



## edward wright

30.08. - 18.10.2008  
tu-sa 11a.m. - 6p.m.

**mirko mayer gallery**  
**ads1a**

an der schanz 1a  
50735 köln



**Reassurance, 2008**  
220 x 360 cm  
oil & acrylic on canvas

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## Edward Wright *Power, Glory*

The people depicted in paintings by the Australian artist Edward Wright (\*1971) confront us with images that are often disconcerting. On the one hand, they seem to present themselves to the viewer in well-arranged group portraits, on the other, there is no intimation of why the group has come together. The rooms, in which the figures he portrays find themselves, are empty but for a few isolated objects, and there is nothing to define them more specifically. The lack of references to location causes the viewer to concentrate on the figures portrayed, thus giving rise to the realization that Edward Wright is dealing with a genre to which contemporary visual art now only seldom makes a contribution.

The painting of portraits or human likenesses is the oldest type of realistic depiction in the art of the modern period. The burgeoning individualism of the Renaissance - after years of Medieval painting that strove to depict an ideal and resulted in a diminished ability to portray differentiated human physiognomies - reverted to the Ancient tradition of Roman Naturalism, of the type seen in the earliest known realistic individual portraits, the mummy portraits from the Alexandrian cultural circles which were painted during the first to the third century. Pursuing the subsequent historical development of the portrait allows fascinating relationships to be discovered between Edward Wright's portraits and those of the Old Masters. One look at the composition of the figures in the apparently spontaneous gatherings of personnel in his paintings reveal clear parallels to the society and group portraits of the Dutch Baroque as well as the friendship portraits of the Romantic period. Edward Wright refers to a type of painting that originally emerged in the wake of the rising power of the bourgeoisie and its increased economic and political influence; he uses it - more or less in a reversal of the initial intention - to underline his critical attitude towards the present-day descendants of the Baroque economic and intellectual elite - managers and similar, self-proclaimed leaders of society. Thus, the Dutch Baroque portraits of one or more people were intended to "clearly underline, physiognomically distinguish, and illustrate through physical appearance the essential character and role (through facial expression, speaking hands and manner of dress). [...]" of the individual person portrayed. Excellent examples of this can be found in group portraits by Rembrandt, such as *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* (1632) or *The Syndics (De Staalmeesters, 1661)*; in these status portraits, which sought to create representative depictions of the political and social standing of the group in question, the subjects are depicted as connected to each by a certain task in an individual and naturalistic manner. The viewer is drawn into the painting by intermediary figures who gaze out of the paintings with dignified expressions, while the relevance of the spoken word is underlined and made visible by means of depicting "speaking hands". Anyone likely to commission such a portrait was conscious of his social standing and could be sure that the viewer understood and agreed with the message of bourgeois emancipation. Edward Wright now introduces new, critical aspects into the originally positive connotation of the themes of these paintings.

In doing so he avails himself of the traditional iconography, but adds new meaning by including slight, formal variations. Hence, the depiction of the faces appears to be realistic at first glance although it is sometimes grotesquely exaggerated and border on parody. The dignified appearance of the *Staalmeesters* gives way to hysteria and compulsive grinning. The clothing once regulated to reflect social rank is reflected by the uniformity of the business suit, which is simply an indicator of a certain social standing, without providing any indication as to the specific profession of its wearer. The titles of the portraits are also no longer directly related to the people depicted or their functions within their "guilds", although they obviously designate the field of business, in which the depicted figures - who are completely interchangeable - have attained success (reassurance, electricity, power or - in a private context - Golf, and More Time With The Family), thereby heightening the impression of deindividuation.

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The internal communication within the painting, originally directed towards the viewer, is reduced to self-referentiality in Wright's group portraits and excludes the viewer almost entirely from what is happening in the painting. The repertoire of the speaking hands is limited to mutual gestures of congratulations and backslapping or, as in the case of "electricity", to gestures that cannot be interpreted by outsiders. Such mysterious means of communication evoke the character of a secret order and thereby further exclude the viewer. Nevertheless, hands play a particularly notable role in Wright's paintings. They are instruments of self-assurance and confirmation when contact is made with others of similar standing; they enclose, reach for, grasp, take hold of, and shake - but they no longer fulfil a rhetorical function in these paintings. Considering the diversity of symbolic meanings conveyed by hands and their ability to communicate symbolically through gestures, they open up an effective avenue for effectively expressing criticism of existing conditions in an economy dominated by managers whose primary dictum is the maximization of profits, which has come to influence all areas of life.

Thus, the picture of Josef Ackermann, the CEO of the Deutsche Bank who was charged with embezzlement, wearing a broad grin as he held up two fingers spread in a "V" for victory upon encountering his co-defendant, the former CEO of Mannesmann Klaus Esser, made its way around the world in record time, and came to be seen as evidence of an "arrogance of power" and as an icon of the critique of capitalism. A lack of style, cynicism and greed were all concentrated in a single gesture.

Edward Wright extracts the fundamental substance from such images and reworks them in his cryptic portraits, creating revealing depictions of a society in which gestures have become so thoroughly banal that they only serve to expose the immorality and vapidty behind the purported friendliness and sincerity of those who make them.

Thomas Donga-Durach  
transl. by Maureen Roycroft-Sommer

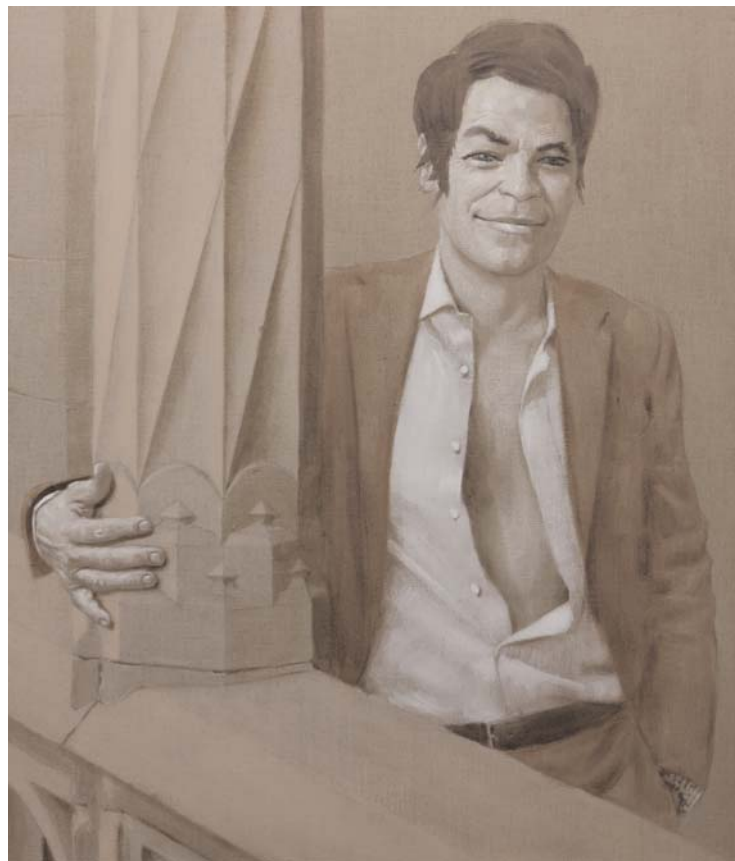
<sup>1</sup>Monica Mayr, *Ut pictura Descriptio? Poetik und Praxis künstlerischer Beschreibung bei Flaubert, Proust, Belyj, Simon*, Tübingen: 2001, p. 111



**Power, Glory, 2008**  
206 x 380 x 7,5 cm  
oil & acrylic on canvas  
walnut frame



**Power, Glory**, 2008  
206 x 380 x 7,5 cm  
oil & acrylic on canvas  
walnut frame



**Liebetektur**, 2008  
100 x 85 cm  
oil & acrylic on canvas



**Electricity**, 2008  
220 x 320 cm  
oil & acrylic on canvas





**& Sons**, 2008  
100 x 120 cm  
oil & acrylic on canvas



## EDWARD WRIGHT

born 1971 in Sydney, Australia

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 1993 | B.Design, (Honours),<br>Visual Communication UTS               |
| 1999 | Diploma of Fine Art (scholarship),<br>Julian Ashton Art School |
| 2003 | BFA (Honours) National Art School, Sydney                      |
| 2006 | MFA Goldsmiths College, University of London                   |

lives and works in London

### GROUP EXHIBITIONS (SELECTION)

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 2008 | on the edge of painting - sublime-construction-reality,<br>Mirko Mayer Galerie, Cologne<br>Timothy Taylor Gallery, NEXT Art Fair Chicago<br>Bilton Contemporary, two-person show, Alberta  |
| 2007 | Mirko Mayer Galerie, Art Cologne<br>Lucky You, Timothy Taylor Gallery, London<br>Mirko Mayer Galerie, Art Athina<br>People, The Old Sweet Shop, London   |
| 2006 | Hit My Dark Spot, Crypt, St.Pancras, London<br>Collective Particulars, The Residence, London 2006<br>Empire Strikes Back, Hewer St Studios, London<br>Rag and Bone, Three Colts Gallery, London<br>Celeste Art Prize, Truman Brewery, London<br>Work/Play UTS Gallery, Ultimo  |
| 2005 | re:sponse Cesky Krumlov, Czech Republic<br>Charity Show Royal College of Art, London 2005  |
| 2004 | On Reason and Emotion. Biennale of Sydney<br>(Artspace, Woolloomooloo).<br>Salon des Refuses S.H.Ervin Gallery, Sydney<br>Still-Life Robin Gibson Gallery, Sydney August<br>Fresh #2: Edward Wright and Midori Burns,<br>Michael Carr Gallery, Sydney<br>Cromwell Art Prize Sydney, Melbourne, Chicago<br>Infusion Cellblock, Sydney |
| 2003 | Artist Books Byron Fine Art, Byron Bay<br>Robin Gibson Gallery, Sydney, December<br>Nineteen, National Art School, Darlinghurst  |

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 2008 | Power, Glory, Mirko Mayer Galerie, Cologne                                 |
| 2007 | First Born, Mirko Mayer Galerie, Cologne                                   |
| 2004 | Free Idea with Every Work Australian<br>Galleries (Works on Paper), Sydney |
| 1997 | Humus Nature Fourthleaf Gallery, Sydney                                    |
| 1995 | Wet Dreams Bondi Pavilion Gallery, Sydney                                  |

### AWARDS

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| 2005    | Anne and Gordon Samstag Scholarship  |
| 2005/06 | Marten Bequest (painting)  |
| 2003    | Willoughby Contemporary Art Prize, Student Award<br>William Fletcher Trust   |
| 1998    | The Jocelyn Maughan Drawing Prize<br>Scholarship at Julian Ashton Art School |

### PUBLICATIONS

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 2005 | Art in an Age of Anxiety, Peter Timms,<br>Samstag Catalogue   |
| 2004 | The Glittering Prize Peter Hill, Sydney Morning Herald,<br>November 13<br>Arty and Crafty, Joel Gibson, Sydney Morning Herald,<br>June 2<br>Page-tearing Biennale work spawns circular<br>controversy Arts Hub Website, June 4<br>Sydney Circular Biennale of Sydney 2004,<br>Catalogue Supplement, published by the Biennale<br>as an insert |