



X E N I A  
H A U S N E R  
E X I L E S

## SUBMERGED

PHILIPP BLOM

It's the silence that touches you first. These are farewells, but there are no requests or reassurances, no last greetings or promises. The protagonists are mute. A little boy is lifted up to the window, but even he seems to be stretching out his hand without a word toward one of the passengers in the compartment. The participants speak with their hands. They are not gesticulating - they are reaching out, holding on, pointing to something invisible.

What kind of silent farewells are these? Why do these searching pairs of eyes never meet? And why do some of the figures reappear in the three scenes in different groupings and on different trains? What kind of journey are they really embarking on?

At first they look like ordinary people, pushed against one another at the window. But the younger woman with her patterned blanket and red headscarf looks like a refugee, although the rest of her dress is western. With her upward gaze, and with the little boy reaching hopelessly toward her from the outside, she reminds us of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, caught in a second-class train compartment. And what of the young man standing over her, with his hand pointing upwards in a baroque gesture? This is a timeless moment, somewhere between the present and the era of old-fashioned train compartments and a Roman altarpiece in 1600.

The painter leaves traces, only to erase them straightaway. In the next painting it is night-time. Only the compartment is lit, garishly. Behind the sliding glass of the half-open window, the young Maria is sinking down as if in an aquarium. Now she is the one pointing upwards, or perhaps her hand simply doesn't have the strength to hold on anymore. This scene seems calmer. No one is reaching out of the compartment. A woman on the platform is taking one last photo, but the screen of her mobile phone doesn't show the face it's directed at. From the roof of the train, a pair of women's legs, clad in sky-blue, seem to belong to the hand that's passing a bowl down into the compartment, but the bowl appears to be empty. And how could the woman have managed to climb up on top of the train in her high-heeled shoes? What is she doing there? A hand grabs her, holds tight, pulls her down. The young man who's caught hold of her from inside the compartment is looking straight out of the painting. His eyes are empty, almost hopeless, without any emotional connection.

In the third compartment, there are no more pointing hands. The woman who at first looked like a Virgin Mary figure is now drowned in the aquarium of her silence. Three other young women have taken her place at the window, forcing her down. They press their hands against the window frame, as if to define it. Two of them are looking back at something left behind them. They don't seem to regret this departure. They're not waving at anyone, not looking directly at anyone. A couple on the platform embrace as if in consolation.

A disturbing new perspective on the travelers slowly intensifies. Isolated from one another, gesticulating silently, they are enclosed in a latent panic. They are fighting for a place, for room to breathe, pressing themselves towards the open window, smothering one another. They are not tourists, nor are they refugees - they are on a journey whose terminus they themselves don't know. The train compartments were once part of an orderly network of timetables and destinations (the numbers on the carriages still show signs of this), but they long ago fell into disrepair, were several times repainted, changed owners, purposes, end stations, and now, in the age of air travel, have become curious anachronisms. The travelers themselves are young, dressed in modern clothes, part of a different world. Yet they are not looking forward to what awaits them. They are too alone, too occupied with fighting for their own survival.

On the right of the last painting, only half part of the scene, there stands a female figure dressed in black, her hand raised with open palm. She tells you to stop. She looks directly at you. She is not pointing in any particular direction. Her gesture is half warning and half oracle. What is she warning of?

Translation: Veronica Buckley

Philipp Blom

Born 1970 in Hamburg. He studied Philosophie and History in Vienna and Oxford and holds a DPhil in Modern History from Oxford University. After living and working in London, Paris and Vienna he now lives in Los Angeles.

His historical works include *To Have and To Hold*, a history of collectors and collecting, and *Encyclopédie* (US edition: *Enlightening the World*), a history of the *Encyclopaedia* by Diderot and d'Alembert that sparked the Enlightenment in France. In *The Vertigo Years*, Blom argues that the break with the past that is often associated with the trauma of World War I actually had its roots in the years before the war from 1900-1914. Blom followed this with *Fracture: Life and Culture in the West, 1918-1938*, a cultural history of the interwar years.



EXILES 1    2017    Oil on paper on dibond    240 x 337 cm



EXILES 2 2017 Oil on paper on dibond 240 x 370 cm



EXILES 3    2017    Oil on paper on dibond    240 x 326 cm

## EXILES

MARTIN OSKAR KRAMER

Exiles, Xenia Hausner's new work series, consists of four large-format paintings that are all composed according to the same basic pattern: a section of a train carriage complete with a window open at the upper half, with people crowded in the interior visible through it, animatedly communicating with others on the platform outside of the train. While the first three images present a view from outside of the train, the last one shows the view from inside out. The scenes are quite dramatic: a lot of extended arms jutting out of or into the train windows, gesturing vividly, the expression of strong emotions or of exhaustion quite apparent in a number of the figures; the carriages seem excessively crowded, in both Exiles 2 and Exiles 3 a woman is squeezed against the window by other travelers. In all scenes it is quite obvious that we are witnessing a departure, not an arrival, the title „Exiles“ being a further indication of this.

The paintings are based on theatrical stagings arranged and photographed by Hausner in her studio. Hausner deliberately preserved the photographic composition in the paintings, most strikingly in the way bodies and limbs are cut off by the edge of the frame. Particularly interesting in this context is the painting *Certain Women*, consisting of a detail of Exiles 3. The photographic framing imparts the more palpable character of a snapshot to the images, connoting the spontaneous recording of a real occurrence, and thereby creates an effect that is much more immediate than a more traditional painterly composition would allow. Hausner's paintings also retain traces of the staged nature of the scenes, with the visible parts of the train carriages consisting of painted cardboard settings: the edges of the individual cardboard sections remain clearly discernible as such. Since it would have been much easier to omit them it is obvious that Hausner included them on purpose. It is possible to read this as a reference to the theatricality of photo-journalistic reporting of the events in the media.

With regard to current events, the most obvious association suggested by the iconography as well as the title of the images is the drama of the refugee crisis, which has not only dominated the headlines and public perception during the last two years, but thereby also has had a profound impact on the political landscape in the European countries affected by it. Not only the (civil) wars in the Middle East, but also the increasingly apparent effects of global warming—which is very likely to overshadow the effects of wars by far in the near future—have created a refugee crisis of

an unprecedented extent from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Northern African countries, despite the considerable risks and sufferings endured by those setting out on this path. Reducing Hausner's paintings to a direct commentary on this topic, however, would be selling them short—her approach is not as simple as all that. Not only are the people depicted obviously of central European descent (with light skin and in part with blond or red hair), it is also all young people, not families, and mostly young women (none of whom is wearing a scarf). In other words, Hausner is staging these dramatic images of crowded refugee trains with young people from our own culture.

Even though the figures depicted in the paintings are contemporary (in *Exiles 2* a woman on the platform uses a smartphone to take a picture of people in the train), she thus establishes a connection to our own past. For dramatic images of trains crowded with refugees are very familiar to us from our own history. What is more, the images of overcrowded trains have long assumed rather sinister connotations. While the Futurists still celebrated trains as an expression of advanced modern technology and unrelenting progress, today they conjure entirely different memories of 20th-century history: German soldiers cheering from trains departing to the front-lines at the outbreak of World War I in August 1914 (with today's knowledge of the brutal carnage to follow this short-lived euphoria); or the refugee streams pouring out of the German eastern territories ahead of the advancing Red Army at the end of the Second World War. But we are familiar with these images also from other parts of the world: Stalin's extensive deportations, for instance, of entire ethnic groups in Eastern Europe and Central Asia during the 1930s and 40s, also often using trains, as well as the hopelessly overcrowded trains during the large demographic shifts brought about by the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. Even more ominous is the memory of the large-scale transportation of Jews, the Romani people and other undesirable ethnic groups from all over Europe, jammed together in trains, to the concentration and extermination camps by the Nazis during the Second World War.

These images—just think of the infamous image of train tracks leading to the gate of the Auschwitz concentration camp—are deeply etched into the collective memory and infallibly resonate in Hausner's series. Her paintings are quite deliberately not meant to be current in a journalistic sense, but aim for a fundamental truth. Hausner has thus succeeded in translating the refugee crisis into a pictorial expression that does not foreground the threateningly unfamiliar (the trigger for all those fears of the loss of cultural identity and the values of „Western Christian civilization“), but rather focuses on those aspects that link the suffering of these people with the universal human suffering that we have experienced (or inflicted) in our own not so distant past. All the same time these historical connotations remain



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Martin Oskar Kramer, Ph.D., Princeton University, 2002 (art history), works freelance as an art historian in Berlin.



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## EXHIBITIONS (selection)

2017

„Glasstress“, Palazzo Franchetti, Venice

“Xenia Hausner – Exiles” in Personal Structures: Crossing Borders, Palazzo Bembo, Venice

„Entfesselt. Malerinnen der Gegenwart“, Schloss Achberg, Germany

„Fleischeslust“, Galerie Deschler, Berlin

„Modern & Contemporary Art“, Forum Gallery, New York

„10 – Alive and Kicking“, Dominik Mersch Gallery, Sydney

„Menagerie. An Animal Show from the Würth Collection“, Forum Würth Rorschach, CH

2016

“Frau im Bild – Female Portraits from the Würth Collection”, Gallery Würth, Oslo

“Rendezvous, Meisterwerke aus der Sammlung Essl”, Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg

2015

“Von Hockney bis Holbein. Die Sammlung Würth in Berlin”, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin

“Personal Structures: Crossing Borders”, Palazzo Mora, Venedig

“Soft Power”, Leo Gallery, Shanghai

Xenia Hausner “Some Hope”, FO.KU.S, Innsbruck

2014

Xenia Hausner “Look Left – Look Right”, Today Art Museum, Beijing

Xenia Hausner “Look Left – Look Right”, The Pao Galleries, Hong Kong Arts Center, Hong Kong

“Glanzlichter. Meisterwerke zeitgenössischer Glasmalerei im Naumburger Dom”, Naumburg

“Die Andere Sicht“, Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg

2013

“Sie. Selbst. Nackt.” Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum, Bremen

“Painting Water”, Berlin Art Week, Galerie Deschler

“A.E.I.O.U. – Österreichische Aspekte in der Sammlung Würth”, Museum Würth, Künzelsau

2012

“Xenia Hausner – ÜberLeben”, Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg  
5th Beijing International Art Biennial, Beijing (China)  
“Glasmalerei des 21. Jahrhunderts“, Centre international du Vitrail,  
Chartres

“Xenia Hausner – Flagrant délit“, Museum Würth Frankreich, Erstein  
2011

“Xenia Hausner – Damage“, Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai  
“Familiensinn“, Installation Ringturm, Wien

“Glasmalerei der Moderne“, Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe  
2010

“Intimacy. Baden in der Kunst“, Kunstmuseum Ahlen, Ahlen  
“Trailblazer“, Gabriele Münter Preis 2010, Martin-Gropius-Bau,  
Berlin

2009

“Xenia Hausner“, Palais Liechtenstein, Forum für Zeitgenössische  
Kunst, Feldkirch

“Sehnsucht nach dem Abbild. Das Portrait im Wandel der Zeit.“,  
Kunsthalle Krems

2008

Montijo International Biennial ON Europe 2008, Portugal

“You and I“, Forum Gallery, New York

2007

“Two“, Galerie von Braunbehrens, München

“Zurück zur Figur“, Kunsthaus, Wien

2006

“Österreich: 1900 – 2000. Konfrontation und Kontinuitäten“, Sam-  
mlung Essl, Klosterneuburg

“Zurück zur Figur – Malerei der Gegenwart“, Kunsthalle der Hypo-  
kulturstiftung, München

“Hide and Seek“, Forum Gallery, New York

“Xenia Hausner – Glücksfall“, Kunsthaus Wien

“Rundlederwelten“, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin

„Physiognomie der 2. Republik“, Österreich. Galerie Belvedere Wien

“Xenia Hausner – Glücksfall“, Ludwig Museum, Koblenz

2004

“Upper Class – Working Girl“, Galerie der Stadt Salzburg

“Fremd. Berichte aus ferner Nähe“, Kunstfest Weimar “Pélerinages”

“Xenia Hausner – Die 2. Natur“, Charim Galerie, Wien 2003

“Xenia Hausner – Damenwahl“, Galerie Deschler, Berlin

“Xenia Hausner – New Paintings“, Forum Gallery, Los Angeles  
2002

“Xenia Hausner – Malerei“, Galerie Kämpf, Basel

“Xenia Hausner – Malerei“, Galerie Hohmann, Hamburg

2001

“Xenia Hausner – Neue Arbeiten“, Rupertinum, Museum der Moder-  
ne, Salzburg

„Xenia Hausner – Arbeiten auf Papier“, Galerie 422, Gmunden

“Xenia Hausner – Gemälde und Grafik“, Galerie Thomas, München  
2000

“Xenia Hausner – Kampfzone“, Käthe-Kollwitz-Museum, Berlin und  
im Staatlichen Russischen Museum, St. Petersburg

“Xenia Hausner – Heart Matters“, Forum Gallery, New York

“Xenia Hausner – Menschen“, Ernst Barlach Museum, Hamburg  
Wedel

1999

“Figuration“, Rupertinum Museum der Moderne, Salzburg, Museion  
Bozen und Ursula Blickle Stiftung, Kraichtal

1998

“Wirklichkeit und Traum“, Berlin Galerie, Berlin

“Xenia Hausner – Malerei“, Kunsthalle, Koblenz

“Xenia Hausner – Die Dinge des Lebens“, Kunstforum Hallein

“Xenia Hausner – Liebesfragmente“, Jesuitenkirche, Galerie in  
Aschaffenburg

1997

“Xenia Hausner – Liebesfragmente“, Kunsthalle Wien und Museum  
der bildenden Künste, Leipzig

“Zeitgenössische Kunst aus Österreich“, Europäisches Währungs-  
institut, Frankfurt am Main

1996

“Die Kraft der Bilder“, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin

“Menschenbilder“, Galerie Thomas, München

“Meisterwerke der österreichischen Gegenwartskunst“, Galerie  
Heike Curtze, Salzburg