



***Michael Buthe, Nasser Almulhim, Andreas Blank, Klaus vom Bruch, David Krippendorff, Stefan Kürten, Marcel Odenbach, Manfred Peckl, Angelika Platen, Stephan Rinck, Ulrike Rosenbach, Maik Schierloh, Pola Sieverding, Kerstin Serz, Barthélemy Togo, Ricardo Peredo Wende, Abbas Yousif***

Opening: 26 November 2020, 5pm – 10pm

Duration: 27 November – 31 December 2020

Opening times: due to coronavirus Wed / Fri / Sat 3pm – 6pm  
and by appointment

KLEINERVONWIESE @ enter art airshop opas Nr 1  
Friedrichstrasse 2014, Berlin 10119

### **On the Exhibition:**

Recently, Stephan von Wiese – who for many years was a museum curator in Düsseldorf – was asked, “How would you sum up Michael Buthe’s work for today’s artists? Did he have something that many do not have today?” He replied, “I don’t think any of them had what he had.”

Stephan von Wiese knew Michael Buthe well. In 1977 he presented Buthe’s individual exhibition “Hommage an einen Prinzen aus Sarmakant” [“Homage to a Prince from Samakant”] at the Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf. In 1999 he held a retrospective for him there.

His book “Michael Buthe. Skulptura in Deo Fabulosa” was published in 1983 by Verlag Silke Schreiber.

Buthe’s work consistently broke with conventions; the spontaneity of life flowed directly into his pieces, reflecting things up close and in their otherness. Happiness and grief are captured and held on to, intact and authentic. These magical moments seem to be bound into Buthe’s work through the many cords and fabrics. Art becomes an immense expedition; the work is a mythical space.

Michael Buthe, sometimes also ennobled to “Michel de la Sainte Beauté”, was, after the last two major wars in Europe, one of the first artists in 1970s West Germany to reach for the beauty and mystique of oriental cultures and bring them into a contemporary context. On his many journeys to distant countries and cultures, the artist was, as it were, searching for a “lost paradise”, if we understand “paradise” in its original meaning as a protected and blissful place.

In place of the inflammatory, politicised art that proliferated during the student rebellion in 1968, Buthe and many of his contemporaries developed a burning desire to travel to foreign, seductive worlds and explore apparently archaic societies. This was a deliberate attempt to set themselves apart from the instrumental rationalism of western civilisation, which seemed to be leading into nothing but a wasteland. In 1970 Buthe made Marrakesh his second spiritual home.

That was when Buthe gave in to his exuberant love of colours, his playful handling of gold and ornamentation, his enthusiasm for exotic cultures and their people, his affinity with mystic poetry and his penchant for homoeroticism. These became a source of energy for this work. His studio flats in Cologne and Marrakesh were a frequent, brilliantly staged meeting point for well-known and emerging artists, bourgeois collectors and a colourful crowd of friends and guests. They were sometimes turned into museums, and they were workshops and venues for raucous parties – there was an irrepressible hunger for life.

Buthe’s artistic attitude is nowadays subsumed under the label “individual mythologies”. First and foremost, it was Harald Szeemann who promoted the exceptional artist, when he gave him the opportunity to make a stunning debut as part of the documenta V exhibition in 1972. For this, Buthe built his first large-scale environment “Hommage an die Sonne” [“Homage to the Sun”]. At the time, Szeemann singled him out as an example of one of the “contemporary artists who are creating their own symbols and making their own inroads in particularly striking ways.”

Buthe’s environment at documenta V was a kind of tent made of fabrics dyed by hand, a method the artist knew from Morocco and repeatedly practised himself. A totem-like sculpture of a guard, “Elvira Oasis” stood at the entrance to this spectacular, secular cultic chamber in the middle of the exhibition.

Buthe repeatedly integrated found objects - objets trouvés – into his works, environments, sculptures and art actions; often pieces of clothing, feathers, snail shells, tin cans and

everyday objects, ritually bound by cords or torn fabrics. By using gold leaf, he charged many of his works with sacred and representative radiance – and not infrequently overcharged them with skilful provocation.

Buthe's final works, created in Tangier in 1994 – one of them forms the central motif of the current exhibition – are, among other things, an "oracle basket" translated into painting. The artist once saw an oracle basket in Benin, where it is part of this African tribal culture; it contains many small objects such as shells, bones, figures and all manner of artefacts that can be repeatedly shaken up by the medicine man and each time re-interpreted in new combinations in terms of their content.

A year ago, the art magazine "Monopol" asked the question, "Why is it that Michael Buthe, who brought so much impetus to the art of the 70s and 80s, is almost forgotten?" At the time, the Berlin Galerie Judin was presenting, for the first time in public, a bundle of Buthe's diaries and book objects brimming with ideas.

With the "Paradise" exhibition, KLEINERVONWIESE aims to throw light on a smaller selection of later works from the artist's estate, mostly created in 1994 in Tangier on Buthe's last trip, and thus far only exhibited once, in 1994, in Galerie Ribbentrop in Eltville. 1994 was also the year the artist, who was born in 1944, died. Most recently, there have been larger surveys of works in 2015 and 2016 at the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.) in Ghent and at the Haus der Kunst in Munich, presented by the Goetz Collection.

The sensuous fire in Michael Buthe's work comes periodically ablaze, just as his pieces become visible, particularly in times like these, when distance seems to be essential for survival. This fire was also the inspiration for this group exhibition, which includes works by his Cologne friends – such as Ulrike Rosenbach, Klaus vom Bruch, Marcel Odenbach and Stefan Kürten, a student of Buthe – but also by current African and Arabic artists such as Abbas Yousif from Bahrain, Nasser Almulhim from Saudi Arabia and Barthélémy Toguo from Cameroon.

The sculptors Andreas Blank and Stefan Rinck from Berlin have works in the exhibition, as well as the ceramic sculptor Chris Hammerlein, the painter Kerstin Serz, the painters Manfred Peckl and Maik Schierloh, and the painters and video artists David Krippendorff and Ricardo Peredo Wende, the photo and video artist Pola Sieverding.

The photographer Angelika Platen created a unique photo series of Michael Buthe shortly after his first return trip from Morocco in 1970. Her shots show the transformation from a young, suit-and-tie-wearing art student into an entirely new person: into Michael Buthe, who from now on would appear in a burnous and with a feather in his hair – you can almost hear his exuberant laugh. It is a rare thing to be able to capture people in their moments of redemption. Angelika Platen has achieved this.

We are showing Buthe's timeless works – 2 watercolours, a painting and a pictorial object. Mostly, only remnants of his installations remain, and it feels futile to resurrect them without his presence. This is possibly where we find what is unique about Michael Buthe:

many of his works do not LIVE without him. There are no paradisiacal states without people – this could be one of the messages of this exhibition. Michael Buthe’s magic, however, remains – in some of the installations, such as the temple on Ibiza for Ingvild Goetz, with its reliefs and fetish sculptures, or the room installation “Die Heilige Nacht der Jungfräulichkeit” [“The Holy Night of Virginity”] for documenta IX, which was curated by Jan Hoet. But above all in his paintings and sculptures, and in the stories that we are re-telling in this exhibition.

Constanze Kleiner, Stephan von Wiese