



THIERRY FEUZ

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PSYCHOTROPICAL
2002-2003
PAINTINGS

PSYCHOTROPICAL

Thierry Feuz is interested in recording sensations, but not necessarily those we immediately perceive. As Dutch painter Bram van Velde put it, “What the eye can see of the exterior world does not help us very much. And what it can see is so limited, so restrained.” In similar terms, Feuz uses representation to describe his landscapes, but invests these settings with the rhythmic, radical gestures of abstraction, which allow him to expand and to reimagine “what the eye can see.” The images that result depict extraordinary explorations of the genesis, life, and gradual decay of natural and abstract flowers and other organic material.

Feuz, born in Vienna and now based in Geneva, has created three ongoing series of paintings—“Supernatural,” “Psychotropical,” and “Technicolor”—over the past three years. While separated into distinct groups, the paintings in these series share a fundamental characteristic: Each successive series appears to magnify the view of the preceding one, as though seen through a microscope. Feuz uses this scientific corollary to reexamine classic conceptions of nature, a force that is at once beautiful and picturesque yet is always already in decay; his combination of abstraction and figuration articulates this deteriorating

materiality and permits his investigation into permutations of instability—of perspective, physicality, and organicism.

“Supernatural” (2001), Feuz’s earliest series, begins analyzing these issues. *Supernatural bluestar*, 2001, contains two blooms that fill roughly half the canvas on the middle right. Luxurious, flat pools of purple-blue acrylic form the open faces of the flowers, while the colors of the yellow stamens, white petal bases, and black interior of the flowers flow into each other, mixing and cutting across the expanse of blue (this flow looks like the Mississippi River Delta as seen from space). The straw-colored background appears to reference the hue a bluestar’s foliage attains in autumn, before the plant succumbs to frosts of the winter months. The hint of death is never far from the edge of the flower’s magnificence. And it is precisely this ability to transcend the purely physical plane, to achieve an order beyond the visible world, that lends itself to the title of the series. Feuz’s exploitation of this tension here prefigures his move in subsequent paintings to further abstract his imagery, not only by repositioning his perspective but also by unmooring matter from its setting.

In discussing his process of painting, Feuz mentions the unexpected “propriety of colors” in his immediate environment: candy, advertising, his own photographs, and items from the supermarket. He uses this “energy” as a pretext for incorporating vivid color and high gloss into his paintings; he draws on these colors from ordinary, daily perceptions to inform his palette in the creation of his own semiabstract natural world. In “Psychotropical” (2002–2003), his next series, the colored backgrounds and color masses of the earlier paintings have developed into bolder and more thoughtful constructions. The title, Feuz explains, is a conflation of “psychotropes” (hallucinogens) and “tropical,” and the paintings in this group are qualified by the lush environs transcribed onto canvas by way of human (specifically, the artist’s) perception. An exaggeration of this perception stresses the ongoing struggle in Feuz’s work between pure representation and abstraction. In fact, it marks the growing distortion of his “vision.” A general comparison of a paintings like *Supernatural bluestar* and *Psychotropical iduna*, 2002, (from his second series) reveals that while Feuz’s eye is still trained on vegetable matter, his perspective has tightened, suggesting that he has captured an elemental world with the aid of a microscope.

In *Psychotropical iduna*, green, wispy stems meander across the picture plane and end in small explosions of diffused color. Another flower, whose red-brown top seems to weigh on its thin stem, arises out of a mire of activity in which a dark, diffuse oval is layered over with energetic scribbles of undergrowth. The middle-left edge of the canvas holds in place a multi-hued blue cloud. Hesitant and calm, its impastoed texture is at odds with a similar shape across the canvas whose flat, hot, orange color radiates outward as it appears to shoot down into the picture space. A single, small circle of the same bright color seems to have dropped from this plunging disk and now hovers, frozen in the white expanse of the canvas. “The organic paintings are close-ups,” Feuz explains, “[as though] you have entered a landscape and the details of a strange, humid, wet, and dangerous life have become visible.”

What distinguishes this series of paintings from its predecessor is the dispersion of its elements. The background in these works is white, and this emptiness conveys a sense of alienation in a spare depiction of nature. The reedy flowers and biomorphic sprays of

color float in gentle relation to each other, as though hovering in a liquid solution. In this respect, Feuz seems to quote the visual vocabulary of American modernist Arthur Dove. The latter’s collage aesthetic and organic, free form shapes resemble the mix of the abstract and quasi-figuration in Feuz’s work and in his condensation of forms. As Dove observed the moon, sky, and stars, so Feuz watches the transformation of nature, yet with a distanced, cold gaze; while both artists extract the essential nature of the thing in order to invoke its beauty, Dove brings to his depictions a sensual connection with nature while Feuz imbues his paintings with an expansive detachment. This is due not only to the latter’s placement of items on the canvas, but also to his slick surfaces: His paintings are made with lacquer and enamel, and in this, they reference the hard, plastic surfaces of much contemporary technological culture, like so many of today’s candy-colored, sleekly designed computers. The high gloss bestows a certain artificial distance on the painting’s details, akin to museum objects or commercial products encased in glass vitrines, or images trapped behind the thick wall of a television screen. To elaborate this idea, Feuz covers the outer edges of some canvases in a neon pink that, when hung in the gallery, reflects off the white surface of the wall. This “light” appears to come from behind the canvas. The “hot” color feigns backlighting and adds an eerie, electrified quality to an already abnormal environment. The optical effect further estranges nature from “the natural,” enforcing instead a prevailing artificiality. The faux light proposes a three-dimensionality that it does not actually provide—it is a flat image “projected” behind a sheet of glass—and in so doing, undermines the true texture of the painted picture, flattening it and placing a space between the canvas and the viewer. Feuz, however, identifies a “seductive” quality in this distancing, which dissipates on approach to the painting as “one discovers many menacing details of elements growing, dying, like a strange genesis; plasmas, corollas, veins, like genetically manipulated organs or roots, flowers.”

Psychotropical corona, 2002, advances this play between the natural and man-made, specifically within notions of dangerous, anomalous, and abstract growth. Its imagery is primordial: Bulbous flower buds are composed of ringed sections of colors (creamy yellows, electric reds, forest greens), which are

informed by very small corkscrews and squiggles. Plant and organic imagery is interspersed with scrumbles of paint and banded color spots. Segmented sea green and golden stems snake across the canvases. The white star-shaped petals of a flower blend in so well with the flat background that they are rendered nearly invisible. Another plant form resembles the maze-like twists and folds of a cross-sectioned human brain gathered around a dark green cerebellum. With this protozoan landscape, Feuz manages to anatomize nature in a minute panorama, yet one that is enlarged to outsize proportions (some of the canvases from this series reach more than six and a half by four and a half feet, and many also span multiple canvases); he has amplified an intimate, microscopic perspective into a public, but no less sensitive, vantage, like a detailed and delicately produced billboard.

Feuz's most magnified works appear in his "Technicolor" series (2002-2003). Here, some sixty or seventy vertical bands of color streak horizontally across the canvas and wrap around the sides. The

lines themselves vary in width and often blend or overlap with those above and below, and title words like "primavera," "cayenne," and "sevilla," only begin to suggest the range of warm, bright hues he has employed. Feuz has once again focused on an image that appears at such a magnification that it has become pure abstraction. His plant images are transformed into blobs, coils, lumps, and lines and have become "mental" landscapes, "like the rhythm of music, like stream of consciousness. The passage from one form to the other is smooth, or rude, more or less transparent, which gives the painting depth." But this depth is more than a painterly illusion: The canvases themselves are quite thick—four to five inches—and as the colors envelope the edges and disappear around the back, the painting is no longer a flat representation but a three-dimensional object in itself. Thus, Feuz's perspectival strategy—his series of intervallic glances—has effected a specific and rounded vocabulary of picture making.

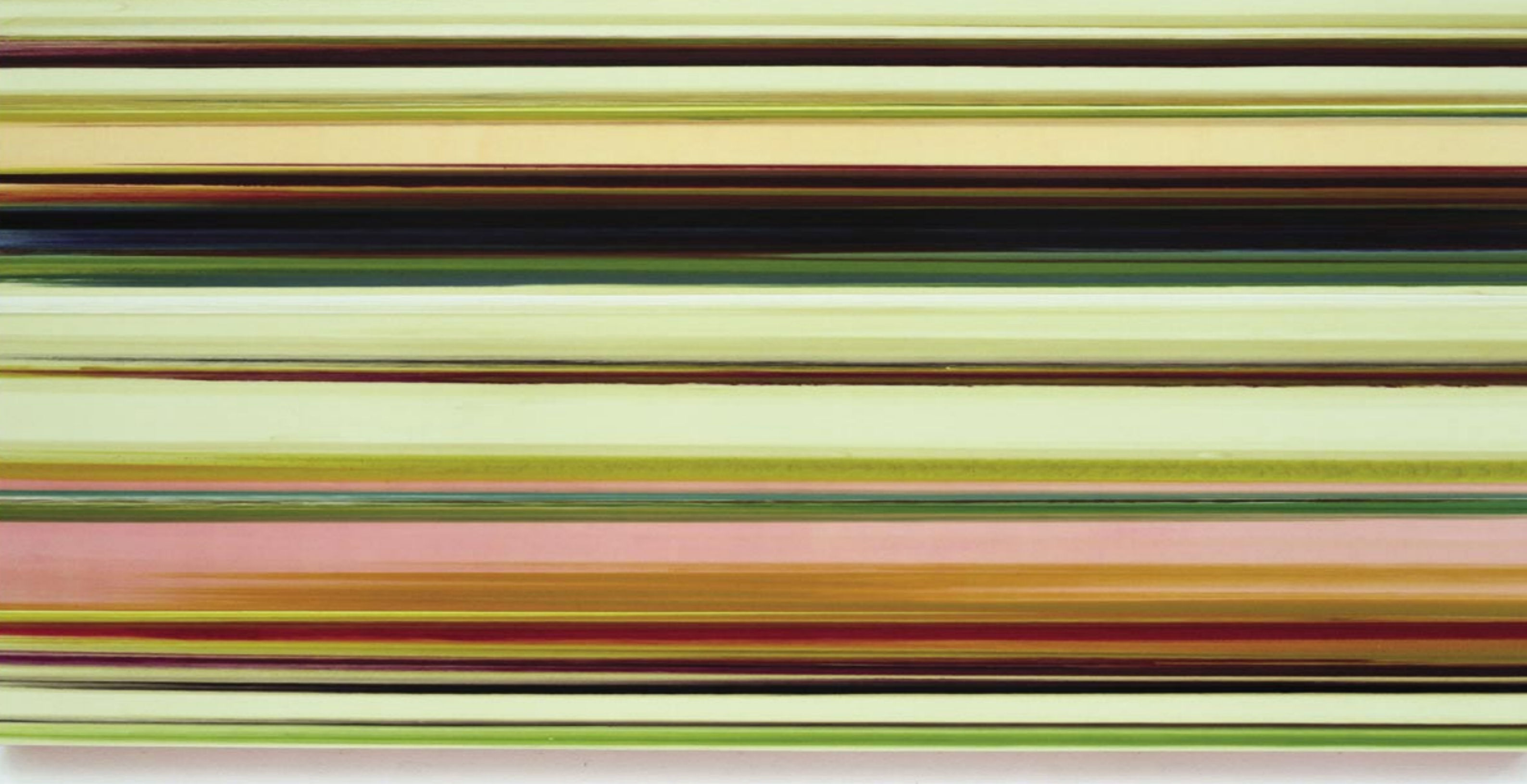
Nicole Rudick



PSYCHOTROPICAL IRIDIUM | LACQUER ON CANVAS | 150 X 120 CM | 2003

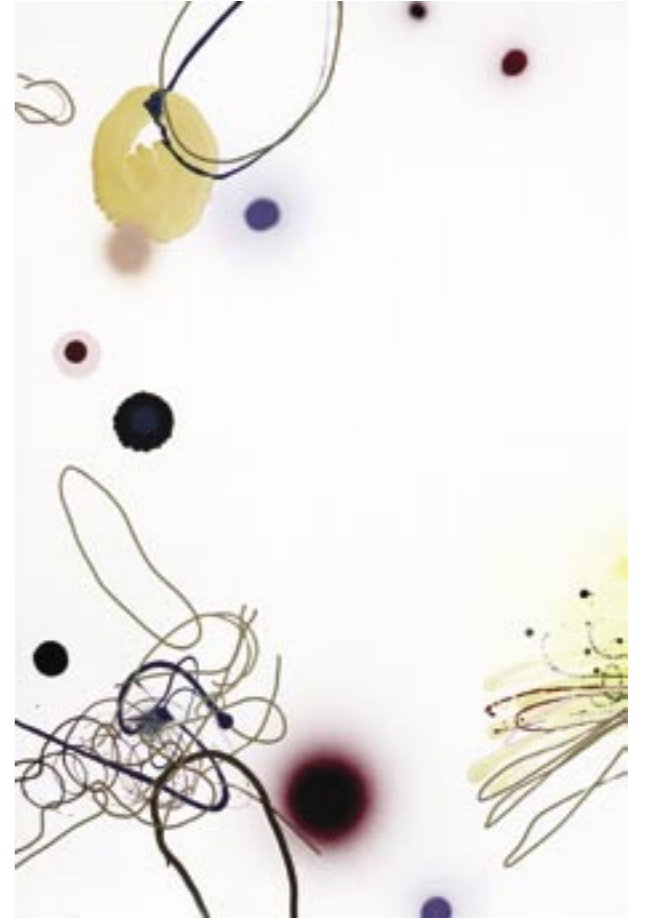


PSYCHOTROPICAL PANORAMA 2 (TRIPTYCH) | LACQUER ON LINEN | 238 X 570 CM | 2003





TECHNICOLOR TOTAL PANORAMA 2 (DETAIL) | LACQUER AND FLUORESCENT COLOUR ON CANVAS | 2003





PSYCHOTROPICAL OXALIDE | LACQUER ON CANVAS | 110 X 97 CM | 2003



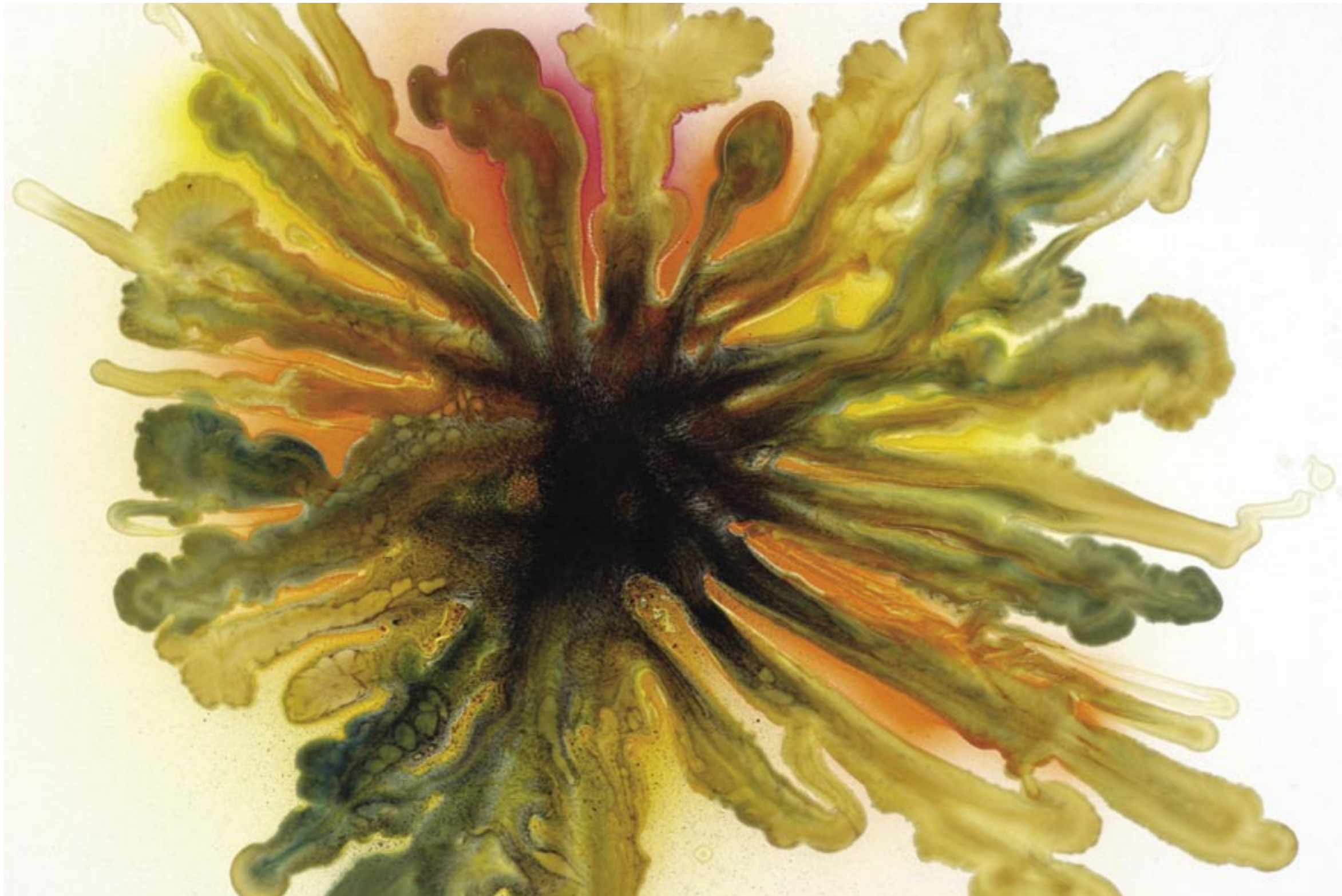
PSYCHOTROPICAL FANTASTIC 1 | LACQUER ON CANVAS | 120 X 100 CM | 2003



TECHNICOLOR LARGE PANORAMA 7 | LACQUER ON CANVAS | 100 X 250 CM (10 CM THICK) | 2003



PSYCHOTROPICAL PANORAMA 1 (DIPTYCH) LACQUER ON CANVAS | 196 X 536 CM | 2003



PSYCHOTROPICAL PANORAMA 1 (DETAIL) | LACQUER ON CANVAS | 2003





PSYCHOTROPICAL ZENITAL | LACQUER ON CANVAS | 120 X 100 CM | 2003



PSYCHOTROPICAL FANTASTIC 2 | LACQUER ON CANVAS | 120 X 100 CM | 2003



PSYCHOTROPICAL SELENA | LACQUER ON CANVAS | 54 X 85 CM | 2003



PSYCHOTROPICAL IDUNA | LACQUER ON CANVAS | 80 X 160 CM | 2003



From the outset, the human is missing from this work, which nonetheless rests on a painter's efforts. To the artist, it is a matter of rethinking and recreating in these broad-sized paintings vital forces of an emotional universe: shapes of plants, lines, spots, splashes and circular waves.

To begin, let us look at these plants, silhouetted on even backgrounds of the undetermined; not only do they develop slow movements in order to lull us, but they also take us back to the spaces of our imagination and to the origins of the universe and life.

Because they aren't real plants but rather imminent vegetable elements: bulbs, calyxes, and corollas which are supported by the reptilian oscillations of the stems which superimpose themselves, crossing, and penetrating as bewitching and mysterious organisms.

The creative power of the living is visible, and not the named and succeeded plant. Although similar, it is never *this* "plant" which is represented but rather *the* "plant". To naturalists it is the "natura naturans" that symbolises the artist's creative power, never the "natura naturata". The nature of the phenomenon matters more than what it produces. As for painting, this nature is operational in the world.

At first fascinated by the elegant shapes of the plants, the viewer may even believe he recognizes the real flowers of nature within the sumptuous but almost venous shades — he is seduced in his naturalist passion. Nevertheless, beyond the fascinating beauty of these colourful plasmas, of these organic elementary structures, which one senses one may have caught

a glimpse of elsewhere in the world of botany, an intense feeling of loneliness and of the abolition of friendliness emerges. It is as if one is witnessing the formation of the universe before the advent of human beings, of a world that ultimately ignores us.

It is an implicit philosophical journey, a painful surprise, an intense disarray, which fits into the modern tragedy. The awareness of things has not always been. Here, we are far from "Leonardo" or "Durer" to whom each blade of grass observed could be reproduced with a stubborn meticulousness.

No these morphogenetic organizations take us back to the constitution of organisms and even further and more profoundly, into the inorganic genesis.

[Marino Buscaglia](#)



THIERRY FEUZ

Born in Vienna, Austria in 1968

Graduate of the École Supérieure des Beaux-arts-HES, Geneva, Switzerland

Lives and works in Geneva, Switzerland

One Man Shows

- 2003 *Psychotropical*, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, New York
- 2003 *Psychotropical*, Galerie Une, Neuchâtel
- 2001 *Hypernatural*, Galerie Une, Neuchâtel
- 2001 *Paillettes*, Galerie Phat John, Geneva
- 1997 *Vamos a la playa*, Galerie de la Cité des Arts, Paris

Group Shows

- 2004 *Art Miami 2004*, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Miami
- 2004 *Palm Beach Contemporary 2004*, Kashya Hildebrand Gallery, Palm Beach
- 2003 *Herzliche Grüsse*, Galerie Une, Auvornier, Switzerland
- 2003 *Donation Jeunet*, Musée d'Art et Histoire, Neuchâtel
- 2003 *66th Biennale de la SAA*, Musée des Beaux Arts, La Chaux-de-Fonds
- 2003 *Salon*, Galerie artone, Zurich
- 2003 *Swiss Art Awards*, Halle 3, Messe, Basel
- 2003 *LASKO*, bh9, Curator: Gauthier Huber, Geneva
- 2003 *Arrêt de nuit*, bh9, Curator: Harm Lux, Geneva
- 2003 *Galerie Une*, Kunst 03, Zurich
- 2003 *Quoi de neuf chez les romands?*, Galerie artone, Zurich
- 2002 *EXPO UNE*, Galerie Une, Neuchâtel
- 2001 *Ma maison et mon jardin*, Fondation Samuel Buffat, Geneva
- 2001 *Chambre de Commerce*, Galerie Phat John, Geneva
- 2001 *65th Biennale de la SAA*, Musée des Beaux-Arts, La Chaux-de-Fonds
- 2000 *TDG — Back from Tamba*, ESBS, Geneva
- 2000 *4 jeunes peintres romands*, Galerie Une, Neuchâtel
- 2000 *Audit*, Espace Neubourg 5', Neuchâtel
- 1999 *64th Biennale de la SAA*, Musée des Beaux-Arts, La Chaux-de-Fonds
- 1999 *Galerie Lambelet*, Le Landeron
- 1999 *Dégâts / Défis*, Espace La Plage, Neuchâtel
- 1998 *Pour mieux penser et se dépenser*, Espace La Plage, Neuchâtel
- 1997 *63rd Biennale de la SAA*, Musée des Beaux-Arts, La Chaux-de-Fonds
- 1997 *Noël-Icônes*, Espace La Plage, Neuchâtel
- 1997 *Galerie de la Cité Internationale des Arts*, Paris
- 1997 *Peintres de l'Est*, Mairie de Paris
- 1996 *Être Étranger*, Hôtel de Ville, Neuchâtel et Holderbank

Awards

- 2003 *Atelier pour plasticiens*, Ville de Genève
- 2003 *Prix Théodore Strawinsky*
- 2002 *Bourse et échange Socrates*, Universität der Künste, Berlin
- 2001 *Prix de la SAA et de la Ville du Locle*, Biennale de la Chaux-de-Fonds

IMPRESSUM

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