

Bernhard Buhmann art show in Dubai

Austrian artists back in Dubai with his show, The Pretenders, at Carbon 12 [Discuss this article](#)



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Austrian artist Bernhard Buhmann reveals his innermost thoughts in *The Pretenders*.

Austrian artist, Bernhard Buhmann's latest exhibition, *The Pretenders*, will be on display at Carbon 12 from Monday September 15 to Tuesday October 28. Born in Bregenz, Austria, the 35-year-old currently lives and works in Vienna and has been creating artworks since he was a teenager.

This is the artist's second solo exhibition in Dubai.

'My mother was an influence in the beginning. She was a painter, but not professionally. It was like magic to me, watching her paint in the evening at home as a young boy. It always interested me because she always seemed to be in her own world – and she was. So it was always my ambition to go to Vienna and study art,' says Buhmann.

Having studied a Masters in Sociology, and Communication Science in 2006, it's clear where his inspiration for his latest exhibition stems from. Using his background in sociology and painting from the University of Applied Arts and the University of Vienna, Buhmann explores issues of how to find one's self in social and individual life, in times of uncertainty and rapid changes.

'Nowadays you have people that try to change their personalities, it's almost like acting,' he explains. 'They try to play different roles. It's all about how to find your individual lifestyle and your way in the world. I want to show how people wear masks and how they are pretending to be something they are not. Everyone tries to be more than what they are or they try to show off to other people. They post selfies and images on social media.

It's really a show for society rather than themselves.'

The inhabitants of the paintings tell an abstract story as they cavort across the canvas. Each painting has its own fiction, but when seen together they allude to a much larger issue. 'The figures are odd and they are trying to show you something but it's not clear because it's hidden behind the mask. It's obvious that they are trying to pretend,' says Buhmann.

His colourful, surreal paintings conjure up alternate realities, with jesters, animals and knights. Buhmann works from his imagination, drawing in elements from art history to create images that are odd and whimsical.

'A person has more than one role to play in society – you could be a writer

and also a sportsman. It's a question about how you mix these roles together and how you get your own point across. It's really a personal expression of my point of view,' he explains. 'People have the free choice to do what they want, but on the other side you have a capitalist system. The message is really about reflecting on your own thoughts and actions. Ask yourself, "Is what I'm doing really right for me?" The knight is shielded by his mask but it's about the masks all people wear.'

Buhmann believes that today's social systems and maintaining personal identities results in society having to fulfil greater demands of public life. The characters in his paintings are both entertaining and a tragic fallout of contemporary society.

'The creatures are trying desperately to show only their assumed glamour and exciting personalities. Their biggest fear is not the personal taxation of social upkeep, but commonality. Consequently, in their daily struggle for uniqueness they lose touch with their authentic individuality and ability to emphasise with others. Masked and clownesque, the creatures parade in their outfits, bidding for our attention,' Buhmann continues.

The works show parallel worlds, orchestrated to depict contradictory creations. In one painting, titled Elvis, you can see a humanised bird with two legs and a pompadour, to mirror the American singer and his famous hair.

'There is a mix of human and animal figures in the paintings, but you never know if it's a mask or just weird clothes,' says Buhmann. 'They are screaming, grotesque figures with masks which they don't dare to take off – maybe they even don't know that they could – but always ready to switch. It's a kind of game, I wanted to make really weird figures.'

Buhmann's creatures are unique in their imagined personalities yet each shares an appearance of constant flux; they are struggling to control shape. The works are light-hearted with colour and there is a childlike construction of his characters, but it's hard to ignore the deeper comment he is making on society. Take a trip to Carbon 12 and discover it for yourself.

**Exhibition: The Pretenders. Sat-Thu
11.30am-7pm.
September 15-October 28.
Alserkal Avenue, Al Quoz (04 340 6016).
By Chanelle Tourish
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