

# JACKY STRENZ

## MAX BRAND

December 6, 2024 – February 22, 2025

In the summer of 2022, I asked Max if I could have permission to reproduce one of his paintings in the pages of the magazine where I work, to accompany a new short story by Russian writer Vladimir Sorokin. The story, titled “The Monique Vaccine,” reminded me of Max’s paintings because they share a sort of phantasmagoric ambition for everythingness: both traffic in absurdity, exhaustion, abundance, and the fantastical. The story narrates the eponymous Monique’s fever dream, in which she inoculates men with a language vaccine of her own invention, for which she is rapturously celebrated in the town square.

Because of this pairing in the magazine, I now associate Max with Sorokin and vice versa. There’s a looseness in the way Sorokin organizes causality that rhymes with Max’s paintings; one wonders how a painting can cohere so many formal elements seemingly at odds with one another. One sees the paintings diligently resisting pattern; for how dense and rich the surface of the painting is, very little is repeated. Images and marks operate at wildly different scales but in close proximity: tiny washes of color, speckled and worked over, intersect with graphic elements one thousand times their size. One feels a sort of resistance to an easy organization of one’s vision on the surface. The paintings do not have a center.

Density and abundance are hallmarks of Max’s painterly vocabulary, as are two particular recurrent colors: aquatic blue and highlighter pink, each clean and cold. Here, they’re set among warmer, washier planes towards kaleidoscopic ends: textural plenitude, total saturation. With such a density of visual information, the panels edge towards namelessness. What is it?

Figures especially organize the image plane: one can chart a population of faces, eyes, hands, and bodies, some foregrounded and some obscured. But for all here that’s recognizable, I’m tempted to claim that these paintings make the distinction between abstraction and figuration less clear than it’s commonly understood to be. Less relevant, or less interesting, too.

Tess Edmonson

**Tess Edmonson** is an art critic and Managing Editor at n+1 magazine based in New York

\*

**Max Brand** (b.1982, DE) graduated from the Städelschule Frankfurt/Main where he studied under Michael Krebber. His painterly work is defined by an almost manic All-over: playing with references from German Expressionism to Japanese anime; and by using a wide range of materials and techniques, such as spray paint, sidewalk chalk, marker, collage, etc.

Exhibitions include GoMA Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow; 9th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art; Centre for Style, Melbourne; Off Vendome, NYC; Oldenburger Kunstverein; Fondation Lafayette, Paris and the MoMA PS1.

Max Brand is based in Berlin.

Kurt-Schumacher-Str. 2 60311 Frankfurt/Main, Germany

TEL +49 (0)69. 21 99 98 70 CELL +49 (0) 151. 11 64 97 37 [jackystrenz.com](http://jackystrenz.com) [jacky@jackystrenz.com](mailto:jacky@jackystrenz.com)