



clown, afterimage, 2008, 130 cm x 130 cm, Philara Collection

[Artists Anonymous](#) is an artist collective formed in Berlin 2000. The collective works and lives in London and Berlin. The collective is known for their diptychs (painting and inverted photograph or vice versa). These diptychs refer to Dutch Golden Age painting placed into a Post-apocalyptic world sometimes sweetened with modern day clip-art.

AFN: Ever since our first encounter 5 years ago, I was wondering why you choose 'clowns' as your theme. We have found the subject interesting to artists like [Cindy Sherman](#) - she did many works on the subject, [Bruce Naumann's clown torture](#), [Paul McCarthy's painter](#), [Jonathan Borofsky's dancing clown](#) and [Ugo Rondinone with "If there were anywhere but desert: Tuesday 2002"](#).

AA: You could mention [Picasso!](#)

AFN: Why do you work the way you work and what are your references to this subject?

AA: Our whole concept stems from art school. Actually learning what art is all about. Because when I went to art school, I thought I would learn how to paint. I didn't, since you don't learn about techniques these days. But surprisingly I learned what art is about and the questions in it. You got to ask yourself how to make art. And that it is not only about technical skills. You look at all the stuff that have been done. As an artist you will have to ask yourself what do you actually do now. I have learned at art school to ask myself this question and that I always have to answer it and to reflect about these very serious people like Gerhard Richter.



a fist for the eye, afterimage, 2010, Private Collection, 118 cm x 70 cm

AFN: Do you affiliate yourself with artists like Otto Dix, Maina-Miriam Munsky, Wolfgang Petrick, Peter Sorge, Hans-Jürgen Diehl or the artistic movement of the ['Nouveau Réalisme'](#)?

AA: No, because especially when you are a German artist, it is expected that they take their subject very serious. Always. And there are these serious people like Otto Dix, George Grosz. Then you move on to Gerhard Richter, you have ["Neue Wilde"](#). You have all this stuff and it is very serious. They have taken every subject. In the end you as an artist are left with what? What is the subject. It is everything that these people do not do because they claim to be so serious. To the point, where every that is left of the subject is its seriousness. And to paint clowns and to do so diligently is completely contradictory to that. In the end really does not matter what we paint. This is the funny thing. It is either a good painting or absolutely nothing.



Drugs, afterimage, 2007, 190 cm x 150 cm, Sander Collection

AFN: Well, there is a painting by [Gerhard Richter about the events surrounding the RAF Movement in Germany](#). Don't you think this is a serious topic?

AA: We think paintings like this are only about sensationalism. The thought process behind that is just 'What is the most shocking thing I could do?', so people will react to that proclaimed piece of art. And in our opinion, if you paint something like this you can't paint your new wife and child 20 years down the line. That's just horrible.

AFN: So, it is not arbitrary?

AA: No it's not.

AFN: Is this the reason why you have painted this picture "Schmuckstück"?

AA: Exactly. There is a thing called art whore. Like the Mona Lisa or certain paintings by Pablo Picasso or the ["Betty" from Gerhard Richter](#). Everybody have seen these paintings and somehow you don't see the subject any more. The "Mona Lisa" for example is not a painting any more it is an icon. And although so many people know these paintings, most of them don't know what the art was supposed to be about. So they are no longer artworks but icons.

AFN: And what do you want to do with art?



Dark, afterimage, 2008, 180 cm x 130 cm, Advaney Collection, Netherlands

AA: We're trying to reinvent it, because what can you do, if it has been killed before. It's what we did with our 'Betty' ("Schmuckstück") for the Deutsche Bank, because they didn't want any sex or violence but we had to take something provocative anyway. We tried to look at the question if the subject of a painting is very important or if it is arbitrary or both. The Betty-Series points this out very clearly because we always used the same picture and so it is only about the way it is painted. Like in Color Field painting. But of course it has a reason why one would choose a particular picture for a painting. Nowadays in popular music you will hear the same tune over and over, just slightly recomposed or in other ways altered. And some painters work the same.



Dark, enamel on aluminium, 2008, 180 cm x 130 cm, Advaney Collection, Netherlands

AFN: There is a book called 'Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past' by Simon Reynolds in which the author says, that in music everything is a mash up of old things, because everything was already there before. He goes on to say that everything made for an audience is arbitrary, because it won't be

consumed as this precious thing, that it was intended to be. The author also states that it all lost its value, because through the internet everything is available all over the world and for free. Would you say that it is the same with art to some degree? That the art world is now at the same place as the pop world? When you sell something for 40,000 pounds it is not nothing? Is it like paying 1 USD for any song. Are these 40,000 pounds completely arbitrary?

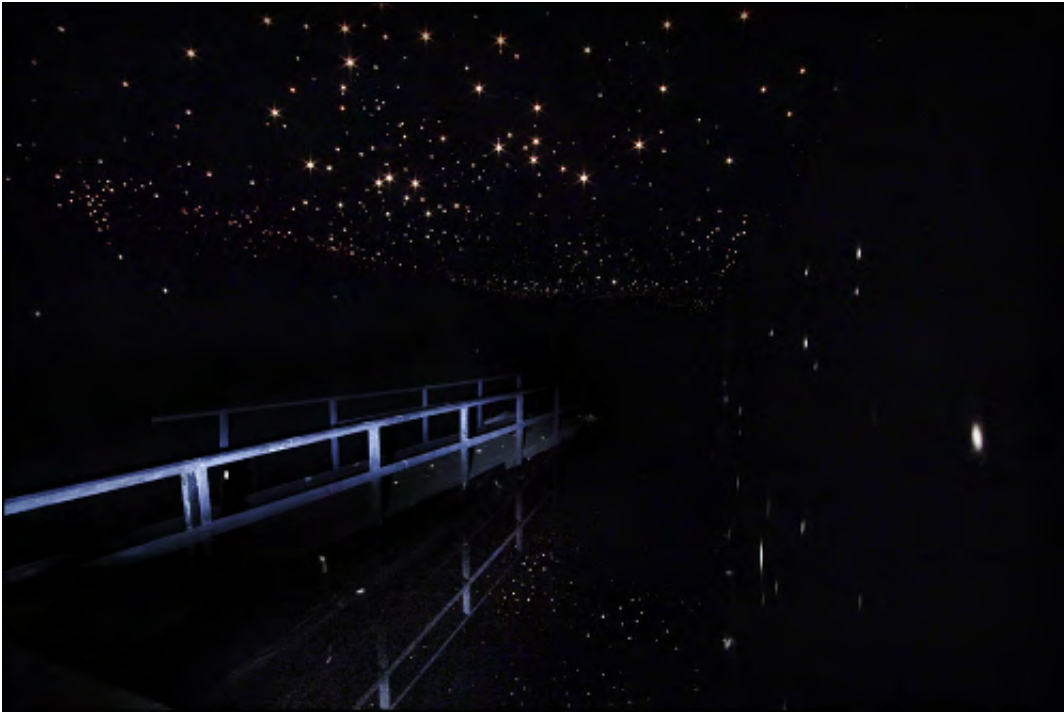
AA: Art was always super commercial and super propagandistic. Music turns more and more into pop these days, but art always was since 300 to 400 years. There were always just a few people that stood out while all the other people just called themselves artists. It's basically the same as companies that only slap their brand name on products that were produced by someone else. But when a person is calling him/herself an artist, that person has to prove that they are serious about art and that they are actually able to create. At least that's the way I see and do it, because 'being an artist' is my job and my role in society.

AFN: My next question goes back to the theory, that everything that can be imagined has already been made, regardless if in art or in music. Do you do the same? Do you figuratively play a foreign score and interpret older artists?

AA: No not at all, but in a way yes. We are not a band of hobby musicians that got famous out of their garage. We studied what we do, we are classically trained and we still train everyday. So in that respect we are like someone who studied music at a conservatory. What we do is not pop, just as our discussion right now is not pop because you need to be educated to follow and to understand what we are talking about. I think, we invented a totally new approach to painting, because that's what we had to do because I learned about art but still wanted to paint. The situation was basically just like you described it: we saw, that everything has been done. All that was left to do was interpreting the existing. And we were not willing to do that. We were taught to do art, and that above other things means, it has to be something new.



bedlam installationshots, 2012, London



bedlam installationshots, 2012, London



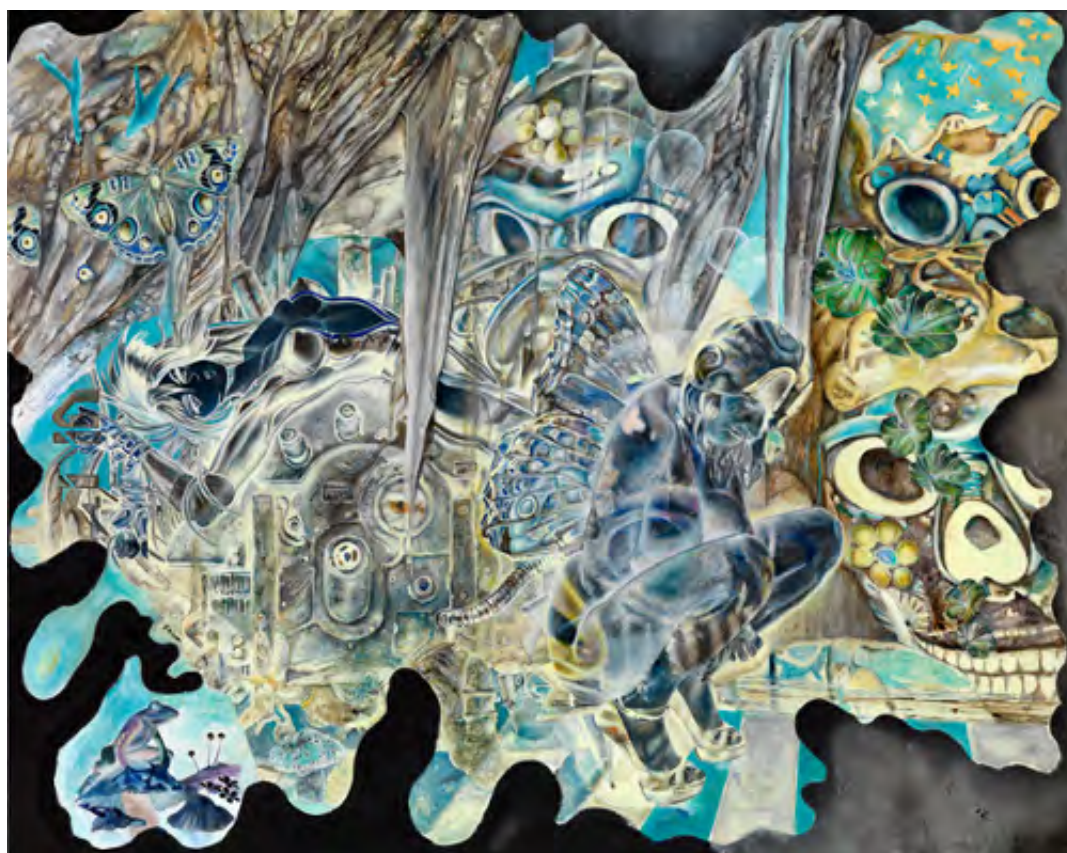
bedlam installationshots, 2012, London

AFN: I was just thinking about [Ed and Nancy Kienholz installation work "Five Car Stud"](#) and [George Segal's installations like "Walk, Don't Walk"](#). Do you think that as much intensity and feeling goes into a two-dimensional painting as in a three-dimensional installation?

AA: I don't think that our painting are two-dimensional. If you have a painting and an after image it is not two-dimensional any more. One of our approach was how can we make a painting? Because there will always be some kind of architecture around a painting, even if it is just a white wall. And since every painting exists within a three-dimensional space, the artist has to be aware of that and has to account for that whilst producing art.

AFN: We were looking at a wikipedia page about after images some paintings with after images. For example by [Richard Hamilton "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas"](#)?

AA: ...and [Jasper Johns "Inverted flag"](#). We think Jasper Johns was the only who ever came to the point as we did. But we passed that point, but he somehow stopped. Do you know [ancient Greek red or black figure pottery](#) or [aboriginal art](#). It is representing the dream world. So other people liked this idea as well. We thought that you give painting a new chance. You have to think completely different. We are building whole scenes and sets to references where we actually paint from because we still paint after nature.



cyborg oil on canvas, 120 cm x 150 cm, 2012, Private Collection UK



cyborg afterimage, 120 cm x 150 cm, 2012, Private Collection UK

AFN: You had quite the career. You officially started out in 2005, peaked according to our ranking in 2009 and you kept yourself in that position since then. Is this horrible or fun in this economy of attention?

AA: It's nothing you would expect while in art school and honestly, it's a nightmare. I became a painter, because I like to be in my studio and paint and be away from people. Furthermore I have a problem with networking, lying and with selling myself. And even if you are willing to do all this, because you have to do it to actually be an artist, there are still so many people that run around wanting to be important, that only studied art history because they had no better idea. And I studied art because that was exactly what I wanted to do with life. And those other people are now curators or gallery owners and try to lecture me about my art.

AFN: I think that is another quality besides the technical skill. It is an extra selection process, next to the technical skills, intelligence and thought that goes into a painting. I think that painters are also little factories, like Chinese sweat shop. So it's a very competitive environment and the individual painter has to want to be competitive as well. You are an english-german group. Is the competition easier in Germany or in England?

AA: In England it is totally easy, because you can be aggressive. In Germany you can't be aggressive; neither can you in the U.S. As an example in school sports you can not really give marks on somebodies

ability to do sports. Some people are just not designed to make sport. Maybe they are not sporty or fat, whatever. How can you possibly give this people a bad mark? In art it is art or it is not art. You can not fake. One day in school we were asked to judge our own art work - and I knew was really good and is was an A. Otherwise it would not be an art work anyway - and I was quite proud. The guy in front of me - who was also very good in art - said, "Well, I think it is a B". In my point of view this guy change the game. Now it is not about judging your. Now it is about yourself. You present yourself as humble. And I don't like that because I personally value the quality of the work the most. And in the art world nowadays, it's often times more about the artist than about his or her work.

AFN: I think that that's because quality became a marketing ploy in the art world. So quality has lost its inner meaning. This was one of the reasons why we started measuring the art world differently. But the art still has to move people or evoke some kind of feeling; even in this arbitrary world where people can simply sit on their computers and look at other artists' works in an instant. So, you have to constantly keep yourself present. How do you cope with that?

AA: I think the most important thing we did, especially since 2009, was to always ask ourselves, why this particular person wants to buy more paintings from us, or why he/she is willing to pay more money. And this is a thing we always were humble about, because if you're not, and your gallery raises the prices too much, no other gallery will take your art.

AFN: We talked about Banksy and the invasion of public space. To mention your Hamburger Bahnhof show "The fictional blast of the Hamburger Bahnhof or the absolute definition of art" in "Kult des Künstlers" Do you think this clash is necessary? Do you do street art?

AA: Of course we do, either accidentally or because we were assigned to do so. There are a few art works in Berlin. I don't want to fight in general I just want to do art. These clashes just arise out of society. We don't want to fight we just want to achieve our goals and we will argue for them.



Ansicht Hamburger Bahnhof "The fictional blast of the Hamburger Bahnhof or the absolute definition of art in 'Kult des Künstlers'", 2009

AFN: Why do some artists go better along with gallery or museums personnel than others? Is it a different attitude? And in which ways do you use your own attitude to prevail?

AA: There are many ways to put gallery owners or museum curators under pressure but I don't think that this helps in any way. We are just normal artists although we might be crazy and megalomaniac. But I've even been megalomaniac 20 years ago, when nobody cared what I did. We are just like that because we know, that we do is worthwhile. But this is a feeling that every artist, musician and writer knows and this feeling is not about me being the greatest. We've got this feeling because it is our job and we love it. Otherwise we wouldn't do it.

AFN: Do you think that a big reason for your career is your determinism? For example with Damian Hirst, we have always predicted that he will fall after his £111m record for one-artist auction on September 16, 2008. Only one day after Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy protection. Instead he was keeping up. I think he's playing the social piano like he is playing with his art.

AA: Yes, that is definitely an important reason. I think that the reason why we have problems with some people is the same reason why others like us. Namely, that we take art so seriously. That's why because there is not only one right way to do things, because every person is different. Of course you can avoid the big mistakes, but you can't predict every person's reaction.

AA: Yes, you can play it but then you will not be an artist. Damien Hirst is not an artist. He is whatever he is. This is why people laugh at him. Yes, everybody can paint like a Rembrandt. But you my friend are absolutely not the person who can actually say it. Maybe you can throw all your money at people and they will teach you how to paint like Rembrandt. The problem is you will always paint just like Rembrandt. Well, I am the Rembrandt. This is what I know and you don't. He had his chance but he decided differently. I really like that people take their chance. This is why London is our town. Because people like Saatchi and Norman Rosenthal made it. They had the money, they did not have the artists. So they made the artists. But this can not happen to us. We are like Jeff Koons. He made it himself and they fucked him at a certain point in his career because he did this thing with his wife

AFN: ["Made in Heaven" with Ilona Staller.](#)

AA: That was the best thing ever. Then they took him down. Since then he is really the quiet guy. Before he was playing the clown and now he is the clown. So, he did this on his own while the whole thing with the Young British Artists was a set up.



bioshock installationshots, 2009, Amsterdam



bioshock installationshots, 2009, Amsterdam



bioshock installationshots, 2009, Amsterdam



bioshock installationshots, 2009, Amsterdam



bioshock installationshots, 2009, Amsterdam

AFN: In the beginning of this interview. We started talking about Otto Dix and Peter Sorge and so on. We did not mention any one of the YBA scene like, for example, the brothers Jake and Dinos Chapman. We threw the thought away because we you are not sensationalists?

AA: The ["Freeze Show" \(1 July 1988 until 31 July 1988\)](#) was contemporary art. That show was the thing.

AFN: We do not want to question that fact. The question was "are you sensationalists"? When you talk about Rembrandt then this is not sensationalism.

AA: No, we are contemporary artists. What we did with the clowns for example, wasn't done to shock or to be fancy. Rather it was the opposite, we felt so humble about what has been done in the art that we decided to paint something stupid. All serious art is done by the grown ups and we will never grow up, probably. And I honestly don't even understand grown ups. Furthermore I need to stay this way so I can go on being an artist.

AFN: So you see yourselves as mirrors of society?

AA: Yes. And if we wouldn't be artists we would be terrorists. It's as simple as that.

AFN: Without art there wouldn't be any kind of cultural identity.

AA: Yes, I agree. I think if terrorists would have flown planes into the Louvre, the Moma or something like that, they would have taken much more of our identity.

AFN: But the WTC an architectural icon and we had the discussion about art and architecture and how they are the same before.

AA: I'd say if they would have flown into an important museum like the Moma or the Metropolitan Museum, it would have another impact. It would have been a totally different thing.

AFN: They would have destroyed our entire cultural heritage.

AA: Exactly. I am sure that the true impact would not be obvious for a long time. We couldn't know how the following generations would have suffered from this loss. So, I think in the idea of losing all this art is much more depth as in losing a building. That still is an attack on your identity but not as fatal as losing all this art. This also connects to how serious we take art. Because, if you are an artist and your responsibility in being one hits you, it hits you quite hard. When you think of all these people that came before you and all those that will come after you, you can't help it but take it serious.

AFN: We heard a lot of criticism in this interview and we talked about domestic and foreign terrorism. But in preparation for this interview we talked about your auction career and how proud you are about that. How do those two aspects work together?

You feel you are safe, but we are within your system.
To your upper eschelons, to the rich, to the powerful, authorities, in
your vernissages and
receptions where you neglect your security through conceitedness

You hold sophisticated conversation with the resistance who will bring
the fall of your system.

You pay our communication with your ostentation.
The Art in public spaces the urban projects,
monuments financed with blood money only serve the transmission of
our plans.

Hundreds or Thousands worldwide, regardless of race, religion,
nationality or gender
have organised themselves under the guise of the free arrangement und
unhampered distribution of creativity,
that which you have tried with all your power to prevent.

Each rudiment of true Art is disabled in its germination, but the
ridiculousness of your stars, your pin-up artists and their pseudo
aggressive manipulations for the inflation of prices and the
protectionism of fame is our cover.
You let us in with them into their fortress and their palaces

Now, 7 years after the final dissolution of democracy and the start of
World War 3,
we start the implementation:
we attack the heart directly and strike right to the core.

The downfall of the society you produced will not happened due to loss
of goods or lack of education

We will deprive nourishment to the foundation of your disregarded
existence,
fed by your government and laws which you parasitically suck the
content from without reinvesting,
which as you know dooms your model to failure.

We are only accelerating what is already happening.

Radical Art Force

radical art force press release, 2009

AA: First of all, we are not the RAF and we don't agree with their policy. We are not Communists. We have our doubt about their ism. Furthermore, I don't think that we are the crazy ones and the clowns, but the people who judge us this way. Because we are educated about art and we study it even further. And

how often do I have serious discussions about art?! When in truth I don't know why I studied art. And maybe we are not even producing our own paintings, maybe made by some Chinese people and we are just a made up. No one cares. Everybody does what they want and nobody is really educated about it. And before one can make a statement you have to be educated about that certain topic. But if someone would take all the auctions and exhibitions away tomorrow, we wouldn't be mad. Because our pride isn't so much about the money as it is about being taken seriously. Because I think that is important. And it is a responsibility you have, if you want to judge something then it has to be worth it. That is why I don't like judges sometimes. Because there is no clear reason why they can be a judge other than someone choose them to be one. It's the same with police men, just because they wear a badge does not make them serious. Factually, the only thing that's putting them above anyone else is that they wear a gun and I do not. They are just stronger than me like a Skinhead. And I don't want this to happen, metaphorically, with art critiques because I want my art to be taken seriously. I want that because my art is serious and because I love it.

AFN: Great closing words. Thanks for the interview.

Interview: ArtFacts.Net, April 2013

artists-anonymous.com

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