

“WUUM! THAT’S WHAT YOU GET”

Michael Golz has created an entire country, with maps, brochures and tourist information. Welcome to Athosland...

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Map of Athosland, detail of Honne Mid-West, 1977–today, mixed media on paper, 42.9 x 94.5 ins. / 109 x 240 cm, courtesy of Galerie ART CRU Berlin

In Athosland, Michael Golz takes the viewer on a journey through his lifetime’s work. As a cartographer, inventor and storyteller, Golz has built his own fantasy world with its own culture, history and geography. What started in the 1960s as a childlike game of inventing fictional worlds and creatures with his brother Wulf has developed into an infinite artwork. Today, Athosland manifests itself in three main parts: a giant map; hundreds of scenes and drawings of places, towns, and landscapes; and eight folders full of travelogues about the imaginary country.

The most extravagant element in Golz’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total art work) is a giant map. This large-scale pictorial sculpture defines Athosland cartographically. Golz has been working on this current version of the map since 1977. Over the past four decades, around 160 irregularly-shaped pieces have been created, with an average size of 80 x 100 cm. They can be assembled, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, into a giant map that is 17 x 14 metres in size.

Athosland is divided into five main regions. In the south is the giant capital, “Athos”. The urban area of this

"Michael Golz – Reise ins Athosland" is open to the public until October 30 at Kunstmuseum Thurgau, Switzerland.

Artworks are courtesy of Kunstmuseum Thurgau unless otherwise stated.

metropolis spreads through the "East Marshlands" on one side and the "Western Region" on the other. In the east is the "Eastern Region", which merges, in the north-east, into the sparse "Juniper-Desert", and in the north into the fertile, sap-green "Kindermann Area".

West of Athos-City you can find the rural landscapes of the "Western Region", as well as the "Land of Castles" and the "Karst Mountains", which are characterised by the many rivers flowing through them and by their yellow-brown mountains. The region "Honne" spreads throughout the northwest and covers about a fifth of the whole country. At the centre of the region of "Honne" is a major city of the same name, which lies at the broad "Athos River". The river itself meanders across



Folder 1, page 131, day 7, 1968–2014, mixed media, 11.7 x 15.7 ins. / 29.8 x 40 cm

the country, from north-west to south-east. Between "Honne" and the "Kindermann-Area" are the "Ground of the Forest" and the "Anxious-Mountains".

With his map, Golz transforms his fantasy into a tangible reality and gives the viewer the opportunity to take a journey deep into the centre of it.

The map is complemented by around 250 separate illustrations of places, towns and villages, which are located on it. These coloured-pencil drawings (several

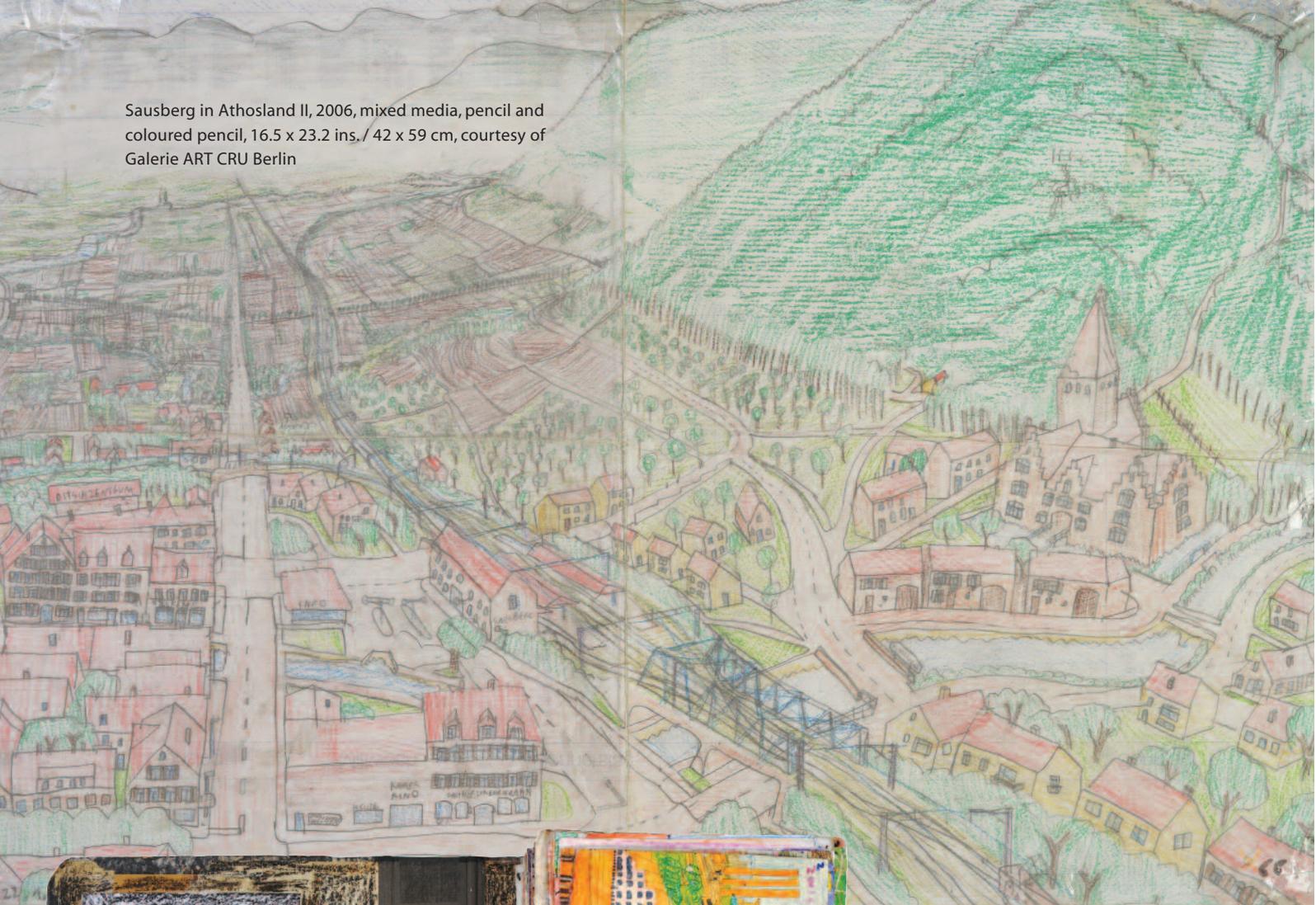
accentuated with a marker) show everything from capitals with modern skyscrapers, farms, shopping malls and bars, to tiny, rustic villages with timber-framed houses or family-run guest houses. The drawings bring the imaginary country to life; the towns, villages and landscapes on the map are given a visual identity and the inhabitants of Athosland are given faces.

Each scene is captured precisely and located geographically on the map. Sometimes



I Love Michael Golz, 1998, mixed media, 16.5 x 23.2 ins. / 42 x 59 cm

Sausberg in Athosland II, 2006, mixed media, pencil and coloured pencil, 16.5 x 23.2 ins. / 42 x 59 cm, courtesy of Galerie ART CRU Berlin



left: Folder 1, opened to show contents page and first of 314 drawings, 1968–2014, mixed media, 12.4 x 26.2 ins. / 31.6 x 66.5 cm

century holiday albums, postcards and travelogues, illustrated with popular graphic prints. Some of the scenes depict inhabitants of Athosland,

a small number signposts the distance in kilometres to “Athos-City”. For example, there is “Bad Martin south of Bad Hartwich”, a medium-sized city with a spa resort, and “St. André Karraschhausen in Athosland”. The names of the cities and villages are often inspired by the names of people who are important to Golz. In “St. André Karraschhausen”, he honours his caretaker, André Karrasch of the Theodor Fliedner Foundation in Mülheim an der Ruhr (everyone who works at the Foundation, which is for people with disabilities and is responsible for the caretaking of Michael Golz, has been given a drawing of their home city). The village “Lamour” not only refers to the French love (*l’amour*) but also to Golz’ close acquaintance Ingrid Lamour.

The drawings allow us to literally see the cities, villages, landscapes and inhabitants. They are the equivalent of photographic views from nineteenth-

often shown as joyful people with long hair revelling in their bathing suits. Fantasy creatures also exist in Golz’ world, but are depicted less frequently in the work.

The *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Golz comprises a third component: eight folders that the artist refers to as “Ifichen Mem’s Holiday Folders”, and which work as grand narratives exploring life in Athosland. They contain picture stories, which describe the events and experiences of the foreign fantasy-creatures living there. There are Devil-Ö-Ifiche, Anxioustooth, Bruck Animals, Furbish Animals, SM-Snakes and other fantastical creatures.

Eight of these folders exist but twelve more are planned, to make a complete set of 20. Each folder contains about 300 numbered drawings that have been rendered on both sides of the paper. Often the dimensions are larger than their encasing folders, so



Folder 2, page 70, 1968–2014, mixed media, 16.5 x 23.2 ins. / 42 x 59 cm, courtesy of Kunstmuseum Thurgau

the viewer must take them out and unfold them to take a proper look at the work. The folders are all characterised by a clear structure that is constantly controlled and re-worked by Golz. The integrity of the folders is important to the artist. If, by accident, a sheet goes missing from a folder, Golz makes every effort to replace it even if it means creating a copy of the original by hand.

For Golz, the folders – like all the rest of his work – are an instrument to facilitate exchange with his environment. They help him to explain the adventurous life stories of the *Ifichen* and other creatures of Athosland to his visitors in a most eloquent manner. Similar to the constant renewal of the map, the folders are also frequently changed, “repaired” and developed further.

The narrative of the folders is almost incomprehensible without Golz’ guidance. The drawings are cryptic and interfused with his invented words. Over the years, he has developed his own idiom, the “*Ifichen* language”, which is only understandable to readers on a very basic level, almost like a secret language. His word-creations are witness to great creativity, to a passion for storytelling, and to a joyful violation of language conventions which results

in a constant incomprehensibility of the stories.

The escalating pictorial worlds are held together through the stories, which Golz formulates orally and on paper. A concrete source is a 20-page typescript written by the artist, which starts out as an autobiography before morphing into a wide range of stories describing life in Athosland. His own biography and the product of his fantasy connect to form a complex whole.

Direct contact with the artist, who loves to explain his work, is one way to gain access to the complex system of “Athosland”, but it is sufficient to engage oneself unreservedly with Golz’ fascinating lifework. The creations of this world-tinkerer, cartographer, inventor and storyteller summon us, without further explanation, to move around freely, and highly stimulated, inside of this foreign universe. We are invited to create our own version of this ever-expanding world, which exists as much as we allow ourselves to imagine its existence.

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Translated by Matthias Hofmann, Galerie ART CRU, Berlin.

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