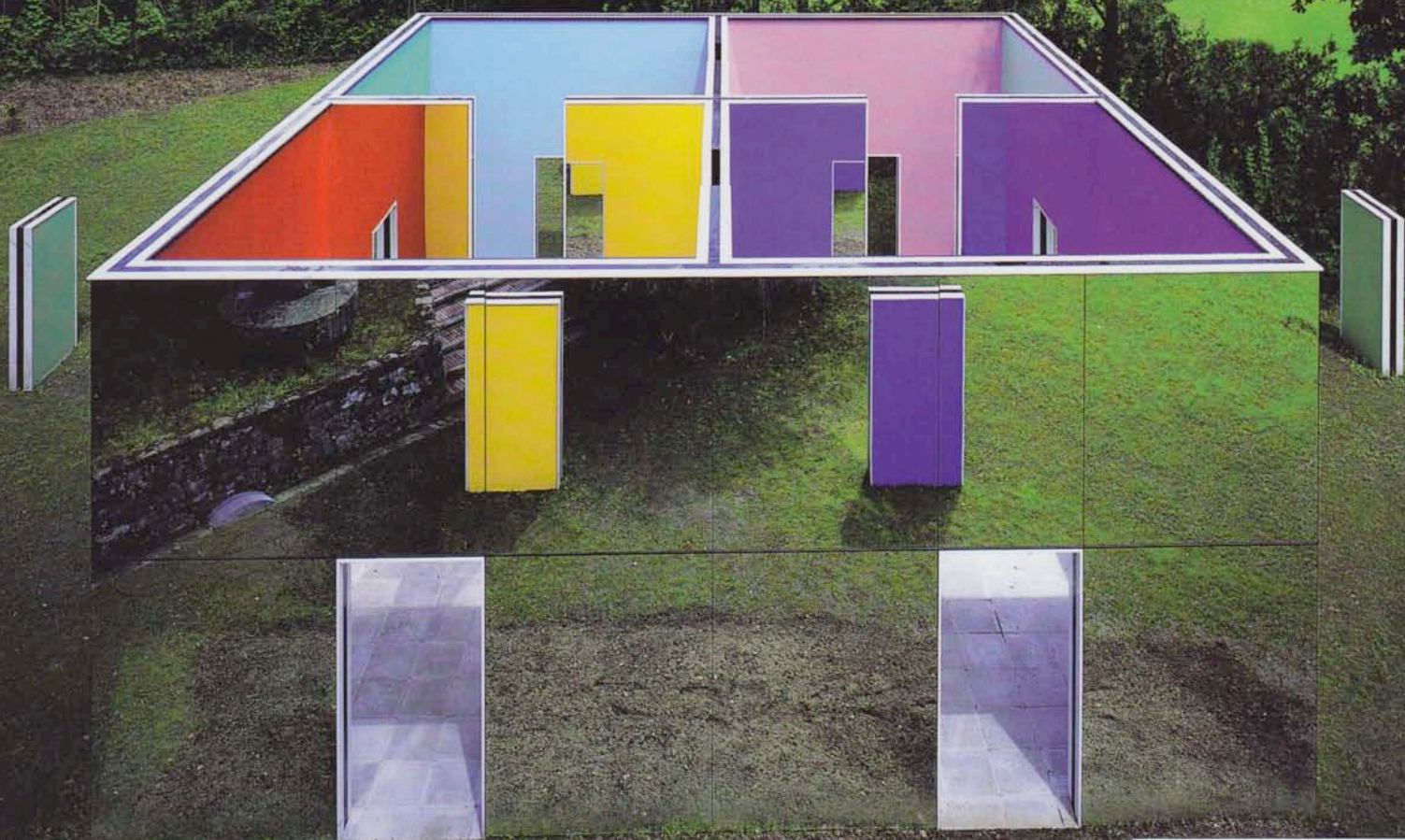


ARTnews

SUMMER 2009

The World's Top 200 Collectors



The Faking of the Russian Avant-Garde
Venice Biennale: Who Steals the Show
Why Leonardo Has a Theme Park



supports. The figures seemed to float free from the wall, casting intriguing shadows that heightened their impact. As much sculpted as painted, these 30 recent artworks boldly claimed their space.

Among the figure studies in the main gallery, the nearly life-size *Portrait de l'artiste* (2009) was notable for its varying depths of relief. The artist worked the paper, seemed even to have fought with it, to create an infinite tonality and a surface of almost metallic sheen. In the enigmatic *Couple* (2008), remarkable for its layering, two figures merge, but a tension develops as they appear to be at once clutching together and pushing apart.

In the side gallery, the rather flat yet richly textured *Vase de fleurs* (2007) seemed to be cut from metal rather than paper. Two powerful pieces from this year, *Tora* (Bull) and *Motard* (Motorcyclist), derive their strength as much from the deep blackness as from their roughly worked surfaces.

Downstairs were several large etchings. Even working in this delicate medium, Haas achieved a density that linked the coarsely rendered figure in *La Femme allongée* (Reclining Woman, 2008) to the sculpted paintings upstairs.

—Mary Krienke

Matthew Burrows

Alexia Goethe
London

Why do painters distort the human figure? Francis Bacon wanted to maximize the sense of wrenching inner pain. Matthew Burrows, who often makes large-scale images in oil on linen, usually quite thinly painted, seems to believe that as we gaze at the human form, some part of us is searching for the other ways that figure might be seen, the other lives that might be hidden. In the best works, he unites the sometimes wildly different ways the human form has been depicted—the sublime imagery of the sacred icon, the brutish figure of the Neanderthal.

Burrows's disturbing subjects seem never quite sure what evolutionary stage they have reached. They slip back toward something more primitive, starting to dissolve into primeval sludge, and at the same time they are on the verge of transcending the human, ready to rocket toward some spiritual realm. *Unholy*

Pragmatic (2008) captures this duality. A supine baby has the long interlocking toes of a monkey, but beneath a muddy brown halo his taut face looks at the viewer knowingly.



Matthew Burrows, *From Muck we Come*, 2008, oil on linen, 18" x 14". Alexia Goethe.

The way these figures are painted—the oozy and restless back-and-forth passages of the brush, all these garish flare-ups and drippy smears—contributes to what, in the end, amounts to a rich and heady atmosphere of uncertainty. Burrows's saints are fallen, but not defiant. Clownishly bathetic, limply grotesque, precariously present, they stare out at us through bulgy, joke-shop eyes like pathetic creatures pushed onto some Toulouse-Lautrec-lit vaudeville stage. We pity them and wonder how long such soft things can survive. —Michael Glover

Lajos Vajda

Hungarian National Gallery
Budapest

There was a surge of interest in Central European modernism after the fall of the Berlin wall, but the subject remains underexplored and promises many new discoveries. Among them is the art of Lajos Vajda (1908–41), seen here in a comprehensive exhibition that surveyed the development of his art, touching on many of the important movements of the 1920s and '30s.

Vajda was born into the family of a Jewish court clerk and spent his child-

hood in Serbia, where he was influenced by the culture of Orthodox Christianity. Although the young artist enjoyed a stay in Paris in the early '30s, Picasso proved to be less appealing than the Suprematist compositions of Malevich. The Soviet avant-garde cinema inspired Vajda to produce photomontages, and his Constructivist graphic compositions of the period bear the sometimes too-obvious imprint of Russian influence.

After moving back to Hungary, in 1934, Vajda entered his mature period with a return to more conventional painting and drawing, depicting ancient village houses, old Serbian churches, and Jewish cemeteries. His refined watercolors and light, virtuoso drawings call to mind a tradition remote from both Paris and Moscow—the art of fin-de-siècle Vienna. Vajda returned to abstracted imagery at the end of the '30s in large-scale drawings that were his greatest works. These surrealist compositions, often evoking cave paintings, tied back to another experience that fascinated him in Paris: his visits to the collection of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro.

Vajda died before the darkest days of the Hungarian Holocaust, but his widow, Julia, survived and managed to save his works, storing them under her bed for two



Lajos Vajda, *Csendélet rózsaszín asztalon* (Still-Life on a Pink Table), 1934, tempera on paper, 18" x 12½". Hungarian National Gallery.

decades. Vajda's art was not needed in Communist Hungary, but fortunately for us, it survived the century that inspired its creation. —Konstantin Akinsha