

Thomas Erben Gallery

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Jutta Koether at Thomas Erben

Installing a liquid-looking curtain of shining silver and gold Mylar ribbons at the entrance, Jutta Koether reconfigured Thomas Erben's gallery as an off-hours discothèque, walls painted a suitably Warhol-factory silver and a large fitness ball of the same hue placed more or less at the

there) and a teacher of painting at Cooper Union and SVA. Koether is also, by her own account, among the many admirers of Martin Kippenberger.

Electric orbs recalling the glowing eyes of the Replicants in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* look out from five of Koether's small acrylic-on-canvas portraits, all dated 2000. No more than 24

inches on a side, these paintings from the artist's "Hysterics" series have a funky urgency compounded by their serial repetition, as though reiteration alone were enough to fire or slake the needs signaled by their titles. Flaring lines of paint emanate from *I Need Your Eyes* like mascara streaked by the tears of Tammy Faye Bakker, scary and compelling. The perhaps blinded eyes



View of Jutta Koether's exhibition, including, on wall (left), *Das Wunder*, 1990, oil on canvas, 78 1/2 by 86 1/2 inches; at Thomas Erben.

gallery's center. (Strobe lights played off its surface during the opening event.) A swath of gold lamé fabric ornamented a highly reflective sheet of silver Mylar towards the rear. By way of introduction, the suitably festive *Das Wunder* (1990), more than 6 by 7 feet, is a sunny, balloon-red holiday of an oil painting. An epiphanic text in outlined block letters ranging across the painting's surface reads "Das Wunder ist wie immer" (wonder is as always), according to the artist a passage from a work by Thomas Wolfe. Replete with painted tangles of streamers if not confetti, the work served to trumpet a 15-year span of paintings by this much-lionized German-born New Yorker. Equally at home in a variety of disciplines including performance art, music, and rock and art criticism, she is a repeat alumna of Pat Hearn Gallery (six exhibitions

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of the agitated, convulsive *Event Mental*, first laid down in a near-fluorescent orange paint, have been obliterated with a few strokes of white, as though by that tactic Koether could shut down the furnace that seems to burn within. The masklike visage of *Living Desire (Disarmed)* is adorned with long polychrome tresses and is struck through with an insistent negation, a painted green "X" (which recurs in a portrait of Neil Young from the related "Male Hysterics" series of 2002, not included here).

The phrase *trompe l'âme* (mislead the heart) weaves through the centrally placed, brilliant yellow sphere of the roughly 6-by-4-foot oil *Coronal Holes and the Sunny Eyes of Women* (1999). A counterpoint to *Das Wunder*, it is abstractly overpainted with arabesques of yellow and white and ornamented with a garland of the eyes that figure in its title. Two 5-foot-tall monochromes in vibrant red, *Portrait Robert Johnson* and *Some Orphic Voices* (both 1990), pay homage to the legendary bluesman (1911-1938). The former consists of a grid of painted text that reads in columns: "100% Obsessed, 100% Painted, 100% Electric, 100% Spiritual" and so on, qualities Koether attributes to Johnson, and finds necessary to the development of her own work as well. —Edward Leffingwell

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