

# ANDREAS SCHULZE *Stau*

by Terry R. Myers

SPRÜTH MAGERS, BERLIN | JULY 28 – AUGUST 29, 2015

Some of these Andreas Schulze paintings were shown in New York in late 2014, at Team Gallery in an exhibition called *Traffic Jam*. Now, several months later, here in Berlin, those paintings and some others are stuck again in a “stau” (translation, simply: *jam*). Installed bumper-to-bumper around the perimeter of a rather perfectly proportioned room, they start, stop, and start again, but most don’t move. It’s not often that one small word in German can stand for two in English, and, in terms of something like meaning in language, the cut is minor. For painting, however, specifically Schulze’s fixated yet floating approach to it, such an edit is the entryway to a rigorous expansiveness, as well as a structural way out—a viable and necessary off-ramp, if you will. Schulze reminds us how often good painting occurs because it is always, just *always*, jammed up. Put another way, painting lives by the “jam,” with no need for traffic.

These are paintings of cars that have almost nothing in common with them.



Andreas Schulze, *Untitled (New Jersey Sheep)*, 2014. Acrylic on nettle cloth, 78 3/4 × 86 5/8 in. © Andreas Schulze / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy Sprüth Magers and Team Gallery, New York.

“Access Fantasy,” one of my favorite Jonathan Lethem short stories, is one paragraph at twenty-plus pages long. A fuzzy memory of its first sentence careened back into my brain the moment I walked into Schulze’s show: “There was a start-up about a half mile ahead the day before, a fever of distant engines and horns honking as others signaled their excitement—a chance to move!—and so he’d spent the day jammed behind the wheel, living in his Apartment on Tape, waiting for that chance, listening under the drone of distant helicopters to hear the start-up make its way downtown.” Naturally, it’s a false alarm; no one is going anywhere (they’re on the wrong side of a “one-way permeable barrier”). The story takes off when the protagonist thinks he’s witnessed a crime on the tape he is watching. One of the paintings in the main gallery, *Untitled (N.Y. Householder)* (2014), could be an image from Lethem’s story: a boxy yet rounded television/camper, glowing like the unidentified driving object (U.D.O.?) it must be. Schulze makes regular use of light and dark highlights around the edges of his shapes, making everything look ever so slightly inflated and weirdly dimensional, as if what are paintings—flatly produced in acrylic soaked into nubby canvas—could be reliefs. It creates, on the one hand, a magical effect, enticing the eye into a pictorial playland that moves



from parts to wholes, from painterly moves within a window or door to the overall vehicle, and from those vehicles to the dreamy and rolling landscapes they've been painted into. From there, we are further transported through those expansive landscapes to the screeching halt of the actual space between the paintings that have been, obviously, following each other too close. One painting—*Untitled (Seabull)* (2015)—is especially gorgeous, due to a large rounded portal in the center of its hot red car that opens up to a flowerscape soaked into the canvas, as if underwater.

The show could have feasibly collapsed into cuteness rather than holding it hostage. Schulze achieves this standoff by inserting what he has called “filth” into the situation by way of *exhaust* as a visual and verbal pun. First, in the smaller entryway gallery, there are several paintings that depict exhaust pipes close up, updating Léger for our brink-of-catastrophe era. Filth then makes a more emphatic appearance in two paintings in the main room: the television/camper in *Untitled (N.Y. Householder)*, mentioned above, which features a black hole in its upper right corner expelling thick exhaust out of that side of the painting. It continues onto the left side of the next painting, the wickedly titled *Untitled (Charlie Browner)* (2014), spewing its pollution across the front end of what is (somehow) a dorky sports car. Such moments of painterly and poisoned consecutiveness are made all the more critical when one realizes that one of the other paintings in the lineup is from 1998 (*Untitled (Praha Ivana)*)—and another from 2000 (*Untitled (Warszawa OK Prototyp)*). These works demonstrate, on painterly terms, that nothing really has changed in the decades since. From the beginning, it seems, Schulze's enterprise has been one of a wicked and refreshing stubbornness, a commitment to an approach to painting that must have irritated many along the way but now has the last laugh. This is why two paintings, *Untitled (Cloud of filth)* (2015), and especially *Untitled (High cloud of filth)* (2015), raise the stakes of the deal that Schulze puts forward in all of his work: painting *stays*, all the more when it's in the shit.



Andreas Schulze, *Untitled (Seabull)*, 2015. Acrylic on nettle cloth, 63 × 189 in. © Andreas Schulze / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, Courtesy the artist and Sprüth Magers.