

THE GLITTER AND THE GUTTER

THE WORK AND VISION OF ATTILA RICHARD LUKACS

by

PETER ADAM

I met Attila Richard Lukacs in 1995 in Berlin. I had come to the city I was born in to give the official annual *Berliner Lektion* at the Berlin International Theatre Festival. The title of my lecture was, 'In Search of My Lost Germany'. It dealt with my childhood, which I, the son of a Berlin Jew and a Christian mother, had spent in Hitler's Germany. Much of my conference raised the question of how Berlin, this melting pot of liberal ideas, emancipated sexuality and artistic innovations could fall under the devastating spell of the Nationalsocialists. How one man and his philistine ideology could stifle all artistic progress and turned the clock back. It seemed no coincidence that I met an artist like Attila, who was so fascinated by the two sides of Berlin, the liberating sexual and the dark authoritarian one.

Attila Richard Lukacs worked in a large vaulted space under the arches of the S Bahn, Berlin's public transport system. It was a stone throw from the Brandenburg Gate, the Reichstag all the vestiges of German's painful history. Thick pipes ran along the ceiling, the floor was splattered with paint. In one corner a heap of used jeans, leatherjackets, jockstraps and other paraphernalia of the leather scene. The rough brick walls were lined with huge. paintings from which fixed eyes starred at us from pale and shaved heads, as if to invite us to a discourse. They belonged to life size raunchy raucous skinheads, most of them naked or just wearing a jockstrap, acting out a plethora of ritualised sex. What spine-tingling fears did they harbour? The erotic charge that came from these extraordinary paintings was quite

intoxicating, and the loving and painterly way in which these scenes were rendered gave the feeling of an almost timeless homoerotic¹ longing.

As there was no window the large metal doors were open, giving us a view of a turkish vegetable and fruit market. From time to time one of the 'guest worker' peaked through the door and looked in disbelief at the naked skinhead model that was photographed in the middle of room. He must have been wondering what the attraction of this example of his worst² enemy, the image of extreme right wing politics, could possibly mean to the young painter who stood in the middle of this erotic theatre, kitted out with boots and army fatigues. Attila Richard Lukacs was photographing an object of his desire.

Attila was twenty-four years old when he moved to Berlin in 1986. It seemed to be the perfect place for a young artist, trying to escape the puritanical atmosphere of his native land. Here he found the freewheeling and intellectual atmosphere that had drawn writers like Christopher Isherwood, W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender or painters like Marsden Hartley and Charles Demuth in the first decades of this century to this town. They were in search for a sub-culture with working class lads, whose mixture of innocence and knowledgeable³ sexual curiosity promised titillating encounters. Berlin allowed them to be anonymous and to savour a cavalcade of experiences, sexual, intellectual and emotional ones with the sexual ones taken priority above the others. Attila too was attracted by the unselfconscious working class boys with little self-loathing⁴ or guilt and by a place in which the past and the presence ran so precariously together. In the Jungle of this still divided city Lukacs found the possibility to submerge himself in a wave of sexual pleasure and to capture them in his paintings.

Attila Richard Lukacs was born in Alberta in Canada in 1962. He grew up in Calgary a place of vast prairies and peaceful existence. His parents and moved there from Hungary after the 1956 uprising.

¹ Strikethrough "homoerotic"

² corrected from original „worse“ to „worst“

³ corrected from original „knowledgable“ to „knowledgeable“

⁴ corrected, inserted a hyphen

In outlook and work he is very European, 'sometimes I feel that I was born in the wrong country'⁵. The parents, although determined to become very Canadian passed on much of their Hungarian background and tradition to their three children. Attila and his brothers spent several summers in a small Hungarian village where 'geese strutted about and carts were drawn by horses'. Images of landscapes and village life similar then those photographed by the great Hungarian photographer André Kertész, are still with him. His first sexual encounter was with a gypsy man⁶ on the banks of a river⁷ 'the bulrushes forming a roof over our heads while the sun was setting'.

Lukacs is profoundly romantic and deeply influenced by his parents, especially his father, an amateur painter. As a boy, he used to watch him painting, and one day the father handed him a brush. He was six years old. The family relationship was close. There was little of the Anglo-Saxon feeling of puritanism or the shame one should feel towards one's body. His father painted many nudes, mostly female, that hung on their wall. Not that sex was much talked about, but the body in art was nothing to be ashamed off.

His father wanted him to go to ballet class and told him; 'there is nothing more beautiful than a male body'. This remark addressed from a 'straight' man to his six year old son marked him deeply.⁸ There are many homosexual images in Lukacs' work, and his sexual orientation are the wellspring of his work, but he does not want to be seen as a gay painter. 'I paint the world as I see it'. He likes to paint 'beautiful things'. The word beauty crops up several time in his conversation. Beauty for him is landscape and in the male body.

Attila had not much formal art education, or rejects most of what he was taught in art school. According to his own words, he dropped out before the first examen. So he did get much what he calls 'Mesopotamia'. But he had an enlightened school master in high school⁹, who told him what to look at, and gradually helped him to build¹⁰ up a knowledge. Some of the artist he looked at meant little at the time. They ranged from Kurt Schwitters

⁵ note from Attila: „age“ instead of „country“

⁶ note from Attila: „boy“ instead of „man“

⁷ note from Attila: „pond“ instead of „river“

⁸ note from Attila: 'It was in fact me listening to my father tell this to my younger brother'

⁹ note from Attila: "art school" and not "high school"

¹⁰ corrected from „built“ to „build“

to Max Beckmann or Chaim Soutine. But one painter did struck him with force; Gustave Moreau. The choice of the French symbolist, obsessed with ephebe-like, androgenous figures, is surprising for a young man, already much interested in muscular athletes. It were Moreau's transparent surfaces and the handling of details, 'the dusting of a lotus¹¹ in a corner' that fascinated Attila.' And until this day he studies the background of paintings always very intensely. The two most important things he learned was how to look at art and 'to see when something is beautiful'.

At twenty-one he moved to Vancouver and enrolled for two years at the Emily Carr College of Art and design. His first painting in 'the manner of Keith Haring, a Mickey Mouse with a hard on' did not go down too well, but it showed the impishness of his personality that still can charm many. When he seriously started to work he not only stood out for the daring scale and scope of his work, but also for his fierce independence. Still at college he had his first exhibition, provocatively called '*Prime Cuts*', with all its sexual innuendos. The gallery¹² had been transformed into a butcher's shop with handwritten signs advertised cheap cuts. On the walls hang aggressive thickly painted canvasses¹³ of dead meat assaulting the shocked onlooker. For those willing to probe into the human psyche these chilly and grisly paintings, announced the eye and the talent of an artist that would in the next ten years embark on a road challenging our pre-conceived notion of order or orderliness. For those who do not want to block their ears his voice is one of the most though provoking and inventive artist that came out of liberation of homosexual sensitivities.

It is not altogether surprising that meat was his first subject he painted. There are always a very concrete, plausible and often salutary reason that bring his painting forth. His father bred cattle and there were always¹⁴ carcasses in the garage. So Attila used to go there and began to paint them. The subject turned him on, and he remembered suddenly that his¹⁵ teacher had sent him to look at the work of Soutine, so he continued to paint meat,

¹¹ note from Attila: „rose“ instead of „lotus“

¹² note from Attila: insert „window“

¹³ note from Attila: „canvasses“ strikethrough

¹⁴ note from Attila: „sometimes“ instead of „always“

¹⁵ note from Attila: add in „high school“

not so much to show man's mortality or man as part of the decaying nature - like the tortured males of Francis Bacon, but in a much more direct reference to the homosexual use of the word. 'A nice piece of meat, blind meat (uncircumcised) or reference to tubesteak for cock' is part of his natural and unashamed sexualisation of the universe.

In 1985 Lukacs participated in a group show, *'The Young Romantics'*, a title which placed him squarely into a painting tradition of figurative painters, who favoured male nudes and landscape, like the English neo-Romantics like Keith Vaughan or John Minton. The surfaces of the paintings were described by a critic as heavily worked, scraped'. This too became one of the hallmarks of his work. Lukacs began to use quite early tar, a dark roofing cement, to build up surfaces and to 'give depth' to his whites. In the beginning the young painter did not quite knew how to use this material, which takes a long time to dry. 'I piled on oil paint, which was disastrous. The effect was a thick impasto gave his canvasses a dark and glutinous quality that matched the sombre message of his images. Now, influenced by Anselm Kiefer's surfaces, it is mostly used for its colour effect.

His Canadian painter friend, Michael Morris, had precede him to Berlin and became his greatest creative influence and sternest critic 'He is my heart really' Attila says. With Berlin history came the encounter with different past. 'In Canada we had one hundred years of art¹⁶ and suddenly there was a country with several thousand years of art and civilisation. It was intoxicating. Lukacs inspirations come mostly from the past history, although he likes many contemporary painters. He loves looking at Rembrandt's sketches and etchings. In his work we can detect traces of Baldung Grien, Matthias Grünewald and many Renaissance artists. He cites Eugène Delacroix and Théodore Géricault, George Stubbs and Thomas Gainsborough 'I look at my paintings and I think I am not a moder painter, I belong to a different century'.

The century he wants to belong to is the late eighteenth and nineteenth century the time of the Romantics and neo-classicism with the re-discovery of the heroic nude of antiquity and the homoerotic longings of the Renaissance.

¹⁶ note from Attila: „history“ instead of „art“

His own work can span centuries and styles. The diptych 800 Mike¹⁷ from 1988 is Lukacs reading of the archangel Michael.

The right hand painting is based on an etching by Klinger or Hofmann der *deutsche*¹⁸ *Michael*. The painting¹⁹ on the left was based on an engraving²⁰ by the Renaissance painter Carracci.

Lukacs has learned how 'to plunder' the art of the past. 'I am not really interested in the history of art, it is simply²¹ a rich fund from which to steal'. He loves browsing through art books- he does not much care for the 'distractive museum's visits', preferring the more quiet study of a book. This almost flippant attitude is not the whole story. Anybody who has ever gone with him to a museum knows that this is only half of the story. Attila, easily bored, usually impatiently flits from room to room until his attention is caught. Then transfixed he can stand in front of a Bonnard or a Francis Bacon and scrutinise the surface like under a magnifying glass. 'I can see how he did this', he usually pronounces, 'I can do that too'.

Sometimes the impact of an exhibition can be direct and over bearing. He remembers how as a student he saw a large exhibition of Max Beckmann. 'I was overwhelmed by it. He more than anybody else taught me to paint the figure' I set out to work immediately and painted my first human figure and this has never left me.'

Not burdened by history, Lukacs is openly derivative, appropriating what he needs, 'I sometimes like an apple or a bird'. 'I am a great copier he admits, ' my friend calls me the artistic xerox machine, I am like a sponge, soaking up messages', But Lukacs is also a very skillful assimilator, a quality which gives his work a breathtaking inventiveness. His strength lies in his capacity to assimilate in order to create something that is entirely his own. This is the recognition and acceptance of the contradiction in human nature and in life.

¹⁷ note from Attila: „1-800 Mike“ instead of „800 Mike“

¹⁸ note from Attila: add “Heilige”

¹⁹ note from Attila: „panel“ not „painting“

²⁰ note from Attila: „painting“ instead of „engraving“

²¹ corrected according to notes

Berlin, with its pioneering modernity and the always looming past, became a great inspiration and produced in the young Canadian painter a feverish desire to paint, that has not abated. During the first years in Berlin he sometimes worked twelve to fifteen hours a day.

Much inspiration comes from life that surrounds him. Lukacs collects anything and he loves people who collect. He is fascinated by objects that have accumulated history and masses of incidence. He is especially proud of a large collection of crucifixes, as the image of spiritual and bodily sufferance.

His largest collection are of sexy photographs, mostly cut out from porn magazines. He calls it his 'pornography factory'. Highly sexed these images bombard him daily, urged him on to paint. Once he begins to paint 'the demons die down, fall asleep. I ban them in my work.'

Most of his canvasses are very large, several meters long and high. This has not so much to do with the heroic scale he sometimes attempts, although he likes to be seen in the tradition of the large story telling paintings of the nineteenth century. But²² the choice is also a matter of composition. He feels comfortable with the large scale, small canvas frighten him 'as the border always seem to lurk'. New kind of subjects usually call for new kind of style and techniques. He enjoys the battle with a new medium and tires quickly when he becomes too accomplished. Patience is not one of the qualities that come to mind when one thinks of Attila. Some canvases are like brutally scarred fields others like a magical lunar landscape in which luminous greys are next to touches of pink and purple. Over the years the thick impasto paintings have made room for thinner colour surfaces. He usually puts down a field of colour, 'leaving very little room for mistakes', and fills in the details. He is an expert in organizing large surfaces on which forms and subject are vigorously interactive.

Lukacs paints usually series of paintings, grouping them under an overall theme, Sometimes they are planned with a pre-determined theme, but often they just 'happen'. 'I just paint away and a series just happen or later by looking at my paintings I discover that they are related, linked by a theme or a way of painting. Sometimes out of a series another series is borne.'

²² corrected according to notes

He often works on several paintings at the same time, moving from one to the other, sometimes up to ten paintings. There are technical reasons for this as oil paints need time to dry, but this method also it sharpens his senses, 'It is good to let a painting rest, just as it is important to know when a painting is finish'.

Some works are painted very quickly and finished in a day or two. At other times he lets a work rest for weeks, before attacking it again. Many paintings are the result of quite complicated experiments. He loves what he calls the 'road of discovery', the kind of paint he uses, what kind of brush, the precise timing for letting the paint dry, 'all that gives me such a buzz'.

Mercurial by nature his power to challenge and to inspire has not abated, and even if there is a slightly calculated side in his constantly changing work, but one is amazed in the range of his inventiveness. 'Painting is my vocabulary, that's the way I express myself, I communicate. Of course over the years my vocabulary has become much richer'. In the past, much of his work was the result of spontaneity. 'In my early days I had no concept, I just let go and let the painting develop, letting loose and learning from my mistakes'. The mistakes were part of his road to discovery. Nowadays, with increasing knowledge about his abilities and the actual material, Lukacs plans much more before he embarks on a work. He sometimes wonders if his greater skills have diminished his direct response, a kind of 'innocence' he much cherishes. 'In the past I discovered so many of what I call "my little tricks", now I still discover things, but this is not as often'. Attila wonders if his greater awareness has not taken some of the joy out of it, the joy that overcame him when he discovered that the paintings constantly pushed him into new directions and forced him to conquer new frontiers. 'It is part of what I call "discovery" not knowing what comes out. I could of course tread the same safe path, but that would bore me'. Avoiding the danger of too formalized paintings is always with him. They look confident, but maybe a challenge is missing, he admits freely, always being his sternest critic.

Not that all surprise is gone. A child-like joy overcomes him when he discovers what he calls 'beauty'. 'It's better than any drug, my kind of drug, the feeling when a painting is

finish and you know that it is good. There are times when I am like a junky to be that high', but the now the high comes less and less, but when it happens it is still very intense'.

The intense physical relationship with his work is not unusual. Many painters know that the act of painting is like love making. The paintings to him are like lovers, he jealously guards, covets, even lust after. In the early days Lukacs did not want to let them go, refused to sell them. I wanted to be surrounded by them. Attila sometimes masturbate over his paintings, 'a thing I do not do very often outside my studio'.

'I am at the best when I am absolutely honest with me. Self-critical, Lukacs is much concerned how his subject translate. Subject, material or form can all defeat and artist. Attila does not like failure as an artist and as man. 'I do not like to be beaten by a canvas'. He never throws out a canvas. He sometimes strips it down to its surface, furiously scraping away the paint. 'Sometime you can kill a painting, but you can also bring it back to life and the mistakes can be turned around. The memory of the paint that remains, just visible faintly discernable is a very charming effect. Sometimes when I look at a painting thinking that it can't get any worse, I can see salvation and I can really loosen up and let go and this pushes me to get to it anew and with fresh vigour'.

This intoxicating relationship with his craft is always with him, firing him to enter new territories. Lukacs is like a hunter always in search of new prey.

The two re-current subjects in his work are skinheads and monkeys. For a while skinheads have populated his canvasses. Lucas is well aware that they, like his other subjects, the marines, provoke violent reactions. They are, to say the least innocent and ambivalent. It is this paradox that attracts him. Their blend of raw physicality, arrogance and aggressiveness was foremost a sexual attraction for Attila. 'I thought them so very sexy, they always hung out in the beer halls hustling for drink, and all the older faggots bought them beer, and I did the same'. Attila dressed in boots, bomberjackets and shaved his head. 'The other faggots looked at me as I was crazy'. They were very much the odd men out, another reason for Lukacs to be interested in them. 'They were outcasts. A way to get near them was to photograph or paint them a sneaky way to get them into my studio and strip them'. It was not the first or the last time for him to turn a sexual attraction into an artistic

one. His art became a substitute for sex, vested with the same thrill and intensity. When he began painting skinheads their defiant stance in attitude and dress was not at all fashionable. Then on the wings of pop music and fashion they became all the rage, not just in the gay world. Now he has left them behind 'they became such a cliché, just another uniform'.

The pair of paintings, *Die jungen Spartaner fordern Knaben zum Kampf heraus*, the young men from Sparta challenging boys to fight, was painted in 1987/8. It was inspired by antique frescos in the Museum in Berlin.²³ There were influences by Degas and Caravaggio, but they were in the back of his mind not in front, 'I did not²⁴ consciously plan this painting. All the things that I see are stored somewhere and sometimes they come into play, but I usually only realize that afterwards.' It is convenient for people to find art historical link when they see a fuck painting, it sort of makes it O.K. for them.'

The diptych is one of Lukacs' favourite form, as two or three painting hung together 'feed on each other'. This is evident in these paintings which must be seen together. The challengers on the left are grouped together in the right corner, as if they are ready to leave the canvas, the group on the right are pressed against the opposite corner as if they have already been pushed into a corner. With this straightforward compositional device the painter has created dynamic and energy. One does feel that the Spartans are pushing forward. The five naked heroic skinheads take on a strident position. They stand in front of a richly painted red background with the insignias Lukacs borrowed from Bauhaus designed²⁵ Nazi emblems. The sickle and the spade are also insignias, one pointing to communism the other to National Socialism. The panel on the right also features a group of five skinheads, but they are half dressed with all parts of their 'uniform'; tea shirt, bomber jacket, jockstrap and Dock Martens. The whole mood is in stark contrast to its twin. The luminous naked bodies on the left are replaced by darker ones. The bright red of the background has been replaced by sombre grey and black tone. The strident movement is

²³ note from Attila: Sentence strikethrough

²⁴ note from Attila: „not“ is strikethrough

²⁵ corrected according to notes

opposed by men huddling in a corner in defiant poses. Where does Attila's sympathy lie in the light or in the dark group? One has to presume in both.

Despite his reservation it is tempting to place Lukacs' paintings in some context, if only to come to an understanding of his very complex work that can be seen on many levels the sexual, the emotional one. To remove the historical aspects reduces them too much to images of personal fantasy.

The composition of the right painting was inspired by Caravaggio's card players and the men are reminiscent of the realistic paintings of Russian workers from the pre constructivist period. The one on the left is part of a canon of nude men standing together in a fight. Since Antiquity the image of fighting and dying soldiers was a favourite subject. Strong male bonding occurred in the army with all its possibilities, sexual, emotional and intellectual. In Greece the older lover, the *eromenos* and his beloved *erastes* were often posted together in battle to spur each other on. The cult of heroic love among young men was wide spread. The Greek geographer Pausanias declared that the strongest army would be one composed entirely of male lovers. Sensual male nudes, often in fight or riding naked on horses was a much prized motif in the Renaissance as an excuse to display male nudity. Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Pollaiuolo, Mantegna all took up the theme.

Lukacs' are rhetorical paintings in which the men are not just an image of sexual fantasies, but elevated to a heroic state. By substituting the women in the original fresco with men, he up-dates the old heroic subject of the battle of lovers by reflecting in his the fascist and Russian propaganda paintings. The nudes are reminiscent of the heroic nudes of Arno Breker or Joseph Thorak, or the other official artists of the art of the Reich. The background is a tapestry of Nazi insignia. Lukacs fascination with the propaganda of totalitarian regimes is not a fascination with their inhuman system, as it is sometimes insinuated- but a fascination with their formal language, which he bends to serve his own painterly purpose.

Critics of his work are too often preoccupied with Lukacs' subject matter. They point out his fascination with the skin head, often ignoring and the way the work is executed.

The subject for Lukacs is only a pretext for painting. The male body might be the wellspring, but the actual act of painting is what fires his imagination.

He savours the male nude and surrounds him with exquisitely painted accessories; a pair of Doc Martens, a flower or a tattoo. These are more than a decorative device, they enter into discourse, underlining the nudity of the sitter and give out strong messages. They are also signature tunes or attributes of belonging to a particular group. One of Lukacs' great influence has been the Renaissance painter Caravaggio. The way he painted what Attila calls the 'street trash' of his time was a special attraction. But the way Caravaggio adorned his sitters with objects was the most striking things for the young Canadian painter. 'He painted the dirty fingernails but with the same love he also painted a rose, a bowl of fruit or a bee'. The titillating effect which the Italian painter achieved by placing his boys at the edge of his canvas at reach of them and the way he dressed them in loose garments with ribbons as if to invite the viewer to undo them, has also been influential. Lukacs' figures too seem to tease the onlooker, soliciting him to grab and to undress them. The viewer thus become the voyeur. This invitation is also underlined by another device. At least one of Lukacs figures always looks straight at us, summing us to an eye contact.

Lukacs' paintings are allegories of yearning. He is not interested in passing on a 'social message'. His world is intensely private, he does not subscribe to a skinhead ideology. His skinheads, like all his men, are simply an expression of his lust. Like the heroes of Jean Genet the criminal, the outcast become his object of desire.

By lifting them out of their often drab lives and he elevates them to regal icons. In the painting *True North* the skinhead has become an aristocrat. Painted in the manner of eighteenth century noblemen, modelled on Gainsborough, they stand poised, arrogant and narcissistic in an idealized, arcadian landscape that was inspired by Claude Lorrain. The dog in one of the paintings was 'borrowed' from George Stubbs.²⁶ The material used is also 'noble and precious, glossy oil, gold paint.

²⁶ note from Attila: this sentence is wrong

True North painted in 1989 in Berlin was a series of four paintings and a table, with real shoes²⁷. It was exhibited in Berlin and New York. The model for all four paintings was Alex, a boy that had come from the East, and became Attila's favourite model, appearing again and again in his work sometimes as a muscled labourer in *E-Werk* or as a more elegant figure in a kilt in *Golden Alex* (1990), the monkey sitting demurely at his feet. The real boots were Attila's, thus fusing his own dreams with those of his subjects.

Lukacs shares his fascination with many gay men as sign of rough maleness. Each painting was also a portrait of the most famous Doc Martens and carried the name of one of the four models of boots: 'Hightop', 'Highlander', 'Blackburn' and 'Southerner'²⁸. The landscape took its clue from the name - Blackburn is also the name of an area renowned for many coal mines. The boots underlined the fetishistic character of their attire, but also highlighted the fastidiousness of their bearer, whose sole and price possession was a pair of boots. Lukacs was thus dismantling the common perception of skinheads as nasty, rough and untidy. Boys grown up in poverty and sordidness rise above their wretched existence to become Gods. By canonizing them, Lukacs hopes to alter the perception of them. The painter- and the Romantic- has given them their dignity. 'I wanted people to see skinheads the way I see them as creature of great beauty and pride'. Lukacs' skinheads are of a defiant arrogance, which he admires and shares with them. The title came from the Canadian National anthem: 'True North strong and free'.

The reoccurring subject of the monkey came from looking at a painting by Pieter Breughel. At first the animal was just like any other 'prop' like a flower. It was a creature that was not like a human being, but still close to one. Gradually it became a powerful symbol in Lukacs' work. The monkey became the jester, the sooth-sayer, the dispenser of truths and wisdom. Reading about the role of the monkey in the iconographical tradition as the artist chained to his art, Lukacs adopted him as an image for himself. It was a good way of bringing himself into discourse without doing it too openly. 'Instead using an obvious self-

²⁷ note from Attila: "boots" instead of "shoes"

²⁸ corrected according to notes

portrait, I could hide behind the monkey as an observer of the world'. But more important the monkey was able to indulge in fantasies and sexual plays the artist dreamed about.

From 1990 the monkey became a very important part in his oeuvre. Lukacs painted a whole series of monkey paintings based on Persian miniatures.²⁹ The rather flat paint is much thinner and the composition is sparse. Following their Persian inspiration the paintings are illustrative and make much use of nature in form of plants. In the cartoon-like renderings, sometimes with graffiti like inscriptions, Lukacs acknowledges the influence of the early paintings by David Hockney, whose work he much admires. This is very evident in pictures like, *Piss'n Boots* (1990) with its ironic inscriptions: '36 Boys', or 'Adei skinheads'³⁰. The use of graffiti for both Hockney and Lukacs are often taken from lavatory walls, a liberating device to keep the painting from becoming too 'refined' and too 'arty'. a technique much used by pop artist to keep their world away from the fine art notion.

Many of Lukacs' scraped down paintings resemble walls, and he enjoys taking the handle of a brush or a screwdriver to etch in crude messages.' It brings the painting down, it makes the painting more tangible, reflecting my life style. The glitter and the gutter. I exist in both section³¹.

The glitter and the gutter. In his last exhibition in New York there was a sculpture made from elegant Hermes boxes and jockstraps. 'My two objects of desire, one an expensive luxury, the other one also a luxury but easily available, both insinuating precious dreams'.

There is only one direct self portrait of Attila. The *Lazy Künstler and the Well Travelled Monkey* (1995). It shows an idealized, languorous artist in repose, that could be modelled on a painting by one of the Tischbeins or any other Romantic painters. The landscape is finely painted lush arcadian garden. He is watched by a monkey richly dressed in an eighteenth century frock coat of red velvet. The artist watching himself. Attila loves to dress up in expensive elegant clothes as well as in tatty jeans and boots. The glitter and the gutter. 'This is not a romantic vision of myself' he retorts, 'it is a dark vision, it's very much about my headspace'. The rough-neck and the dandy always live side by side.

²⁹ note from Attila: added "on Italian frescoes"

³⁰ corrected according to notes

³¹ note from Attila: „section“ strikethrough

The monkey has become his alter ego. The painter has become the monkey in his relationship to the world. In some he is just the observer in others he gets involved in the action, roving freely, doing all sort of things, 'naughty things like shitting, pissing or drinking piss'. Lukacs finds many of his paintings hilarious. The irreverent monkey becomes the homo ludens, man the player. The painter can allow the monkey to do all sort of things that are considered unseemly. 'We do piss and shit, but of course this is not considered a suitable subject for art'. Of course it is the Flemish paintings that gave him the monkey we can see men urinating.

In one of the monkey paintings *Boss* (1989) one monkey performs a blowjob on the other. There is also a small collage inspired by a Gerhard Richter landscape. Lukacs likes the medium of collages, but they rarely find their way into his paintings. They help him to keep the paintings 'loose' and are a sort of personal exercise. He mostly keeps them for himself or as presents for his friends.

In another one, *Danger* (1988) a monkey is suspended from the ceiling, while another one sits next to a grate. The inscription reads 'Vorsicht Danger' (careful danger) The name of one of his German boyfriend was Danger and the painting is an homage to that relationship, with bottles of champagne they always drank in a personal ritual, and the inscription 'softly softly as a tribute to the love they shared.

His paintings of groups of nudes are erotica on a large even heroic scale. The pictures of Lukacs are not always true portraits, some a composite images taken from several of his friends or 'borrowed' from magazines. There are tight butts, large cocks, bulging muscles floating above organic matter. Reality and fantasy³² mix freely; the portrait of his present lover, Claus³³ is made up of his friend's face and the body of Kevin Kostner.

The impact of his paintings is direct and intensely physical, a feeling that derives from the subject and the way they are painted. The density of the paint reflects the urgency of the topic. Gold leaf mixed with tar. Large monochrome surfaces alternate with detailed and finely tunes areas. Lukacs nudes have more to do with the nudes of Beckmann than

³² corrected

³³ corrected according to notes

with the American tradition of realistic painting of handsome and well-endowed men like those by Paul Cadmus, Jarred French, Rockwell Kent or George Wesley Bellows, all attracted by the athlete and wrestlers.

Most of Lukacs' figures are life size. They are of the same size as the onlooker, which allows then to physically identify with the men on the canvas. Lukacs does not like to reduce them as this creates a barrier between his subjects and the onlooker. He does want us to forget that we are looking at a painting. 'I like to give them the feeling that they could step into the canvas and take their place and share their body language'. In this way he becomes part of the scenario.

Many of his painting deal with the subject of domination, violence, bondage, discipline. Lukacs is fascinated by the ritual of S and M practices, the playing out of strength. He would never paint torture inflicted by an enemy on an unwilling subject. Being a man with belief in decorum, to paint political torture for him is ugly and 'in bad taste'. In Lukacs' paintings the victim is the accomplice, a willing collaborator, 'he is in control, using the scenario for his gain'. It is an exchange not an enforced punishment. The painter's bodies are subtexts for his own eroticism, imagined and lived out. Domination is part of this game, doubly exciting because it is reversible, can be stopped, called upon at any time.

Attila Richard Lukacs' work is often described as 'provocative' an accusation he strongly denies. 'I never set out to provoke anybody, I want people to have their own reaction.' Lukacs is like a stage director who creates a certain scenario inviting people to react, but he does not want to manipulate their emotion. 'My painting are not message paintings. I present my own reading of the world, people can make of it what they want, I just show them the world I see it.' The function of an artist is basically to be a camera. Sometimes I use a wide angle lens, sometimes extreme close ups and sometimes a rose tinted lens. There is no doubt that Attila Richard Lukacs is one of the most accomplished chronicler of present day gay life. To leave out a tattoo with a swastika would be a denial. 'I want to confront people with reality, I do not make moral judgements, people have to make their own assumptions. '

It is this private nature of his work that make it so difficult to pin these multi-layered canvasses down. He shuns to 'interpret too much the meaning of his work. 'It is to the public to do that'. Being an instinctive painter, it takes him sometimes a long time to understand a body of works. 'Sometimes a long time after I finished a painting or a series I discover what it is all about.' Attila sees life as quest. 'Why, always seem to pop up' he explains, 'I have a very curious nature, the riskier is the more interesting it gets. And that goes for my life and my art/ I do not like to run away from challenge. No artist should do that. If you stay with what you are, secure, the act of creation ends.'

There is no denying that much of Lukacs' work exudes an air of willful defiance in Lukacs enjoys the reputation of the bad boy of painting. His open stances defy conventions. Like his sitters he likes to taunt even to assault us, the onlooker. This feeling is summed up in *Four Small Works* from 1990. Four paintings with the words; 'Love', 'Hate', 'Fuck', 'Kill' written on it in large black³⁴ letters. Underneath skinheads are defyingly giving the Nazi salute and the 'up yours sign'. Carousing and bear drinking they carry a banner³⁵ that reads: 'Deutschland'.

While working living in Berlin Lukacs also worked on his most American body of works. The Military³⁶ Series, group of paintings on the subject of the Cadets from military academies³⁷. They were painted in 1990 What are we to make of these stern deadpan faces that star at us? In their nationalistic and jingoistic stances, they are looking old-fashioned and dated in their frozen poses, with the American flag.

Is it a nostalgic look at a world in which order reigns? The cold realistic way they are painted is not the language of a romantic. These are chillingly de-humanized images of catalog marionettes in polished brass and boots. The paint is cold and slick, like the magazine³⁸ photos they emanate. Is it a critical or an admiring look at repression, in which

³⁴ note from Attila: "dark red" instead of "black"

³⁵ note from Attila: "football scarf" instead of "banner"

³⁶ corrected according to notes

³⁷ corrected according to notes

³⁸ note from Attila: "catalogues" instead of "magazine"

the individual is anilide by the group? There is no love making, no bodily secretion as in his other works. Even the cherish icons of America's social and cultural life, the celebrating of mass, the making of music, the playing in sport arena, are synchronized and dehumanized under the uniform or the flag. Is it the child-like jester in Lukacs who simply tells us, boys will be boys? Is it a critical look at the absurdity of military might at a time when America was preparing for the Gulf war? But then when he painted them the war had not started and only when they were shown did it suddenly become an issue. Who does he think of when did the picture of the swearing in ceremony, that so ominously reminds one of the 'Blood Oath' ceremonies of Hitler's SA men. *Sic Semper Tyrannis* is the title. Is this a parody or a declaration of love? As usual Attila Richard Lukacs raises questions, unsettling and disturbing ones. As always a range of possible motivations are at the roots of this work. It is possible that a bit of all of the above came to play and Attila the artist with the double-sided Janus head might be damasked as Medusa, the person with several heads. This is Lukacs at his most subversive, undermining constantly his own subject-matter. Lukacs is once more the camera the chronicler. 'This is what I saw' he seems to say. For each of us to make with it what we want.

Of course there are several practical and plausible answers for the *raison d'être* of this series that forces us to shift our response. They certainly are another foray into the male psyche. The building of another mythology of maleness with lived-out rituals, marked boundaries in which only the imagination is allowed to take on wings. Like the skinheads and he workmen they become powerful players in Lukacs' theatre of seduction. Lukacs' characters are beset by dreams that hold them in a nightmarish grip. In this series the artist was once more seduced by its subjects and the way to tackle it in a painterly way. For the painter in constant search for improvement, they was yet another way of discovering how to paint the human figure, to make it more real. The way these canvasses are executed show again another skill of this painting virtuoso and are a sure proof of his technical skill. The photo-realistic style was dictated by the subject and based on the many magazines of marines³⁹. Attila had collected from early youth on. As a child he longed to go to a military academy, but his father refuse to give in to his ardent wish. In high school he cut out 'all

³⁹ note from Attila: "military academy catalogues" instead of "magazines of marines"

those fantastic pictures, jerk off material. For Attila the man, *Military Series* is also about yearning. They are about bullying and humiliation. Lukacs' obsession with violence stems from the American myth of it, but the fascination with the man in uniform and with the ritual of admission and domination is an old and universal one.

Attila kept the photos of cadets in his drawer and one day flipping through them he thought 'I paint them'. It was another demon that had to be exorcised. This took some courage, but I do not let things slumber in a corner of myself. This would be self denial'. In his fantasies he likes to be dominated to a point that he does 'not have to make any decisions'. In real life it is just the opposite. In his studio he holds the reins tight. He expects friends and assistant to fall in with his moods and wishes, and one feels that it would be unwise to cross him. It is the head of Janus again and he realizes that his ultimate dream does not fit into his life style. 'It is utopian'.

The catalogue to the exhibition at the Dianne Ferris Gallery in Vancouver had the following slogans written on gold background:

HOW TO LEARN HOW TO LABOUR HOW TO LIVE

The frontispiece showed five smiling marines in their uniforms surrounding a placard;

Welcome to Valley Forge
where the finest young Men attend the
Finest Military Academy and
Junior College
in the
United States

The catalogue is dedicated to 'New Boys'. Lukacs forces us to look at another species that embody for him manhood, male bonding, *Dance a manly Dance* is the title of one painting, the image of four sportsmen. The men in this new series of yearning are dressed, it is the uniform with all its implication of conformity, authority and synchronised order. PATRIOTISM LEADERSHIP DISCIPLINE is another headline.

The Eternal Teahouse was done for the XIth Documenta in Kassel of 1992. Lucacs had constructed a Berlin pissoir, as an homage to a dying out specie of the homosexual landscape.⁴⁰ The inside was decorated with four large painting representing the Four Seasons. They had an Arcadian feeling with plants, like horse chestnuts in bloom. The pissoir as a paradise. Each picture carried the image of a nude young men standing in a rich and beautiful landscape. The model for all four was his friend Alex.⁴¹ There were Christian and profane references abound. 'Springtime' is a Christ-like figure with a woodpecker, 'Summer' a beautiful Adam -like figure, feeding a snake, 'Autumn a man holding hammer and sickle, symbols of harvest and communism and Winter kissing a skeleton, representing the time when things die down.

Laurel wreaths and musical notes on the roof declared it as a temple of the muses, a place where poetry reigns. A meeting place in a fin-de- siècle atmosphere, heightened by the use of precious paint and material; gold, glass, enamel that reflected the light in its shiny surfaces. On the top of the room were metal grills, based on Japanese screens. The signs for deutschmark, francs, yen and dollars above the entrance were not only a reference to the internationality of the pissoir, but also hints at the commercialisation of sex.

The fascination with the public lavatory is of course wide spread in homosexual circles. They were the greatest cruising places in my student years' attila recalls, 'some people thought that were sordid, but far from it. They are places of worship' the pissoir as a cathedral, sacred places of homosexual sensibilities were high mass of sexualities are celebrated, might be a shocking concept to the morally hypocritical and high minded, but they are in a strong tradition from de Sade to Jean Genet.

Lukacs also painted a homage to the cruising spot of his youth in a painting that shows several urinals with two young men in shiny red boots cruise each other, a painting of strong suggestive erotic power and great beauty. They are adoration pictures of homosexual life, but I do not want to be seen as homosexual painter, who paints homosexual scenes. These are simply pictures of life, as I see it, live it. For me they are nothing special, they are scenes of old school fagdom as old as man kind'.

⁴⁰ note from Attila: added "and Berlin Landscape"

⁴¹ note from Attila: wrong, "a model from the Bahnhof Zoo" instead of Alex

The elegiac longing for Arcadia as a lost paradise is also evident in another very important body of works. The *Garden Series*, a group of fourteen⁴² large paintings were all done in 1991 and 1992. They grew out of a period of intense activity in which he did almost 100 paintings a year, working sixteen to eighteen hours a day'.

It was also a period of extreme happiness with a new lover, Mischa.⁴³ The *Garden Series* include some of the artists favourite paintings. In many ways they are a departure from Lukacs' other work, maybe best characterised by a photograph of the artist that was reproduced in the catalogue to an exhibition in Dianne Farris Gallery in Vancouver in 1992. Attila is sitting in a deckchair under a sun umbrella in a leafy landscape. The artist at peace with himself and the world. They are based on a poem The Vision of Sir George Ripley:

When busie at my booke I was upon a certeine night,
This Vision here exprest appear'd unto my dimmed sight,
A Toade full rudde I saw did drinke the juce of grapes so fast,
Till over charged with the broth, his bowells all to brast;
And after that from poysoned bulke he cast his venome fell,
For greif and paine whereof his Members all began to swell,
With drops of poysoned sweate approaching thus his secret Den,
His cave with blasts of fumous ayre he all be-whyted then;
And from the which in space a golden humour did ensue,
Whose falling drops from high did staine the soile with ruddy hew:
And when this Corps the force of vitall breath began to lacke,
This dying Toade became forthwith like Coale for colour blacke:
Thus drowned in his proper veynes of poysoned flood,
For tearme of eightie dayes and fowre he rotting stood:
By tryall then this venome to expell I did desire,
For which I did committ his carkase to a gentle fire:

⁴² note from Attila: "eighteen" instead of "fourteen"

⁴³ note from Attila „wrong“

Which done, a wonder to the fight, but more to be rehear'st,
The Toade with Colours rare through every side was pear'st,
And White appeared when all the sundry hewes were past,
Which after being tinted Rudde, for evermore did last.
Then of the venome handled thus a medicine I did make;
Which venome kills and saveth such as venome chance to take.
Glory be to him the graunter of such secret wayes,
Dominion, and Honour, both with Worship, and with Prayse.

Attila had found a new voice. The *Garden* paintings are about personal loss and the transformation of the world through deprivation. They display a dramatic stillness and a melancholic quality as if they mourn a lost past. But they are also about healing. Thus I prepared a medicine out of the poison thus treated/Which destroys the poison and heals those who have accidentally taken it.'

The garden is a paradise in which the negative and the positive forces balance themselves out, as the other quote, that accompanies the series indicates:

There is an unknown land, a land of strange flowers⁴⁴, a land in which all things are perfect and poisonous.

The painting that goes with these words by Oscar Wilde is called *Amorous Meeting*. The picture of two lovers, one wearing a jockstrap the other naked with an erection. The lovers look across a beautiful but poisonous field of opiate poppies and greet the rising or sinking sun. This painting is about seduction but also a warning about it', the artist explains. One man uses, like the skinheads in the *Four Small Paintings*, the 'up yours sign' the other the fascist salute. It is the old ambiguity, embracing and rejecting. The sun has a swastika and is painted in the old Germanic way, the symbol that the Nationalsocialists hijacked for their own sinister philosophy. Lukacs has stripped the swastika of its fascist connotation and given it its old traditional one as the sign of light. The hauntingly beautiful paintings of the *Garden Series* were inspired by Indian paintings, and they share with them the colourfulness and the flat narrative style. The cartoon-like characters are not unlike the

⁴⁴ note from Attila: added "full of unusual flowers"

legends of saints in medieval paintings, and Lukacs wants us to read their stories thus. Attila's emotional investment in the masculine form and his fascination with 'rough trade' is still evident in these rich and extraordinary paintings, but they speak in a softer and more tender language. There are rich colours and a subtlety of tones that are new in his work and reflect the ' blissful state of these subjects.'

The painter offers us a tapestry on the *Varieties of Love: Love in Waiting, Love in Union, Love in Separation* and finally *Love in Loss*. The four 'varieties', each represented by three paintings. They are preceded by two canvas as a kind of preface, *Adam and Steve*, the image of two lovers looking at each other under rising sun and *Looking in the Mirror*, the picture of a boy⁴⁵ his reflection in the river. Does he, as the boy in Kleist's famous story the *Marionetten Theater*, loses his innocence the minute he discovers his own pleasing image?

The *Garden* paintings are mysterious pictures with complex iconographies, a picaresque patchwork in which the world of humans fuses with the world of animals, the obligatory monkey, fishes, snakes, lions, antelopes and rabbits, the ancient gift the Greek lover bestowed on their beloved. There are men wrestling, making love or sheltering from the storm. The many rituals are acted out in an arcadian landscape that grows darker and more menacing with the occurring loss.

The *Garden Series* is also an exploration of nature. 'Nature is impartial, it does not judge, it is us who always pass judgement', Attila explains. The lush landscapes are fictionalised. They were inspired by the parks of Berlin, Attila saw, when 'high on some halucinary drugs' he perceived the world as one of "beauty and innocence, but also of fragility. 'It was like the flowerpower of San Francisco in the seventies. Gay guys straight guys all hugging and embracing each other.' It was as near as he had come to the reality of the brotherhood of men he had so often dreamed about in his life and his paintings. The Romantic is always slumbering under the poised and sometimes cynical facade of this janus-like artist. I am a dreamer, but my dreams are very real to me.

As the series progresses from painting to painting, from wooing to overt lovemaking in *Heat and Light* and *Day Break*, the luminous background turns sombre. One of the men

⁴⁵ corrected according to notes

watching his friends copulating is trying to shoot down the rooster on the roof, who announces the menacing dawn. It is the beginning of the group called: *Love in Separation*, with titles like, *Rejection* and *Withdrawal*. Knives begin to appear, although there is still some loving. Men are preening each other under large lotus flowers and banana trees, reminiscent of the dreamlike foliage of the Douanier Rousseau. 'When people discover each other love awakes. Preening is an act of discovery', Lukacs explains in his unshakable believe that the physical act can be a salvation.

But then in the fourth Variation, *Love at Loss*, the beloved, the figure of Saint Sebastian, is dead, the tree has lost its foliage. The lover, entwined by the poisonous snake is looking towards heaven in anguish, the garden has experienced loss. In the next painting, *Hermit's Life*, man is devoured by beast⁴⁶, the paradise has turned into a place of carnage, the natural cycle is complete.

But there is consolation. In the last painting of this astonishing parable, Lukacs has been unfolding. It is called. *Painting the lover;s Portrait*. A grey figure is holding two naked young men in his arm. One of them is re-painting a paradisaical landscape, a flowery garden, inspired by the naive paintings that adorned the furniture of Attila's Hungarian childhood.⁴⁷

Many works manifest a refreshing naivety which invades even his most 'shocking' subjects. The artist's imagination has allowed out to create our own Elysian fields and thus to reverse expulsion from paradise.

Besides portraying men in large paintings Lukacs has also embarked since 1994 in a series of small portraits of his friends, 'ravers and hustlers'⁴⁸. Gene are the tight butts and the sexual-organs. They are usually three/quarter length just stopping at the crotch level. Some are focussing on far distances but most starring at us. They look at us, almost deadpan. It is again the eye contact with the onlooker that is important to the artist. Attila paints usually people he is physically attracted too, 'people with shaved heads and a beautiful face'. Of course he is not interested in conventional beauty, the pretty American type of a sunlit

⁴⁶ note from Attila: added "man becomes part of the food chain"

⁴⁷ note from Attila: "'my mother's kitchen'" instead of "the furniture of Attila's Hungarian childhood"

⁴⁸ note from Attila; The group which includes ravers, hustlers and friends, as well as Alex is a small part of a large body of portraits done over ten years.

California that populates the homosexual world of North America and much of Europe is not for him. His beauties are of a darker more real kind.

Lukacs rarely does any preliminary drawings, although he used to draw a lot and masters this medium well. He prefers to draw directly onto the canvas. Most portraits are preceded by intensive sessions with the polaroid camera. Sometimes he will call the model in to verify a detail, but mostly I prefer the photo and I trust my memory.

The sitters in these *Portraits* are seen flat against neutral background. There are no hints of domesticity, no props. His sitters are not placed in any room or landscape. The colour of the background is the only variant. There is no visual trick like the indication of a wall or a horizon. This was partly done to escape the often too decorative aspect of Lukacs work, but most important, taken out of context, the person is seen as he is, not whom he represents. The impact is direct, we can concentrate on the person, meeting him face to face. 'I like to give them an applied character and the onlooker has to figure out what the person might be, like when you pick someone up, when you walk up to someone wondering what he is going to be like'. Lukacs like to awake in us this feeling of encounter, when looking at his work. The adventure of seeing a painting just like the adventure of seeing a person. Lukacs' paintings grow out of a physical desire, and he wants us to relive it. The greatest compliment for me is, when people want to grab my portraits, want to pose the person, make love to them.'

With the portraits came the discovery of rendering people more realistic. Sometimes Lukacs goes for likeness, but as the portraits are not directly about the person he is painting. the likeness just happens, even if the person might not recognise themselves'. A portrait is about two people, the one who paints and the one who is painted. Lukacs portraits are a way he sees men. They are again tributes to a certain lifestyle and he likes to exhibit them together.

In an exhibition in the Phyllis Kind Gallery in New York⁴⁹ they were all hung closely together at the same height, filling an entire wall. Thus giving the feeling of a group. This is not done as a sign of 'cloning' which Lukacs strongly dislikes. It is a kind of formula in

⁴⁹ note from Attila: "at Diane Farris instead of "Phyllis Kind Gallery in New York"

the desire for anonymity.⁵⁰ But Lukacs anonymity is not a wish to efface himself, it is a state of us that allows us to enter paths yet untrodden, physical experiences with all the uncharted possibilities.

In these portraits Lukacs was experimenting with different techniques and paints which grew out of his *Sex Series*, a group of thirteen pairs of painting, each with a different coloured background as kind of signature tune for each activity that embraces wrestling, spanking scatology, bestiality. Lukacs does not shun to paint the most physical activities. Men urinating, feces, shedding blood or sperm. These paintings are my Valentine cards to a life I know and love. The only one I can exist in. There is nothing artificial in this sort of life, nothing acquired or watered down by conventions. Nothing human is shocking to him 'I want to celebrate rawness.'

His friend the painter Michael Morris, called them his 'darkest paintings', an accusation he refutes, but admits that it is strange to think that he did his most fetishized paintings at the same time he painted his most lyrical ones, like the *Garden Series*. 'I need that balance.' he remarks. He sees art as 'deflector shield'. My paintings are cathartic, they replace my analyst. They help me to exorcise my demons, to keep them in check.'

Much of the often unsettling power of Lukacs' vision. comes from his quest to follow his own intuition. He wants to convey to us a life he has experienced with his head his heart and his sex. 'Look how beautiful shit looks next to a pair of white socks, or the red of blood on pale pink buttocks', and to prove it there is an exquisite painted canvas of a pale nude man, crouching at the edge of a serenely painted sea scape, defecating.

Lukacs is well aware of the danger of the subject to dominate the painting and he had to tone some of the subjects down. They are most of all about showing in a painterly way what people get up to, the way I see things, not about kinky subjects'.

⁵⁰ note from Attila: added "and to bring the viewer eye to eye with the subject"

Before embarking on the *Sex Series* or almost at the times, as the body of many paintings are always tackled simultaneously, Lukacs did what must be considered his most ambitious group of paintings; the *E-Werk*.

This cycle of six monumental paintings was begun in Berlin in 1989 and finished in 1993, a time of great geographical, social and political transformation. They grew directly out of the political scene and the coming down of the wall. They are paintings about the rebuilding of the new re-united Berlin.

Attila was in Berlin when the wall came down, an event that made him cry out of joy and emotion. He still talks enthusiastically about the great moment. It was not only all 'those untamed boys, untouched by Americanism that flooded through the now open gates', but it was also the realisation of the many possibilities for a new world that appeared under his very eyes.'

Two of the big canvasses, *This Town* (1990) and *Wild Kingdom* (1992/93), show two of Berlin's landmarks, laden with historical references, the Brandenburg Gate that separated the two worlds for so long, and the Altes Museum that was a place of Hitler's parades. The Museum is by the neo-classical architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841), the Nazis much admired. Hitler fashioned his Haus der Kunst in Munich, the temple that housed the giant exhibitions of the *Art of the Third Reich* on Schinkel's design.

E-Werk was the name of a rave club in Berlin artist quarter⁵¹, Kreuzberg, not far from the ruins of Hitler's old powerhouses, the old Luftwaffenmuseum⁵². Attila and his friends opened here a club. On its wall the giant paintings of Lukacs would eventually hang, they were in fact painted for that space.

The Nazi's propaganda paintings and the Russian realistic socialist paintings were again the main inspiration for Lukacs. The architecture forms a backdrop, like a theatrical set in front of which history is played out. This is not only reflected in the heroic scale of the works, but also in the way they were painted. Lukacs is using only a few colours, grey, a bright orange sky, a black back ground he still achieves a rich chromatic affect by sometimes toning these colours down to a subtle pale tone. Some areas are painting in large

⁵¹ note from Attila: "techno" instad of "rave"; "Berlin Mitte" instead of "artist quarter"

⁵² note from Attila: "Luftfahrtministerium" instead of "Luftwaffenmuseum"

brush strokes others in minute details, which makes the eye constantly wander over the surface in search of new sensations. Lukacs' grip on the material constantly punctures his scenarios by the looseness of his colours, while the tightness of his structures prevents the painting from rambling. However diverse and rich his canvasses are he keeps a tight grip on the narrative.

The diptych features groups of half-naked or naked muscled labourers, idealised muscled heroes of a workmen's ethos, much prized by both the fascists and the communists.

The paintings are also an optimistic view of the world. In the one on the right, *This Town* men are paving a new road. Two naked workers invite us to join them. In the pendant picture, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, the workers labour in a dark and mysterious foundry, reforging a new life out of the chiascuro of past times. Again we have two contrasting moods, a dark and a light one, reflected in the handling of paint. The two central figures in the forge are based on Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*. By quoting the artist gives his work a continuity, leading us back in time. In its richly orchestrated tonal qualities in which darkness is lit by the fire that is reflected on the gleaming bodies and on the shiny globe suspended from the ceiling. We get the feeling of some mysterious rituals being celebrated in which several actions happen at once.

The monumental triptych in the same series, *Wild Kingdom* (1992-93), measures over ten meters in length and 4 meters height. It is again a re-interpretation of our past, in which the divine mingles with profanity. On the left panel Ganymede is abducted by Zeus in the shape of an eagle. The versatile God wants the boy to become his cup bearer and ungallantly to replace the lame Hebe. This much used homoerotic icon echoes some of Leonardo's or Michelangelo's sketches of the same theme.

In the important middle panel we see one of the rare female figures of Europa holding up the painter's palette reading, 'imitat' an ironic reference to the painters penchant for quoting. Europa seduced here by Zeus this time in the shape of a bull does not so much represent a woman as the muse of all arts. In this painting Lukacs castigates some of the skinheads' neofascist leaning. The paintings are based on an incident in Hamburg when neo-fascist skinheads marched with slogans like, 'Ich bin ein Esel, ich glaube immer noch

dass Juden vergast wurden' a provocative slogan, saying, I am a donkey for I still believe that jews were gassed'.

The marching boys, like those in the story of Pinocchio are punished by growing the heads of donkeys, although Attila, mischief maker he is, tempers his moral tale by also giving them large cocks.

Maybe Lukacs' real conviction is in the painting *In my Father's House* (1989) In it we see grimy skinheads acting out their pranks, taunting us with gesturers that imitate the Nazi salute or the 'up your's sign' But one of them has a tattoo across his chest which reads: 'S.H.A.R.P. which stood for: 'Skinheads Against Racial Prejudices'. Another tattoo shows a swastika being crushed by a fist.

For any painter to solve so masterly the problem that arises of large figurative compositions is no mean victory. It shows how much this young painter has grown in strength and stature. The later paintings are less overburdened by messages, as Lukacs is striving for greater clarity.

By 1995 things were once more happening to Attila. His relationship with Berlin became clouded, as a sort of disenchantment set in. The Herculean task of working 10 to 15 hours a day took its toll. Lukacs had to learn how to pace himself. The heyday of night clubs had lost their charm and the restless craving for new physical sensations⁵³ made room for a more serene personality. Attila Richard Lukacs has moved to New York he has dabbled in sculpture and in writing.

The E- Werk was a loving farewell to the city Lukacs inhabited for nearly ten years. In *Everybody Wants the same Thing* (1993) we perceive a young man, his head bowed in self absorption, sitting alone⁵⁴ in the window of an abandoned desolated building. There is a flaking wall smeared with graffiti. In the corner another young man is shooting up drugs, a tender and sad homage to a lover that died from drugs. Two images of loneliness and men's separation from each other, that marked his last years in Berlin. Lukacs has moved from the fascination with the outer body, the skin to the soul of men.

⁵³ note from Attila: added "and addiction"

⁵⁴ note from Attila: This is Micha, in the bottom my friend Tyler

But Attila has not rejected what he calls his demons, they are there under the surface always ready to break out. He does not want to get rid of them only tame them makes them subservient. Like in his S and M paintings the rules of the game are well established only with increasing maturity it is he who is the master. His painting impulse is still sexual, but Lukacs is lucid enough to see the danger and he shares the reservation with his critics, who wonder if he will totally succeed until he will distinct himself from his subjects.

The world of Attila Lukacs is not a world of aggression or inhospitable, as it has been often said. The world of his men is no alien country constantly being furrowed. Initially men caught in isolated scenes, but gradually these begin to cohere as Lukacs begins to draw his dramatic net around them pulling them in to a collective experience. What strikes one that in all his paintings we seem to look at a harmonious community of the brotherhood of men in which roles are assigned and accepted. In a world of dashed hopes and unfulfilled expectations, men of solitude protect each other. It is a world in which men follow their own instinct, free of guilt, a world at peace with itself. What the artist demands is the right to marginality. Maybe that is the reason why some people feel uncomfortable with them. They challenge the notion of the unhappy homosexual at odds with themselves and the community they live in. The expression of often brutal masculinity of his models are not an expression of gratuitous violence or a celebration of authoritarian aggression, they are simply the type the artist would like to go to bed with.

Lukacs is not a political painter, the only ideology he subscribes to is that of raw sexuality. The other accusation that he pays lip service to fascist art is also easily dismissed.

With the *insouciance* of his generation Attila Richard Lukacs looks at the past, often disregarding the underlying reality. By bending it and making it subservient to his art he can use some of the formal inventions of fascist art, without reference to the underlying terror that brought it forth.

In his obsession with race and biology, Hitler's new man was an idolized male nude, tall, broad-shouldered, with narrow hips, represented the ideal of the Aryan master race. Each muscle, each tendon had to express strength and to be the carrier of specific masculine values like manliness, bravery and comradeship. The nudity erased all class distinction. It

is one of the many contradiction of the Nazi era that they sanctioned an art that carry many homoerotic traits, while punishing those who were homosexual with prison sentences. Many homosexual are fascinated by these nudes. With memories fading, the elements of kitch, their heightened masculinity, the overt sexual attributes, the feeling of camp have a certain appeal. For many these images have become pin-ups of sexual fantasies.

A closer and more informed look at Lukacs' male nudes shows the difference. Lukacs nudes are real people of flesh and blood, they are based on accurate perception, tenderness and humour. They are no idealized males, they take on all sorts of sexual poses they are drunk, doped or aroused. The Nazi nudes were sexual and a-sexual at the same times. The athletes of Arno Breker or Joseph Thorak have nothing to do with a spiritual or physical longing for comradeship. They are not human beings, they are props in the service of a propaganda machine. In order to be carriers of an ideology all traits of individuality had to be erased. Male nudes perverted to a soulless representation of a race. What is unsettling about Lukacs nudes is not what is fascistic about them, but what they say about our fascination with it.

There is no doubt that the often exquisitely painted works, masterly controlled in their formal composition making him one of the most talented and inventive and audacious painter of his generation. With strident language and proud attitude, Lukacs' works are daring forays into erotic images. Like a magician he is weaving history, myth, sexual dreams sadistic rituals into the fabric of our awareness. There are those who finds his images of sexuality disturbing. This is nothing new the honest look in the deeper spheres that lie buried under the thin veneer of respectability have always unsettled people. His sometimes an apocalyptic vision is also a vision of liberation from rules and codes of behaviour who simply came down to us, often untested simply inherited. He is turning our perception of the world up side down.

A modest man in life, he knows his worth when it comes to his work. 'I will not let anybody decide if and when I failed. This will be my decision.' His greatest fear are to be laughed at' or to fail his parents. The is little of either of them happening. His father anyway

is his greatest fan, 'even my mother can look at my work without being bothered by the subject.'

Maybe it is too high an acclaim to see his work as that of a moralist, but in his existential attitude to life, in which man is ultimately accountable for his action lies a moral stance. There is something spiritual about me, a belief in karma as a source of energy, Attila exclaims.

There is a deeply moral attitude in him, which has little to do with conventional morals. I think man has to take responsibility for his own deeds. if you that you are fine.' Attila was brought up a catholic, his parents went to church a weekly ritual when Attila refused to attend mass, after he was forced to kiss the foot of the virgin. 'T felt so humiliated'. The parents were liberal enough to find a more open church⁵⁵. 'There is a certain purpose in life, but I do not believe that it has been given by someone. We have to find it ourselves'.

'I trust my conscience. Without there is no self respect, no life. I have found what I want and who I want to be. This of course raises a lot of questions. Is what I am doing the right thing? Perhaps it was the right thing five years ago. Sometimes one is more in tune with one self than at other times. Maybe when I did the *Sex Series* I was less in tune with my self than when I did the *Gardens*. If I am honest I was more focused and it shows in the work. Maybe the *Sex Series*' was a transitional period, but without the transitional periods you can't arrive at something else.'

An honest assessment of an honest man. Attila Richard Lukacs painting demand us to look at them with honesty and interpret them as such as Robin Mayor wrote in his introduction to one of Lukacs exhibition catalogues, 'None of Lukacs' paintings are correctly interpretable, just honestly interpretable'.

⁵⁵ note from Attila: "quit" instead of "find a more open church"

Note on the author:

Peter Adam has been a film maker for the BBC. He has made many prize winning documentaries among them, the series *Architecture at the Cross Roads* and films on David Hockney, Man Ray, the Russian Constructivists, Lotte Lenya, Lillian Hellman, Diaghilev, Lawrence Durrell, George Gershwin, Edward Albee and the series *Master Photographers*.

His books include

the biography of *Eileen Gray*,

Art of the Third Reich,

Hockney and his Friends

and an autobiography; *Not Drowning But Waving*.