

ART

Desiring Machines: Andreas Schulze's "Vacanze 365" and Thomas Eggerer's "Todd"

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"...desire is a product of lacking knowledge," writes Thomas Mann in his sensual novella *Death In Venice*. Mann's description of desire not only details the allure of the unknown and unknowable, but it also defines desire in terms of production, lending a perhaps unintentional mechanized overtone to lust and longing.

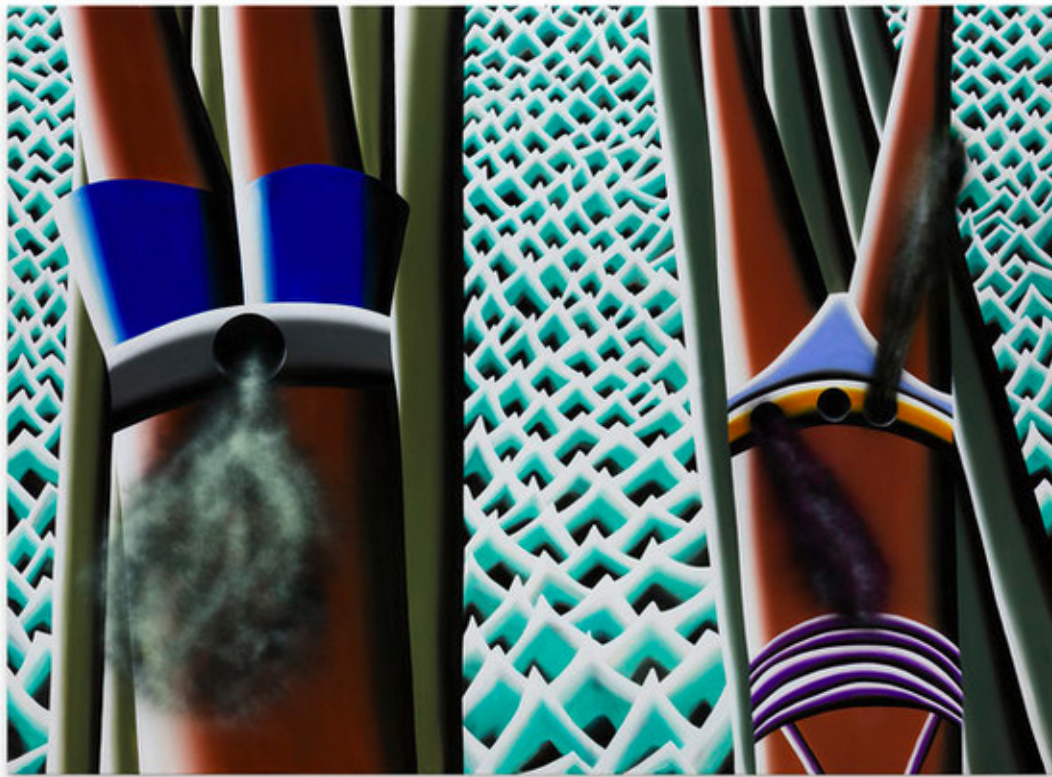
Two current painting exhibitions—Andreas Schulze's *Vacanze 365* at Team Gallery and Thomas Eggerer's *Todd* at Petzel Gallery—reflect both Mann's glorification of sudden, short-lived glimpses and his conflation of the desired body with industry. Granted, the two painters diverge noticeably in terms of their subject matter and chosen environment. As the exhibition title indicates, Schulze's *Vacanze 365* depicts an endless summer with brilliantly colored torsos of bathers scattered around the walls of the gallery as if floating in a vast sea or soaking up rays on the beach. Conversely, Eggerer's more conservatively hung show diverts from his own previous interest in beachgoers, as seen in his single painting exhibition *Waterworld*. Instead, *Todd* draws viewers into an urban environment with the limbs and torsos of young men, draped over manhole covers and leaking ConEd grates.



Installation view of Andreas Schulze's *Vacanze 365* at Team (Courtesy of the artist and Team (gallery, inc.))

And yet, the similarities between the shows are quite significant, from their shared aerial perspective, which strengthens the voyeurism pervading both exhibitions, to a mechanized eroticism that visually echoes Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's understanding of desire, namely their term "desiring machines."

For Deleuze and Guattari, the concept of "desiring machines," discussed in *Anti-Oedipus*, developed as a way to counter Freud's oh-so-straight and oh-so-conservative model of the Oedipus complex as a means to understand desires. Rather than looking to the mother or father as the source of burgeoning desires, Deleuze and Guattari began to view desire in terms of production, like a factory. As Jeffrey Weeks explains in the 1978 introduction to Guy Hocquenghem's *Homosexual Desire*, "Deleuze and Guattari see man as constituted by 'desiring machines.'...There is, in other words, no given 'self,' only the cacophony of desiring machines. Fragmentation is universal, and is not the peculiar fate of what society defines as the schizophrenic" (31).



Andreas Schultz, *Untitled (Vacanze) 22*, 2017, acrylic on nettle cloth (Courtesy of the artist and Team (gallery, inc.))

In *Vacanze 365*, it appears as if Andreas Schulze took the phrase “desiring machines” literally with numerous paintings of anonymous bathers producing plumes of dark grey and black smoke from holes in their midsection. Completed in various sizes from long and thin to hefty rectangles, the canvases mimic the range of body shapes and sizes seen on the beach. Their swimsuits are brightly colored and patterned, resembling the eponymous striped bathing suit worn by Björn Andrésen's Tadzio in Luchino Visconti's decadent 1971 film adaption of *Death In Venice*, heightening a sense of eroticism with its evocation of young, towheaded Tadzio running around the Italian shore.

However, more than just simplistic renderings of people lounging on beach towels, Schulze troubles the division between the body and industrial technology through a thick blast of smoke erupting from each subject like a chimney. Set against the vibrancy of the bathing suits, this polluted plume only strengthens the machine-like qualities of the bodies, which, in their linearity, resemble tubes and pipes. It's as if Schulze answers Warhol's call: “I want to be a machine” with his own “desiring machines.”



Team Gallery's press release compares the paintings to the phrase, "blowing off steam," translating Schulze's canvases into visual puns of relaxation. Not only referencing a continual vacation, there's also something unquestionably sexual about some internal emissions blowing from the crotch area of bodies. Now, there's certainly no shortage of comparisons between the body, sensuality and industrial aesthetics—I mean, there's a reason hardcore leather bars have names like The Anvil and The Mineshaft. And here, rather than a saccharine look at the waning days of summer, *Vacanze 365* literally represents the body overtaken and inexorably tied to the equipment of capitalist production, leaving desire, as Deleuze and Guattari theorize, as part of this production.

While not transforming bodies into machine-like objects, Thomas Eggerer's paintings portray Deleuze and Guattari's "desiring machines" from another angle, illustrating the free-flowing fragmentation of desire in urban space. "Desire constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented," observe Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (5). Eggerer's paintings—whether the leaking grate on the street or the fetishized partial body of a young man—conveys the eroticism inherent in the industrial environment.



Thomas Eggerer, *Spill*, 2017, Oil on linen (Courtesy the artist and Petzel Gallery)

The first room of Eggerer's exhibition *Todd* is devoid of the figure—focusing solely on circular manhole covers and rectangular grates, which are occasionally, in paintings like *Spill*, seeping a slick of gutter water. In the obsession with holes, sewers and openings, Eggerer's paintings resemble a painterly version of Robert Gober's drains—a subtle reference to the body's own abject holes, openings and flowing liquids. As Deleuze and Guattari write in *Anti-Oedipus*, "Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows" (6).



Thomas Eggerer, *Street Yoga*, 2017, Oil on linen (Courtesy the artist and Petzel Gallery)

If drains aren't enough to get you feeling hot and steamy, a second, larger gallery in Petzel presents a series of similar paintings of the filthy city streets, but these works feature partial views of attractive young figures. Like Schulze's works at Team, there is an inescapable sense of voyeurism, primarily derived from the overhead angle in which Eggerer's places the viewer.



Similarly, the bodies of the subjects are in repose, leisurely lounging on a litter-strewn New York street whether lying on a yoga mat, bartering over a pack of cigarettes or sitting back drinking a beer. Take, for example, *Todd*, which depicts a tracksuit sporting disembodied pair of legs and another young man laying on the pavement, biting his nails and staring off. With scattered cigarette butts and a set of keys strewn around the pavement, the viewer's eye focuses on the luminosity of the skin, which presents a jarring juxtaposition with the dark and dank grey urban landscape.

Posing from the margins, the fragments of bodies—these desiring machines— become inexorably linked with the mechanized, urban environment. As Deleuze and Guattari describe in *Anti-Oedipus*, "Everywhere it is machines—real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections" (1).