (I Saw the Truth, 2005) explores how the clarity and structure of Modernism was instituted at the cost of repressing its dark and the monstrous side. On a mirrored tabletop stands a small sculpture assembled out of delicate twigs and sticks, its giant shadows playing a magical game on the wall behind. In formal terms, the work is reminiscent of the kinetic sculptures and architectural models of classical Modernism, but its fragility and artisanal air also recall handcrafted toys. The title is ironic: although it appears to deconstruct the ideologies of establishing truth, for Lutz & Guggisberg there is no clear truth, and everything they present us with has a dark side as well as a light one. Their deconstructions are not fiercely intellectual, but playful in a child-like manner, staging a kind of mania that refuses to be pinned down.

The high point of the show was undoubtedly *Floss* (Raft, 2008), a sloping wooden floor on which perched sofas, wall racks, knick-knacks, side tables and rolls of toilet paper; a dilapidated, chaotic living room that is never going to see better days. Gallery-goers were allowed to enter this stage-like scenario of things coated in plaster, including a sort of icing-sugar-coated cake that was actually formed more like a piece of shit. The room was a hive of activity, filled with small wooden figures pushing rakes about or pulling strings to manoeuvre objects, so busy that they didn't notice the threat of chaos and collapse all around them.

This exhibition presented a climax of Lutz & Guggisberg's stratagem to reveal the ominous lack of moderation that underpins our culture of order and cleanliness: the atmosphere was impressive, the aesthetic precise and densely wrought. The only question is how much more mileage the two artists can get out of their pet hate: middle-class culture. For much of what they stage with such verve is appropriated from an outmoded, stuffy way of life with which vivacious partygoers, agile managers and the global art audience can no longer identify. But perhaps this is precisely the point, at least in the case of *Floss*: the idea that this good old enemy, the all-mod-cons bourgeois way of life, is finally in danger of going irrevocably off the rails.

**Yvonne Volkart**

Translated by Nicholas Grindell

# Lutz & Guggisberg