

Lyles & King

Michael Bauer

Metacaves 1973

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This Text Is About Michael Bauer's Paintings

By Alastair MacKinven, 28/10/20, North London

Some years ago I was living in Greenwich, South London. It is similar to every square inch of this island in that it is contaminated with a thick layer of history; Greenwich's legacy is naval. The Royal Observatory sits on top of a hill in Greenwich Park where engraved plaques draw attention to Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), "This Is Where Time Begins" reads an inscription next to a bronze line inlaid in the ground at 0° longitude.

At some point an artist received a grant to install a permanent public artwork at this site: a laser housed in a turret in the observatory draws the zero point of time through the night sky. On my nightly walks I would look up and see the green laser light, reminding me of GMT, mapping my location, causing my mind to imagine the flotillas that set sail from this island knowing their location by adopting standardised time. Without fail each night seeing it anew I would curse and rage about this public artwork! My over-reaction is funny to me now but at the time seeing that laser felt like being woken by a cruel prison warden.

I no longer remember the date but it was approaching mid-summer when I enacted my petty revenge on this site. I waited till the sun disappeared and climbed the wall that encircled Greenwich Park. I made my way to the base of the observatory, unpacked my supplies: sections of bamboo poles, duct tape, and a mirror. I fitted the bamboo poles together, taped the mirror to the top and used this precarious tool to divert the path of the laser. For five seconds I shifted time, removed a reference point, freeing us from the clock's organisational tyranny before I dropped everything and sprinted from security.

Replying to an art worker's polite question, "Did you have a nice weekend?" I recount my adventure of moving time to which they inquired if I knew of Joseph Conrad's book *The Secret Agent*. "Uh, no" I replied but thought, "I moved fucking time this weekend, why do you want to tell me about some arsehole who wrote a book, what did you do this weekend, mate!? Read!" They went on to tell me the novel immortalised the real life events leading up to the death of Martial Bourdin, an anarchist who in 1894 accidentally blew himself up when the bomb he was carrying prematurely exploded before he reached his target, Greenwich Observatory. Dutifully I bought the book, read 10 pages before throwing it in the rubbish bin feeling overrun with self-loathing, what was I doing? Research? Intellectualising an impulse? Reverse engineering a historical context? Rationalising my rancour against time and reference points? Planning to write a press release? I did know that reading the novel would neuter my irrational pathetic gesture and doing the research would have been akin to setting sail with my watch calibrated to GMT whereas my desire was more like dropping a tab of acid, stealing a motorboat with the intention of catching up with the Moon.

But what of the lone sailor in the middle of the Atlantic during those five seconds that I, in South London removed their connection to their relationary understanding of place*, of their place. Adrift with no objects to locate their self in relationship to, the seascape changing constantly, not one fixed point, no ground beneath their feet from which to start mapping outwards. In these specific conditions, these

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glorious conditions, it is possible to experience a special feeling, a horror vacui**. A deterritorialisation that only leads inward.

The horror...

The sound of a toilet flushes, it comes from behind you, your index fingers are pulling your bottom eyelids gently down as you see yourself looking back from the mirror staring into the black holes of your pupils the size of plates. This is not the middle of the Atlantic... it is a dirty basement loo, Club Hotsy Totsy? Braunschweig? Yes, Hotsy Totsy, Bruanschweig.

You see the horror vacui of the sailor are kicks for some. They pay good money for those kicks! To stand silent with yer mouth agog, spittle gathering between bottom lip and teeth, pooling, the meniscus breaks, a long string forms, gravity pulls it down, plip, the dribble hits the gallery's polished concrete floor. Everything under heaven is in utter chaos, the situation is excellent***. Plip, plip.

* Yeah I know.

** I realise that.

*** Yes, in bad taste.

Michael Bauer (b. 1973, Erkelenz, Germany) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He studied at the Hochschule fur Bildende Kunst in Braunschweig. Notable exhibitions include *Caves and Gardens*, Nino Mer Gallery, Los Angeles (2020); *30th Anniversary Exhibition: Attics of My Life*, Jack Hanley Gallery (2017); *Men in Pain (Pool Party)*, Norma Mangione (2016); *Michael Bauer: Butter Bebop (Transatlantic Creme Dreams)*, Alison Jacques Gallery, London (2015); *Creme Wars – SnooPie*, Lisa Cooley Gallery, New York (2014); *K-Hole (Frogs)*, Villa Merkel, Esslingen am Neckar (2011); Marquis Dance Hall, Istanbul (2010); Anthem, Kunsthau Baselland, Basel (2009); and Kunstverein Bonn, Bonn (2007). Bauer is the subject of a substantial JRP Ringier monograph published in 2008, entitled *Borwasser*, with a lead essay by Jennifer Higgin and an interview with Stefanie Popp. Bauer's work is part of the Saatchi Collection, London and the Zabudowicz Collection, London.