

DIETMAR BUSSE



Bird Troubadour, 2022

FIERMAN

DIETMAR BUSSE (b. 1966, Stolzenau, Germany) is a German born photographer and artist living and working in New York. Busse taught himself photography in his twenties, and was a successful fashion photographer in New York in the 1990's and early 2000's. He has since focused exclusively on his artistic practice in which he prints his own gelatin silver prints and alters them with darkroom processes and acrylic photographic inks.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2023** Garten, solo show, FIERMAN
Labor of Love, group show, Rachel Uffner Gallery
- 2020** Today I wanted to die again, solo show, FIERMAN
- 2018** A Northern land where young men go to sing with the trees, solo show, FIERMAN
- 2017** Power mask, group show / Wereld Museum, Rotterdam
Heartbreak Hotel, group show / Invisible-Export, NYC
- 2016** Die zweite Haut,' group show/Museum Haus Sinclair, Bad Homburg, Germany
Two Years, group show / New Art Projects, London
- 2015** Interface, group show / The Leslie Lohman Museum, NYC
- 2010** The visitors, Dietmar Busse / Galeria Arana Poveda, Madrid
- 2006** New work, Dietmar Busse and Roger Ricco / Sara Techia NYC
- 2004** Hybrid, Dietmar Busse and Doris Mitch / Clampart, NYC



@fiermangallery | Instagram

AWARDS

1996 American Photo, Portrait of the year

BOOKS

2003 Dietmar Busse, Flower album, Powerhouse

ARTFORUM

"Darren Jones on Dietmar Busse"

Darren Jones, March 2021

At Fierman, the photo-based paintings in Dietmar Busse's solo exhibition "Today I wanted to die again" evoked the dolorous colors and darksome moods of Romantic-era imagery by artists such as William Blake or Eugène Delacroix. Busse portrays the rural, melancholy environs of his West German upbringing as settings rife with murderous, sinister events. Of the five large pieces in the show (all works 2020) presented in this tiny space, two depicted gory battles between wild, cartoonish combatants, while the other three featured portraits of more mythical-looking entities.

Busse creates his work by combining photographic-development techniques with hand-drawn imagery. He exposes gelatin silver paper to light—without negatives—and then paints with developer, which turns his surface black. Over time the untouched sections of paper respond to the light and become a faded number. Once he has fixed the image and washed and dried the paper (he must repeat this process if he applies bleach to whiten certain areas, as he did in these pieces), he then paints and draws with photographic dyes and inks. The overall effect is a glassy, pristine luminosity—as if each picture were a vividly remembered nightmare.

Accidents in Paradise #10 details an epic melee in a meadow ringed with trees and full of characters both supernatural and earthly. In this painting are panicked cows, goblins hovering over mass carnage, a two-headed equine creature, and a pair of bloodied toothy swine fucking maniacally. The humans are equally crazed:

A guy in cowboy garb shoots a naked man while stabbing him with a dagger; a lunatic gouges out his foe's heart; and a crouching, bleeding woman holds up a cross, desperate for salvation. Elsewhere, another fellow with a livid-red hard-on mirrors a nearby horse that's similarly (and grotesquely) tumescent. Almost every face is pitch-black and shrieking, with bared teeth and terror-stricken eyes. In the background, a dainty gingerbread-like house sits on the crest of a hill. Its roof tiles are red and pink, the garden has neat rows of flowers, and clothes are drying on a washing line. But this illustration of bucolic domesticity is only a mirage: Built into the gabled roof are several sets of human eyes, and the cottage's front window is actually a baying mouth, draped with white curtains that resemble blunted fangs. A pair of black, Krampus-y arms with sharp red fingernails seem to disappear into a chimney. We cannot see the goings-on indoors—but we can easily imagine that the things unfolding there are far worse than the horrors taking place outside.

One of the aforementioned deities appears in For my father (you crazy motherfucker!), and Geronimo, and Jesus. This mournful demigod is covered by a dark-gray veil as it poses before an empty sepia sky. Its head is crowned with a radiant halo, and its face is decorated with floral motifs. Within the body are a devilish horned head and multiple claws, limbs, and eyes. The being calls to mind the biblical story of Legion, i.e., the demonic horde that resides inside one host. Its pointed wings rise heavenward, resembling a pair of arms that were nailed to a cross. The



My pain is my privilege, 2020

creature cries rivers and rivers of blood. Another painting that references a father figure, though not included in the show, appeared on the gallery's website and the exhibition checklist: My father in a cage, 2020, depicts a man firing a large, black rifle into his own stomach. The gun's handle is delicately adorned with lacy white orbs, almost like snowflakes. In this piece, as the title describes, the man is imprisoned and

screaming while weeping long, dark tears. We aren't certain about who this person is or what he represents, but the impression he made upon Busse is, without question, monstrously indelible, as the artist's impression of him is upon us. These anguished souls, torn between the sacred and the damned, seem to have arrived at their terrible final acts. The work's absence from this presentation is gloomily appropriate.



Heimat #8, 2017



Childhood nightmare, 2009



Village elder in mourning, 2016

THE NEW YORKER

"Galleries - Downtown"

With a fashion career already under his belt, this New York-based photographer exhibits a series of portraits he took in the German hamlet of Nendorf, his home town. The black-and-white images begin in the familiar mode of August Sander—shot head-on, and inflected with fillips of sociological mystery. But Busse paints over the prints in the darkroom using dyes and developer, turning his subjects into phantasmagorical apparitions. The subject of "Hausfrau with Shotgun and Butterflies" is outfitted with a black veil ornamented in flowers and dots; the twenty pictures in the grid-format piece "Heimat"—blacked-out figures, rosy trees, and white horses—seem stained with nostalgic longing.

"Dietmar Busse's Imaginary Friends" Vince Aletti

Busse says that portraiture remains the essence of his work: "People are the basis," he told me. "They're all there." But he calls the series "Flora and Fauna," because he also thinks of its transformed subjects as "creatures, imaginary friends." One of them is, in fact, a horse he photographed in Nendorf, the small German village where his family had a farm whose livestock still inspire him. He remembers filling his school books with sketches, and says that his new work allows him to channel his younger, freer self "at five or six, making drawings for my mother." Working instinctively, he covered his photographs with red streamers that began as sprays of blood but gradually transformed to ribbons and flowers—a cascade of blooms. In an earlier series, Busse turned nude models into marvelous floral tributes, covering them with intricate arrays of petals and leaves. His new work comes from a similar impulse. Growing up, he said, "I'd always wanted life to be more exciting, more joyful." Now it is.



Garden #1, 2022



Garden #5, 2022

The New York Times

"What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries in February"
Will Heinrich

"Busse, a German-born, New York-based former fashion photographer, uses darkroom chemicals like paint to make busy, naïve images on glossy black photo paper. Five oversize faces festooned with flower petals, thousands of white dots, and extra eyes, look neither psychedelic nor obsessive, though they brush against both qualities. Instead they read as a kind of self-portrait, a strangely innocent exposure of the artist as he communes with his materials and imagination."



Joseph St. Laurent, 2014



Javier Valencia, 2015

TIME

"Dietmar Busse: Flora and Fauna" Phil Bicker

It's rare to encounter a body of work as wholly original as Dietmar Busse's extraordinary series, *Fauna and Flora*. An amalgamation of photography and painting, the pieces in the series manifest a beauty that occasionally veers into dark, dreamlike realms. Busse, 46, grew up as an only child on a small farm in Northern Germany and traveled widely in Europe and Morocco as a teenager before settling in Madrid, where he became interested in photography.

"Making art for me is like being on the road, except that the [artistic] journey is an inward one," he recently told TIME.

The work in *Fauna and Flora*, meanwhile, mirrors that travelers' sensibility, emerging from a process Busse describes — like a road trip — as "full of surprises and spontaneous decisions." In 1991 Busse relocated to New York, working initially as a studio assistant. By 1995 he was receiving commissions as a fashion photographer for magazines like *Paper*, *Interview* and *Visionaire* and portraiture for the *New York Times Magazine*, *Harpers Bazaar* and more. He soon became disillusioned, however, with the constraints imposed when working for others.

"I had always secretly hoped to become an artist," he says, "so I attempted to free myself from any outside demands."

He withdrew from the world of commissioned photography to pursue his artist's vocation. In 2006 he began inviting people he found visually interesting — people in art and fashion, for the most part — to visit his Manhattan apartment, converted into a little studio, to have their portraits taken for a project he calls *Visitors*. The result: an impressive portfolio of black and white portraits.

"I like having people over, rather than going on location. The sitter enters my world, and that way it is so much easier for me to get to know them and for them to relax."

The one exception to this comfortable, intimate approach has been annual visits to his native village in Germany where, for years, Busse has photographed residents, animals, landscapes and, until recently, his stepfather, Fiddy, a constant companion on those month-long explorations of his homeland.

"My father was very good with the local people and always made sure that I had access to anywhere and anyone I wanted. We were like little kids, up to no good and we had so much fun."

In March 2012 Fiddy was diagnosed with cancer; he died within a month of the diagnosis. Busse spent almost the entire year with his mom—driving, shooting and continuing the project in Fiddy's honor. "He came into our lives when I was ten years old," Busse says of his stepfather, "and rescued me and my mother from an impossible situation. He was like an angel to us. We miss him terribly." Today Busse remains very much in the analog world, shooting film and making his own darkroom prints—a hands-on process that helped release him from the constraints of traditional picture-making.

"About six years ago," he recalls, "I made a 'mistake' in the darkroom and double-exposed some paper. I pursued these double and triple exposures, mixing images from my homeland with portraits of people in New York. I liked bringing these two worlds together."

Busse began painting (with photographic developer) on his prints. The resulting images so artfully meld the otherwise quite distinct media that they appear to coalesce — creating, in a sense, a new medium.

"There are all kinds of variables when you draw on the prints before they are fixed, and it's a relief not to worry about spots or imperfect exposures anymore. I embrace the 'accidents', the unforeseen, the spontaneous. I never quite know where things will lead me: it's like an expedition into unknown territory. There is a lot more freedom there, and that is more reflective of who I am as a person than trying for a perfect print."

With no formal art training, Busse was long intimidated by the idea of painting. But in the last few years he began extending his experimentation even further, applying photographic retouching colors and inks to his prints.

Having a strong foundation in photography," he says, "somehow gives me the courage to explore. The photograph serves as the foundation for the painting, capturing something about a person's energy and spirit the way only photography can. The painting starts where photography can not go. I did not set out to [focus on those concepts]. These were just the images I found myself making — and it made sense, for fauna and flora are what I grew up with, and what I relate to."

Two years ago Busse's friend, the collector Scott Newkirk, commissioned him to make a portrait and also requested that Busse integrate his painting process into the images.

"I was insecure about the drawings so I did forty pieces in three days, [thinking] he would maybe like two or three and buy them. I hung all forty up together and it was a completely new way for me to look at my work." Newkirk ended up with a 20-piece installation, and Busse with a new methodology. "With twenty variants on two images, there is repetition of the same image throughout the installation as well as a uniqueness about each piece. The installation becomes one big story and the viewer is invited to go on a journey and explore."

"I don't feel like I have completely resolved it, but [the series] is on my studio wall right now. I'm just looking at it before I make the next move."