

**LIE STILL  
MY BEATING HEART  
ANSEL KRUT: PAINTINGS**  
domoBaal

19 June - 24 July

A NUMBER OF ANSEL KRUT'S MOST faithful collectors have apparently been up in arms at the new direction showcased by these paintings. And no wonder. Some years ago, Krut perfected a unique style of melancholic absurdism – Goya meets Tim Burton in Edward

Gorey's backyard – in which weird, stranded creatures pecked viciously at each other upon a parched, brown, lightning-lit earth. His subjects may have been ugly, but Krut's paintings weren't: richly textured and bedizened with luminous Old-Masterly glazes, they suggested that, no matter how bleak his worldview, Krut gained some succour from expressing it. That carries over into the new work. Gone, though, is much of the nocturnal delicacy of tone, replaced by gushing, high-temperature colour and a screaming immediacy. Krut's typically descriptive titles record the shift. From 2000: *Parrot Exorcism*; from 2004: *Turd Eaters on a Flatcar*.

There are, in fact, several traditions being kept alive here. Transparently present are the cavorting ghosts of Gilray and Guston in particular and, more generally – brought to a zenith by Existentialist literature – the unsparing gaze at humanity's frailties, vouchsafed by creative distortion. *Stripey Mouth* (2004) is typical. Approximating what you might get if you crossed a man, a fly, a whale, and Mickey Mouse, this figure has a proportionally vast mouth filled with multi-coloured, baleen-like stripes, two sagging, finger-like nipples, a left arm that looks bolted on, and a single circular black ear. Yet what

confirms that our unlucky friend is trapped in some Kafkaesque, category-confusing hell are its all-too-human eyes, furious black pinpricks in a white dome of a head. Colourful stripes operate like an auguring of redemption. As *Huge Self-Digesting Fly* (2004) sucks fluid through a tube that leads from its anus, a solar maelstrom of coloured bands flashes outward from its skinny thorax. Again the eyes – these ones have fake eyelashes, and the creature stares with an awful coquettishness

at the viewer, as if trying to seduce its way out of trouble. It's a trick repeated in *Green Nose*, *Telekinesis*, and the alleged self-portrait, *308 in Dog Years* (all 2004).

The latter specimen, with its bulbous mouth, burnt nose and bald head, is no beauty. Still, it appears to wear a hat of which Carmen Miranda would be proud, from which erupts a cavalcade of bright ellipses. Look again, though, and one can't help thinking that perhaps this actually represents Krut's head in the process of being dynamited, wild colours and ideas flowing out. As such, it's tempting to see his works not only as images of humanity at its most base – that is, making increasingly obvious attempts to appear attractive as time marches on and life appears ever more pointless (Krut is approaching 50) – but also as dialectical and contrary celebrations of imaginative potency. Unwrap the sour iconographic coverings of these paintings and behold the paint – which is often gorgeous, implicitly affirmative, and revels in deft bleeds, reversals of style and the subtle offsetting of pastel shades against vigorous hues – and Krut looks less like a polemicist and more like a maker of cocktails of expertly mixed emotions or, more accurately, painterly Gordian knots. Attempting to unpick them is a pleasure, surrendering to their evident superiority even more so. *RF*

2. Ansel Krut, *308 In Dog Years*, 2004, oil on canvas, 60.5 x 76 cm. Courtesy domoBaal, London. © Ansel Krut, 2004

