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Maler Pieter Schoolwerth
"Das Streben nach Authentizität gehört der Vergangenheit an"

Foto: courtesy of Jason Mandella
Der Künstler Pieter Schoolwerth

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Text
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Der Künstler Pieter Schoolwerth will das Medium der Malerei lebendig halten und kombiniert es mit digitalen Bildern. Hier spricht er über die Macht von Schönheitsfiltern, KI und zeitgenössische Identitätskrisen

Pieter Schoolwerth, der physische Großteil eines Gemäldes von Ihnen ist ziemlich schnell gemacht, aber der zeitlich intensivere Teil, der dann zur tatsächlichen Fertigstellung führt, ist weitaus mühsamer. Das lässt sich auf den Kontext zeitgenössischer Körpermodifikationen übertragen — damit meine ich nicht nur invasive Operationen, sondern auch minimalinvasive Eingriffe, wie Botox oder Filler. Und dann gibt es die digitalen Filter, die das Bild des Körpers verändern, ohne ihn physisch zu berühren. Kann man diese Veränderungen des Körpers als eine Art des Finetunings verstehen? Genau so wie Sie auch Ihre Arbeiten finetunen.

Ich habe viel über Schönheitsfilter im Rahmen von Körpermodifikation nachgedacht. Filter sind insofern minimalinvasiv, da der eigentliche Körper nicht berührt wird. Vor Jahrzehnten stand die Veränderung des eigenen Körpers für eine Art visueller Solidarität mit einer bestimmten Klasse—Tattoos und Piercings waren beispielsweise

Pieter Schoolwerth wurde 1970 im US-Bundesstaat Missouri geboren und lebt in New York. In seiner Malerei verarbeitet er verschiedene Einflüsse aus digitalen Bildkulturen. Seine Werke waren unter anderem im Whitney Museum in New York und im Kunstverein Hannover zu sehen. Er wird unter anderem von der Berliner Galerie Kraupy

eine Form des DIY-Protests gegen das Aussehen der Mainstream-Kultur. Traditionellere Schönheitsoperationen ermöglichen die Fantasie der vertikalen Mobilität. Man kann dadurch Teil einer Luxuskultur werden, da man praktisch zu einer konventionellen Attraktivität konvertiert. In meinem Projekt "Rigged" beschäftige ich mich mit der Spaltung, die unserem verflochtenen privaten und virtuellen Leben innewohnt. Unsere Körper befinden sich in einem quasi fiktiven Raum, der zwischen dem Filter und dem tatsächlichen Fleisch liegt. So was führt sicherlich auch häufig zu Angst und Verwirrung in Bezug auf die eigene Identität.

Wie?

Wenn ein Filter mich also traditionell schöner macht, könnte sich das auch darauf auswirken, wie mein Zielpublikum mich wahrnimmt. Man erscheint vielleicht charmanter, koketter oder offener für Geschäfte. Aber das ist man ja eigentlich gar nicht, oder? Dadurch entstehen neue Formen der Verzerrung des eigenen Selbstbewusstseins, da man sich so sehr daran gewöhnt, sich selbst mit einem Filter zu sehen, dass man vergisst, dass der eigene Avatar in Wirklichkeit ein Augment ist. Bei Identitätskrisen und der damit verbundenen Politik ging es früher eher darum, den Unterschied zwischen dem Selbst und der Welt zu verhandeln, aber jetzt geht es darum, sich mit der Kluft zwischen dem AR-Filter, dem Körper auf dem Bildschirm und dem echten Körper zu arrangieren.

Äußerst sich diese Identitätskrise auch in anderen Bereichen?

Diese Verschiebung von Identitätskonstruktionen gibt es auch in der Gaming- und Workout-Kultur. Der Wunsch danach, etwas zu erreichen, wird durch ein pawlowsches Belohnungssystem der körperlichen Selbstverbesserung angeheizt. Wenn man beispielsweise ein Open-World-Spiel auf Twitch spielt, wird einem das Gefühl vermittelt, dass man die Kontrolle hat. Visuelle Errungenschaften oder Modifikationen könnten bedeuten, dass man eine Stufe in einem "Fähigkeitenbaum" aufsteigt, wobei man einen Punkt erhält, um seinen Körper zu verbessern. Im Spiel hat man dann Titanbeine oder irgendwelche Augenimplantate, um durch Wände hindurchsehen zu können, was ähnlich ist wie Botox oder Poimplantate in der Realität. Man spielt ein "Ich werde besser", indem man seinen Körper verändert und auf die Reaktionen anonymer Kommentatoren reagiert.

Die Workout-Kultur auf eine so performative Weise auf die Spitze zu treiben, ist eindeutig etwas, das man nicht nur für sich selbst tut. Es ist fast so, als würde man zu einer Spielfigur, während man eine Aktivität im echten Leben ausübt.

Ja. Es ist, als ob der Wunsch, Sport zu treiben, aus der spielerischen Herausforderung entsteht, die Kluft zwischen dem Körper und seinem Fantasie-Look mit einem Filter zu überbrücken. Wenn man sein Workout online streamt und dabei einen Filter trägt, wird niemand jemals deinen tatsächlichen Körper sehen. Fiktion wird zur Wahrheit. Ich denke, dass wir in einer erweiterten Realität leben: Man eignet sich Wissen über die Leistungen anderer online an, um seine persönlichen Interaktionen mit ihnen zu beeinflussen. Deswegen ist es unmöglich, die eine oder andere Präsenz als "authentischer" zu bezeichnen. Das Streben nach Authentizität, das einst ein Motiv für die Identitätskonstruktion war, insbesondere für Millennials und die Generation X, gehört heute der Vergangenheit an.

Welche Bedeutung hat das Streaming dabei?

Streaming heutzutage ist eine Droge. Aber anstatt gegen andere Menschen zu spielen — wie es auch in einer vordigitalen Zeit oder in einem nicht-virtuellen Raum der Fall gewesen wäre — spielt man jetzt allein gegen sich selbst, aber unter Beobachtung. Die Kommentarfäden und die Anzahl der Follower erwecken den Eindruck von Engagement. Vielleicht ist es das, was letztlich das Bedürfnis nach Selbstverbesserung antreibt. Kürzlich traf ich auf einer Party einen Mann, der mir innerhalb weniger Minuten erzählte, dass seine 60.000 Follower allesamt gefälschte Bots seien, die ihm ein Freund zum Geburtstag geschenkt hatte. Dann meinte er, "Glauben Sie mir, ich bin gar nicht so ein Typ lol", was ich für eine ziemlich verblüffende zeitgenössische Aussage hielt.

Repräsentieren die Figuren in Ihren Arbeiten durch ihr Aussehens bestimmte Lebensstile oder Identitäten?

Alle Figuren der "Rigged"-Gemälde sind digitale Assets, die ich online über Websites wie Turbosquid und Sketchfab kaufe. Die Websites funktionieren ähnlich wie Itunes oder Bandcamp für Musiker. Es handelt sich um eine faszinierende, völlig unregulierte Wirtschaft, in der man jedes beliebige Objekt verkaufen und den Preis festlegen kann. Ohne, dass man eine Ahnung von der Qualität oder der Nutzbarkeit des gekauften Objekts hat. Ich beginne damit, die Modelle in einer CGI-Animationssoftware zusammenzusetzen und baue dann dieses flache Bild zu einem tatsächlichen 3D-Reliefmodell aus Schaumstoff aus. Dieser Prototyp der Komposition dient dazu, den Eindruck eines simulierten Raums zu erzeugen, da alle Lichter, Farben und Schatten mit der Software erzeugt werden. Ich betrachte diese virtuelle Reliefskulptur als kompositorische Vorlage, die Infrastruktur des Gemäldes. Dann drucke ich die Datei

kompositorische Vorlage, die Infrastruktur des Gemäldes. Dann drucke ich die Datei auf Leinwand aus. Im letzten Schritt trage ich eine Farbschicht auf das gedruckte Bild auf. Die malerischen Markierungen in meinen Arbeiten sind eine Filterschicht zur Verbesserung der Visualität. So als ob man bei einem Bild auf dem Handy Kontrast und Sättigung hinzufügt.

Wie kamen Sie zu dieser Praxis?

Warum ich mich für CGI, also computergenerierte Bilder, interessiere, ist, weil ich oft denke, dass die Malerei, wenn sie nicht weiterhin die Welt reflektiert, ihre Fähigkeit verliert, kritisch zu sein. Sie würde dann darauf zusteuern, einfach nur eine weitere veraltete handwerkliche, analoge Fetischindustrie zu werden, die auf Nostalgie basiert. Das ist eine Form von Eskapismus, die durch die Sehnsucht nach "einfacheren Zeiten" entsteht. Man lebt die Fantasie des direkten Kontakts mit der Welt durch Handwerk aus. Und das ist auch die Formel, die die Luxusindustrie heute verwendet.

Sie verwenden auch 3D-Modelle von prominenten Persönlichkeiten wie Elon Musk oder Jeff Bezos. Wie wichtig ist die Celebrity-Kultur für Ihre Arbeiten? Solche Persönlichkeiten stehen ja an der Spitze nicht nur der Entwicklungen in der Schönheitsindustrie, sondern auch der Technologie.

Für mich sind sie nicht besonders wichtig, und ich glaube auch nicht, dass Prominente für die Welt so wichtig sind, wie sie es einmal waren. Die sozialen Medien haben die ehemals subkulturellen Welten der Musik, der Mode und des Filmemachens als primäre Inspirationsquelle abgelöst. Was mich bei Mode interessiert ist, dass sie versucht Kleidung für den physischen Körper herzustellen. Aber welche Bedeutung hat das noch, wenn der tatsächliche Körper heute weitgehend irrelevant und verborgen ist

Ich denke, das ist genau der Grund, warum es so viele nicht-tragbare Kleidungsstücke gibt, die im Trend sind, wie Ultra-Mini-Röcke oder Gürtel-Röcke. Sicherlich kann man argumentieren, dass das Kleidungsstück in diesem Fall eher ein Art von Kunstwerk ist als etwas, das dazu bestimmt ist, benutzt zu werden. Aber das wäre dann wohl Haute Couture und nicht Ready To Wear.

Heutzutage lernt man Menschen in der Regel online kennen. Man sieht sich ihr Profil an und macht sich ein Bild von ihnen und ihren Interessen, ohne dass man ihren Körper oder ihre Kleidung jemals persönlich zu Gesicht bekommt. Ich bin sicher, dass es immer noch Modemarken gibt, bei denen es um die Herstellung von Kleidungsstücken geht, aber es scheint, dass Marken viel weniger unterscheidbar sind als früher. Das wird durch die Tatsache unterstützt, dass Logos so viel bekannter sind als die Kleidung. Zum ersten Mal fiel mir das vor etwa zehn Jahren auf. Ich habe die Ballkinder bei den US Open beobachtet. Alle trugen Ralph-Lauren-Polo-Shirts mit einem riesigen Polo-Logo, das etwa 25 mal so groß war wie üblich. Ich nahm an, dass dies eine Design-Entscheidung war, um die Kinder zu bewegten Werbeträgern für die Marke zu machen. Das Markenlogo überkompensiert die Tatsache, dass die Kleidung nicht so wichtig ist.

Denken Sie, dass die Gamifizierung des alltäglichen Lebens und von Äußerlichkeiten die Welt widerspiegelt, in der wir leben, die ja auch ziemlich absurd ist?

Ich denke, dass "das Groteske" ein Gefühl der Absurdität und Apokalypse vermitteln kann. Und zufälligerweise sehen auch fast alle Bilder, die mit Hilfe von KI erstellt wurden, so absurd aus. Diese Homogenität der Bilder repräsentiert in gewisser Weise das Aussehen der "dunklen Seite des Webs" — ein für immer verborgener Schattenraum voller verstümmelter Masken, hinter denen man sich verstecken kann. So viele KI-Bilder sehen aus wie aufblasbare Halloweenkostüme, die einen daran erinnern, dass man keine Ahnung hat, wer sich im Inneren oder auf der anderen Seite des Gesprächs befindet, mit dem man chattet. Man kennt weder das Aussehen noch das Geschlecht, es ist einfach nur ein knorriger, komischer Blob mit zehn Augen und verzerrten, entstellten Armen und Beinen. Vielleicht ist das wirklich die Mode von heute?

Claire Koron Elat

"Painter Pieter Schoolwerth:
'The pursuit of authenticity is a thing of the past'"
Claire Koron Elat
original translation

The majority of a painting of yours is made rather quickly, but the bigger part, leading to actually finishing it, is more tedious. Applying this to the context of contemporary body augmentations through not just invasive surgeries but also minimally invasive surgeries, including Botox or fillers, you can perceive these alterations of the body as a similar way of finetuning—whether it is an image or the body.

I've been thinking about beauty filters within the evolution of body modification, it's minimally invasive in the sense that the actual physical body is never touched. Decades ago altering your physical body enabled visual solidarity with a particular class — tattoos and piercings for example were a form of DIY protest against the look of "mainstream" corporate culture, and more traditional plastic surgeries enabled the fantasy of vertical mobility into luxury culture through performing conventional attractiveness and the unspoken awareness of its financial cost — but both cases came with the assumption you inhabited the body you changed. With the split inherent in our intertwined private and virtual lives today, which I've been attempting to depict in my Rigged project, a fictional space opens up inside the body between the look of the filter and the actual flesh, which can result in the development of anxiety and confusion around identity, such as BDD (Body Dysmorphic Disorder) in a way that is quite different from the identity-based dysphorias of pre-digital eras. If your filter makes you more traditionally beautiful that could affect how your target audience receives you — you may appear more charming, flirtatious, or open to business. But that's actually not who you are, or is it? New forms of distortion of your own sense of self are born when you become so accustomed to seeing yourself in a filter and forget that your avatar is in fact augmented — like when you finally meet someone you've only seen on Zoom or other socials and they're appear to be another person visually. Crises of identity and its according politics used to involve negotiating the difference between the self and the world, but now it is becoming more like coming to terms with the chasm between the AR filter, of body on screen, and the dormant corpus behind the mask. The AR modification of one's performed image is ubiquitous as it doesn't require resources, doctors or biological sacrifice just the modest, quick download of an app.

It's also interesting to consider how this shift in identity construction takes place through both gaming and workout culture, particularly now that both involve streaming your private solitary performance. and The desire to achieve in these two worlds is fueled by a Pavlovian reward system of corporeal self-improvement. If you're playing an open world game on Twitch, for example, you're made to feel like you're in control and your character has agency when in fact all the you make are entirely foreclosed, which begs the question of do you have any free will? Imagining you do fuels the drive to do better. Visual achievement might entail moving up a level in an ability tree, wherein you receive a point to enhance your body - so you gain titanium legs or ocular implants to see through walls, which is similar to botox or butt implants irl. You perform "I'm getting better" through the body's alteration to the reactions of anonymous commenters competing against you and learning from your mistakes, and envying your progress. Similarly in America it's common to stream your workout and effort at performing the labor of striving for fitness, which projects an image of vulnerability - as you'd apparently like to be more beautiful and physically attractive - while eroticizing your effort alone on the treadmill or weight bench.

I think the idea working out and then taking working out to an extreme in a performative way, is clearly not something you just do for yourself. It's almost like you become a gaming character while doing an activity in real life.

Yes, it's as if the desire to exercise comes out of gamifying the challenge of bridging the gap between the body and the its fantasy look with a filter, but in fact many people are already wearing filters when they work out, so only they know about this space, the truth behind the fiction...though if no one ever sees your

work out, so only they know about this space, the truth behind the fiction...though if no one ever sees your actual body the fiction becomes the truth. The actual and the virtual are inseparable now and I believe we are living in Augmented Reality: you bring your knowledge of other's performances online to influence your in-person interactions with them, in order to develop an idea of their subjectivity, and it's impossible to designate either presence as more "authentic." The drive for authenticity, which was once a motivator in the construction of identity, particularly for millennials and Gen X, is now a thing of the past.

I thought a lot about these ideas while being forced to live in simulation during Covid. For my Shifted Sims project, I took screenshots from forums and chatrooms, where the players were helping each other with their avatars, which were similar to the comment threads that happen under workout and gaming videos. All of the imagery in this series of paintings were derived from appropriated avatars posted by gamers living in simulation, and I was interested in the question of how can I depict a body controlled by someone else? Players offer advice in the forums similar to the stream of feedback on Twitch or TikTok which creates an adrenaline rush to encourage the workout or the gamer to go further. Streaming becomes a drug, but instead of playing against other people (as again would have occurred in a pre-digital time or non-virtual space) now you're alone playing against yourself under surveillance. The comment threads and follower counts create the impression of engagement or attention. Maybe that's what ultimately drives this need for self-improvement in the gamification of you against your avatar, though those may be bots. I recently met a guy at a party who within just a few minutes told me his 60K followers were all fake bots bought for him as a prank by a friend for his birthday, and "Beloeve me, I'm not that guy at all, (lol)" which was I found to be quite an quite an intriquing contemporary smokescreen of an introduction.

Do the characters in your paintings represent certain lifestyles or identities based on their physical appearance?

All of the content in the Rigged paintings are digital assets I purchase online through websites like Turbosquid and Sketchfab which sell 3D models made by artists from around the world, not unlike Itunes or Bandcamp functions for musicians. This is a fascinating, entirely unregulated economy in which you can sell any asset you like and set the price, and you have no idea about the quality or usability of you'll get when you buy. I begin assembling the models together in CGI animation software which I render, and then build out this flat image into an actual 3D relief model in foamcore. This prototype of the composition functions to create the impression of simulated space (as all the lights, colors and shadows are made with the software). I think of this virtual relief sculpture as a compositional template, the infrastructure of the painting, and I embed imagery from the painting into it. I delete portions of the rendering to allow the monochrome relief model to show through, and print the file out on canvas. The last step involves applying a layer of paint on top of the printed image.

Over the past decade I've been developing this multimedia process in an attempt to reflect back the once removed nature of living our lives today. The substance of so many daily activities has been abstracted: you buy things without currency through credit, have relationships without bodies on websites, and violence without blood in video games. Following this we rarely touch anything directly anymore, so I began thinking why is painting still involved in the direct application of material to a support, and how can I make paintings that reflect this bodily detachment one feels in streamed gaming or working out? 95% of images we see today are made in or with the aid of CGI so it seems like an appropriate form through which to paint indirectly by constructing a 3D image in CGI, without any traditional painting, and then put the stuff of paint back into the picture as a last stage - which functions to mark my presence, though the painting is already fully constituted without it. The painterly marks are a filtering layer of enhancement, like adding contrast and saturation to an image on your phone after you capture a picture to "make it pop," as the expression goes.

The gestural brushstrokes I apply to the printed support fall into two stylistic registers: the fragments of the exposed relief model I paint with thick almost machinic marks I think of as enacting the look of

automation. These exist in contrast to the more traditional paint handing in the heads which harken back to mid-century expressionism, and function as masks. Apart from adding texture and gestural movement back into an image that emerged from a screen the heads function like oversized AR beauty filters, which often take an inverse turn towards the grotesque, an opaque oil barrier over the face functioning to conceal the actual body like a profile icon, rather than to reveal it.

Another reason I'm interested utilizing CGI is I often think that if painting doesn't continue to reflect back the world it will lose its capacity to be critical, and in the process could be headed towards becoming simply another outmoded artisanal analog fetish industry grounded in nostalgia - the escapism that occurs through longing for "simpler times" through performing the fantasy of direct contact with the world through craft, which is the manufactured formula driving most luxury industries today. Since getting involved with CGI a few years ago I've come to have immense respect for artists working in this rich and complex medium. I love the fact that anyone can download the tools for free and you don't need an costly MFA degree and the student debt that follows, studio rent, or any supplies and you can make something infinitely more contemporary than most any traditional painting, and get closer at what it feels like to be alive now.

Using such filters, not just on yourself, but also on the figures of your paintings is perhaps a form of disassociation. You're distancing yourself from your true corporeality. But then the question is what your true corporeality is. You referenced historic painting earlier, and even back then painters who depicted human forms did place some kind of filter on the depicted humans, as the finished image obviously does not an accurate representation of the "real" person.

Painting itself is a filter, of course. You're making a representation, which is by its nature a form of mediation. We only can know our personality and what we look like through other people and images. Before the technological era of hyper-abstraction and the body though (whenever you decide that begins, whether it's the birth of the printing press, photography, or the web and digital imagery) there wasn't any distribution of the image of the body. You developed a sense of someone else's presence through spending time with them in person. Despite this there was still a sense that you could perform a different identity in social scenarios, and your personality could be multifaceted or even schizophrenic, as you mention, in that you could change the reception of yourself through altering your voice, body language, outfits etc. Dissociation could be an escape, not unlike that provided by the web and tech today. But the liberation that's achieved through technologies now is different, because there's actually a once removal where you're not inhabiting this body in person during the exchange. I've long believed in Albert Mehrabian's 7-38-55% theory in which he postulated that only 7% of communication occurs through words, 38% through the tone of voice, and 55% through body language. This 93% missing is the new space that the internet has opened up, which has made it all the more complicated to construct one's identity and come to know and connect to other people.

You mentioned that you purchased 3D models of celebrity characters as well. How important is celebrity culture for you? Celebrities are at the forefront of not just developments in the beauty industry, but also in technology, think about Elon Musk or Jeff Bezos, for example.

They're not particularly important to me, and I don't think celebrities are important to the world as they once were, people are much too self-involved now to look to other's as models, no pun intended. Social media has replaced the formerly subcultural worlds of music, fashion, and filmmaking as the primary inspiration that young people use to construct who they are through the gamification of everyday life. I mentioned to you that one of the sites I buy content on was having a sale on celebrities so I bought a few, which was amusing. I've come to compose my paintings quite organically through the spontaneous process of online shopping – as in "if you like this you might also like…" that the algorithm creates. I often buy a few hundred assets in a day and begin to imagine them assembled together quite organically while I shop for

content.

I was thinking recently about fashion in particular, if in some sense fashion involves making clothes for the physical body, what importance does it have if the actual body is largely irrelevant and concealed today?

I think that's exactly the reason why there are so many unwearable clothes that are trending, such as ultra-miniskirts or belt skirts. You can surely argue that, in this case, the garment is an artwork rather than something that is intended to be used, but I guess that would be haute couture then—and not RTW. It probably has to do with the fact that fashion is about fashion (and garments) not actually about human bodies. But this is also somewhat changing a bit—thinking of Gorpcore, for example.

You generally meet people online now, immediately check out their profile and develop a sense of them and their interests without ever seeing their physical body or clothing in person. I'm sure there are still fashion brands that are about crafting garments but it seems brands are much less distinguishable than they used to be, which is supported by the fact that the logo is so much better known than the clothing. I remember first noticing this about ten years ago while watching the ball kids at the US Open – who each wore Ralph Lauren Polo shirts with an enormous Polo logo about 25 times the usual size. I assumed it was a design decision to make the kids into moving ads for the brand for fans watching on tv, but what it also suggested was that the brand logo was overcompensating for the fact that clothing isn't as important, the logo was so big you almost couldn't see the design of the shirt. Claire, I know you're involved in the fashion world, and I'd be curious to hear your thoughts on this question?

Don't you think that just living life has always been a game, or has this been accelerated in the past years?

Of course, I suppose it's always been a game, though that outlook might be a bit cynical. But now it's literally a game when you have a numerical set of values attached to your profile, which is something that didn't exist at to a certain point – it's interesting that Instagram just made it possible to buy a blue checkmark, so now the image of popularity and achievement will simply be a symmetrical mirror of monetary privilege. Maybe at one time you had a number attached to your person allowing insight into your bank account, address or your job, but that information was private. When these numbers become public, it's no different than a video game.

Does the gamification of life and physical appearances reflect the world we live in – which is apocalyptic and absurd?

I mentioned the grotesque earlier, which can often signify a feeling of apocalypse – this is also coincidentally the look of nearly all images made using text to image AI prompt generators, which in time will become an interesting new medium. It's particularly relevant now in the sense that creating art through deep learning removes the hand, in favor of an appropriately indirect form of expression and erasure of the authentic gesture. There are seemingly hundreds of prompt generators now like Stable Diffusion, Midjourney, or Dall-e, and it's intriguing to see that every image which emerges, regardless of who generated it, looks formally identical, as if they were all made by one artist, and the look of this style is as if it was molded out of vinyl with a mangled face a la Bacon or Soutine on the set of Pee Wee's Playhouse in the 1980's. I think this homogeneity represents, then, in a way, the look of the dark side of the web – a forever hidden shadow space of mangled masks to hide behind. So many AI images look like inflatable Halloween costume that remind you that you have no idea of who's inside, or on the other side of this conversation your chatting with. You don't know their appearance, gender, or race – they're just a gnarly comedic blob with 10 eyes and distorted, warped arms and legs – maybe this truly is fashion today?

When you're talking about grotesqueries or and extremes, you can also apply it to painting. Maybe abstraction, to an extent, is taking figuration to an extreme.

In many of my recent paintings the body of the figures are ripping apart, or trying to keep their bodies together, depending on how you see it. In 3D modeling terms the texture maps are peeling off the mesh which hides the rig. I became interested in taking many of the models apart or swapping the textures of one model for another, which, for example, allows two figures to trade bodies, or a human to exchange their body with an animal or inanimate object. I see this identity switching and deforming as again articulating the space between the private life of the body and its accordant virtual image. In several paintings I switched the texture maps of conventionally male and female passing bodies which results in a figuratively non-binary or trans body.

Why do you think that people invented AIs? Is there maybe some kind of innate urge that humans have that they don't want any physical representation anymore, which is perhaps comparable to when you had an art historical development towards abstraction. If you think about the Black Square, for example, it obviously does represent something, but it's a representation of an absence of something, just like in AI there is an absence of physical representation while it simultaneously tries to represent the physical.

I think when it comes to art, it could be a worthwhile tool in pursuing the fantasy of liberation from subjectivity, escaping the fleshly prison of the physical body and the according politics of stereotyping that follow from the pitfalls of identity categorization attached to it. A conversation about AI in the context of absence, or evacuation of the author in art, could indeed be hugely interesting — in my project Your Vacuum Sucks (2014-15) I attempted to construct models of the body as being present through absence, and at the time I took invisibility to be the most contemporary form of being. This was a feeling I experienced frequently in being with friends around the arrival of social media and smartphones.

One of my fantasies since I was young has always been to inhabit another being's body, either human or otherwise. I have always imagined how much more empathetic and supportive we might be towards each other if we could know exactly how another human or animal sees us and what they are thinking in the process. I suppose that's a long way off but it's a utopian vision worth pursuing.