

The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW; Daniel Richter -- 'The Morning After'

By Roberta Smith

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David Zwirner
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The strain of being a hot youngish painter, especially a male German one, shows in the New York gallery debut of Daniel Richter, who is 42 and lives in Berlin and Hamburg. The show's 11 large dystopic works continue the artist's distinctive palette of lurid fluorescents and toxic darks, his post-apocalyptic mix of images from art history and the daily press, and his polymorphous, watercolorish painting techniques (Munch to Polke to Poons) that reiterate the anything-goes mood of violence, threat and dislocation.

In the nearly life-size images here, rearing Delacroixesque horses do battle with one another or with packs of dogs; irradiated figures mass into mobs that may or may not be friendly; and a scantily clad circus performer in top hat and boots wends her way through a field of milling Rottweilers. Backgrounds alternate between shattered, often Munch-like trees or office-building plazas.

It is, as usual, all relative. Compared with examples of Mr. Richter's work seen in recent art fairs here and in Europe, the colors in these new paintings, all from 2004, are pedestrian. The ambiguities feel canned, suggestive of a few too many viewings of "Blade Runner" or "A Clockwork Orange." (An albino gorilla in a wheelchair? Another, a dark one, carrying a white chicken down some dungeon steps? Please.)

All but one of the paintings here are reproduced in a catalog that was published for a survey of the artist's work in Toronto. The catalog reproduces additional, earlier paintings, which look more interesting than the ones here. Mr. Richter's efforts also suffer in comparison with the work of some of his contemporaries, especially the faux-social realist style of Neo Rauch.

Perhaps the images in this exhibition remain too close to their photographic sources. An exception is the bearded blond nude, of undetermined sex, in "The Astounding Comeback of Dr. Freud," the craziest painting here.