



ART

PALETTE OF CONTRASTS

Michael Kunze amalgams contradictory elements to create art.

Text by PRIYANKA CHAKRABARTI

German artist Michael Kunze has been creating paintings reinforced by Central European intellectualism. His art represents the inner world of human beings—a dark, complex maze with explosions of blinding light in which illusion is part of reality. Kunze's individualistic style of painting has gained him recognition in recent years as one of the most important German painters of our time. Earlier this year, he was a recipient of the prestigious Hans Platschek Prize in Karlsruhe, Germany. His works can be found in numerous public and private collections like the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, MMK museum in Frankfurt and the Goetz collection in Munich, among others. He is currently exhibiting his latest work, *The Last Tango In Thule*, at Galerie Isa, Mumbai.



What inspired you to create *The Last Tango In Thule*?

The title refers to Bernardo Bertolucci's movie, *Last Tango in Paris* from more than 40 years ago. The typically '70s-like existentialistic atmosphere and the borderline occurrence of two lonely and lost individuals in Paris, tells us a story that is strongly connected to a cultural context. I always call myself a shadow-line of modernism—a sort of complicated and historically confused development beside the official line of modernism that came to an end with the ideas of 'minimal,' 'pop' and 'concept' in the last decades of the 20th century. In the shadow-line, there is no strong idea of progress, but a mythological-based surrealistic and metaphysical narration—look at Giorgio de Chirico and

Lars von Trier who bring different and difficult historical sources together to a more or less trans-historic image of a time with a doubtful future. In the title of my exhibition, I changed Paris to Thule because it strengthens this aspect of a cultural historic twist. Thule since ancient times has been a name for a not-so-clear précised country in northern Europe (perhaps Iceland). Later, the name Thule got a legendary meaning, like Atlantis. The change from an originally and simply existing location far away to a mythological nowhere and everywhere is exactly the sort of shift I try to follow with painting, text and other media, referring to a strange relation between shadow and light as well as between modern and non-modern attitudes.

Can you describe your style of painting?

I try to juxtapose different manners of painting that belong to the mythological-apocalyptic-futuristic twilight zone. This style brings me closer to the most actual possibility of reacting to an end of an era. My style is a blend of new function and new understanding (not minimal, not pop). You can, in fact, find a reflection of this kind of approach in the works of Arnold Böcklin, G.

de Chirico, some early surrealists, Balthus, Bacon, A. Kiefer, M. Barney, W. Kentridge and others.

What media do you employ?

The main work is oil on canvas, quite classically with different techniques; it all depends on the concrete subject that is to be seen.

When did you know that you wanted to be an artist?

I come from a family of classical archaeologists. I feel, the first instance that got me closer to my calling was when I visited Greece as a child with my parents.

Who do you create art for?

Most people in the art world forget to think about this complicated matter! It is easy to give a tautological answer, like—"I do it for the art world," or "I do it for myself." All these answers are imprudent; they strengthen the decorative approaches, where now the majority of exhausted movements and styles of the last decades come to an end. Exactly here, we can point to the decline of an epoch that only brings out thinner reanimations of the

results of the recent past. Against this, I try to interest people with content-based imagination that helps leave behind this well-known understanding of the whole era of the last century. If this can happen, it could be possible to discover a parallel on-going history of modernism that went a much more labyrinthine and historically-queer way. An artist's work can redefine culture and history; so, an artist has to be conscious about what he/she creates. I work for people who are curious enough to move themselves to the strange contra-presence that is stranger than the present we believe we live in!

What is the art scene like in Berlin?

The art scene in Berlin is quite active. Many artists from all over Europe, and also other parts of the world, find it most practical to come live here and have a studio. Living costs are much more economical, and it has become a hub for art studios.

How has the response for your current exhibition been so far?

It has been a success, I would say. My works are now in so many homes in India, and I love this country. ■