

Ben Katchor

For New Yorker Ben Katchor, “living in an old city, at any moment you have one foot in the past”. His comics brim with the buildings, signage, furniture and overlooked wonders of an unnamed city, unmistakably inspired by the Big Apple, all in grey watercolour washes as if appearing through the mists of memory. After self-publishing *Picture Story Magazine* and being published in *Raw*, Katchor introduced a weekly strip in 1988: *Julius Knipl, Real Estate Photographer*. Camera around his neck, Knipl wanders between assignments, forever waiting for the light to improve and observing the constantly changing streetlife. Any of Knipl’s senses or the humblest of objects – a door buzzer, a newspaper weight, a water fountain – can spark him off on a fascinating, Python-esque reverie about its little-known significances; appropriately, ‘knipl’ means a little treasure or nest egg in Yiddish. Knipl’s clients are dreaming, doomed businessmen and obscure, worthy institutions, all improbable enough to be true: a radiator musician, a blanket rejuvenation plant, private nail-biting salons, the Municipal Birthmark Registry, the Misspent Youth Centre.

Katchor grew up amid this ferment of desperate small-time capitalism and utopian dreams. His wandering father, a Warsaw Jew, wound up in New York state, where he ran “a combination Communist hotel and chicken farm”, with schemes to convert it into an urban kibbutz and bring his revolutionary chicken coop ventilation system to Cuba and the Soviet Union. “As a kid I was taken to this East European Jewish world in New York and this became my world, all conducted in Yiddish – this for me was the real world.” His serialised graphic novel, *The Jew Of New York*, takes as its starting point the title of an imaginary play in 1830 based on the real-life proto-Zionist dreamer Mordecai Noah, whose mission to establish a homeland for all Jews on an island he had acquired near Buffalo in 1825 comes to nothing. From there, Katchor leaves historical fact far behind, as he spins out a dizzying web of interconnected characters adjusting to assimilation in the nineteenth-century New World.

This April, he is lecturing in Berlin and Hamburg to launch this book’s German edition. Katchor has found considerable success internationally, adapting his work into plays and operas, publishing full-colour comics in architecture monthly *Metropolis*, and in 2000 winning a \$500,000 MacArthur Foundation ‘genius’ award. Nevertheless, he still enjoys the way his strips operate as low-level commodities, buried among classified adverts in throwaway newspapers. Each week he sets up another storefront display as he plies his trade as “a middleman in the memory business”.



words **PAUL GRAVETT**



MILES ALDRIDGE

Doll Face, 2 April – 10 May, Hamiltons, London
www.hamiltonsgallery.com

In his acid-coloured images of lascivious lips, impossibly glossed models and hallucinogenic still lifes, photographer Miles Aldridge is plainly heir to some of the twentieth century’s enduring pop culture visionaries. David Lynch’s surreal stylisation and interest in mouths, the carefully staged elegance of Richard Avedon and the psychedelic graphic design of Alan Aldridge are all in there. Actually, he’s quite literally Alan’s heir. Though gobbling up references, Aldridge Jr uses his colour-drenched palette to create something uniquely his own, as his first UK solo exhibition at Hamiltons gallery this month is set to demonstrate.
Skye Sherwin



KAREN TANG

Great Britizens
9 April – 16 May
The Agency, London
www.theagencygallery.co.uk

Karen Tang’s irreverent sculptures, variously made from found objects, scrap wood and metal, deal with the flotsam and jetsam of London life. Referencing rave culture, the tired Hoxton scene and general urban disaffection with a palette that is part Day-Glo, part Lego, and a wicked sense of humour, her works strike a chord with our ragged city.

Tang first came to attention with a public sculpture at the Economist Plaza in 2006 (a mere two years after graduating from the Slade School of Art) that alluded to the area’s gentlemen’s clubs and gambling dens. Her upcoming show at the Agency’s new South London space shows the artist is equally comfortable dealing with London’s lumpen underbelly, often satirised in TV shows like *The Catherine Tate Show* (2004–) and *Little Britain* (2003–). Included in the show is *Pramface* (2008), a playful piece that outlines a grumpy potato-face in steel as well as serving as an actual pram.
Laura Allsop

Berlin

Rumours are flying. Each day brings news of another gallery scaling back operations, and talk of closure and insolvency. It's what happens in a crisis, but it is also a self-fulfilling prophecy, because even before the crisis hit, things weren't all that great. Occasionally it slips that the past two years weren't always as profitable as everyone claimed. But back then everybody at least saw the possibility of sharing in the boom. In an atmosphere of hope, just getting by is just about tolerable, but in an economic downturn, it becomes decidedly scary. Ironically, though, the smaller galleries appear less affected so far, as they rely on committed private collectors, who in Germany are still relatively untouched by the global crisis, and are continuing to buy work in the lower-to-medium-price range.

The global players in Berlin are faced with different problems, and some are luckier than others. Esther Schipper has just given up her separate offices and has had them fitted again into the private showrooms above the gallery, carrying on with business as usual. Arndt & Partner will be giving up their two spaces on Zimmerstrasse in June, to operate exclusively from their project space at Halle am Wasser, behind the Hamburger Bahnhof – where Bodhi just closed up shop, along with their galleries in New York, Singapore and Delhi, concentrating the business instead in Mumbai. Almost everybody has announced layoffs and is trying to cut administrative costs. There is little money available for the production of new work, so many artists' assistants are also job-hunting.

Even exhibition scheduling is losing its certainty. Eight days before *Accrochage* was due to open at Contemporary Fine Arts, the gallery couldn't provide a list of exhibiting artists – and this after pronouncing a 'small-small' approach to be 'counterproductive'. The schedule at Arndt & Partner is facing its own changes, for the simple reason that soon it will only have a third of the current space available. Galleries are playing it safe, as is Art Forum Berlin, who have just announced that they will be expanding their remit to include art back to 1960 in the next edition, in the hopes that it will attract a more established audience.

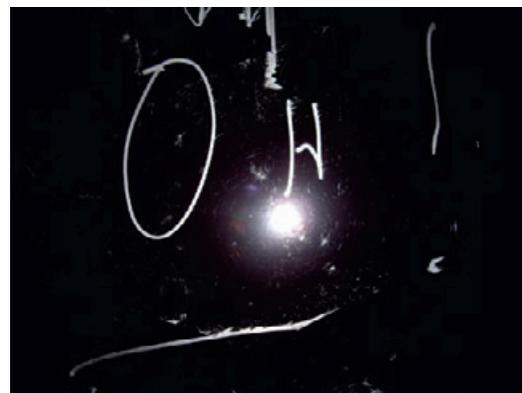
Yet there are encouraging developments: in preparation for the opening of their gallery KOW this summer, when the Arno Brandhuber-designed building on Brunnenstrasse is finished, Alexander Koch, Nikolaus Oberhuber and Jocelyn Wolff have begun a rapidly changing series of shows in their future storage space, including work by Tina Schulz, Chris Martin, Katharina Grosse and Clemens von Wedemeyer.

words **AXEL LAPP**

ROE ETHRIDGE

2 April – 2 May
Greengrassi, London
www.greengrassi.com

It's hard to keep up with Roe Ethridge. The photographer is known for being a protean conceptualist, slipping easily between commercial and art photography, referencing any number of painters or photographers with images that can be either lush or restrained. His subject matter is as boundless as his stylistic approaches – from shopping mall signage to glossy fashion portraits, landscapes or animals. However humdrum, when accumulated in a single show his oddly clustered images call for a double-take, raising questions about how meaning is created. A show of new work at London's Greengrassi is set to further the chase. *Skye Sherwin*



CLUNIE REID

Peek A De Boom, 3 April – 30 May,
Galerie Reinhard Hauff, Stuttgart,
www.reinhardhauff.de

Emerging artist Clunie Reid's collages are in-your-face, angry and fast-paced: images of consumer desire – the body beautiful, food, tourist attractions and so on – look as if they've been ripped from their context in a fit of pique before being gaffer-taped to the wall for a good grilling. Her interrogation often manifests itself in felt-tip pen, with the off-the-cuff irony, hurried crossing-out and bad spelling typical of graffiti in a public lav: 'Munny Munny Munny' is the incantation scrawled over a photo of banknotes; 'The aesthetics of fucked' runs the footnote to an image of a dancer superimposed over a postcard of Venice. Their tone chimes somewhere between indignation and a bit of a cheeky wind-up, but they have a certain aggressive energy it would be foolish to ignore. Reid has two solo shows coming up: at Galerie Reinhard Hauff, Stuttgart, this month and Southend's Focal Point in May. *Skye Sherwin*