

## Things that separate us and yet define us

In the first week of December an important exhibition will open in the Archiv Massiv Gallery at the Spinnerei in Leipzig where New Zealand painter Lisa Chandler will exhibit a new body of work. The theme will be challenging to us all, especially with the current riots by the yellow-vested protesters in Paris. These paintings foreshadow what could easily happen in other European countries.

Artists are observers of everyday life. We don't need to go back too far in history but even in ancient Egypt and the middle ages illustrators recorded the absurdities of everyday life on their parchments. Pieter Bruegel the Elder is still relevant to life 500 years later. The Impressionists took to the countryside and the streets, and sketched the changing world around them. They all lived in difficult as well as prosperous times. Upheavals always took place. Chandler is also of this tradition. However, her work is characterised by current events and volatility, making the New Zealander a commentator on political life. The artist does not take a clear stand on the current political and social upheavals, but comments on them with a bitter sweet irony.

The New Zealand painter touches a sensitive point with her current work, when we not only experience our now established selfie culture with all its facets but messages that are blurred, scratched and unreadable and therefore no longer messages. Tattered bodies, mask-like and anonymous faces seem familiar yet very strange while protesters often stand alone. Policemen appear threatening in their uniforms and have the look of alien predators whose purpose is to protect the law and intimidate their enemy.

As if she wants to reinforce our discomfort, Chandler works with different artistic techniques and subdued hues. She layers colours, then takes them away again. Clearly formulated messages disappear into unclear signs. What seems familiar to us fades into the gray and pastel layers of her paintings. With her muted style, the artist comes closer to a romantic language, such as Philipp Otto Runge formulated in his paintings and in his color-circle theories about the dissonant chords, just as Neo Rauch knows how to express them today.

But in her pictures the revolution is also calling. More sharply expressed, the reflection on a major global change seems to spill out of them. Out of the fog, contrasting situations appear in the pictures before us, which in real life quickly disappear again into the haze of fast-moving life, probably on the Internet.

When looking at Chandler's work, we must inevitably ask ourselves: who is friend or foe? Who is the victim and who is the perpetrator? Who can we identify with? Is the lifeless body something of a martyr who is being photographed by a figure with a selfie stick for Facebook or Instagram? Or is the real victim the culprit looking for his five minutes of fame with a few clicks? Behind the situations that Chandler captures on canvas, the big question is, who in the world holds the strings in their hand and who can be manipulated by them? From this point of view, we could all be puppets of an unleashed economic system which is run by only a few. But what blinds us to this great realisation seems to be a big question in the work of the New Zealander. This does not only seem to be familiar

to the people of Leipzig, who witnessed the failure of a political system and the great political and social upheaval that followed in 1989. Also today, all Europeans – and not only them – are facing big changes. The current situation where utopia's struggle with dystopia's becomes even clearer when we look at the events of the major political summits, as in Hamburg in 2017, the Crimea crisis, the destruction of the Brazilian jungle, the contamination of nature with micro plastics and garbage, the conflicts in the Middle East and the aggravation of social situations for countless people worldwide.

Especially concerning is the current yellow vest movement in France with the first on Advent 2018 in Paris, because of the violence, furore and frightened politicians. The destruction of cultural and artistic objects at and in the Arc de Triomphe suggests a denial of the revolutionary ideals of 1789, where on European soil the first democratic orders of modernity took their beginnings, which were not quite bloodless. The "hi-jacking" infiltration of the yellow-vest protest movement, which points to social ills and upheavals, and criticises the liberal politics of French President Emmanuel

Macron, was obviously used by militant extremists of any stripe to create unstable conditions respectively. To what extent this movement was also used by Islamist-minded forces in order to destabilise the European states, as ideologists of the Islamic State publicly announced in 2014/15, can only be speculated at the present time.

But the fact is that the migration of Muslims – not just the Copts, Christians and Yazidis living and persecuted in the Islamic spirit – is growing out of the Islamic countries and the radicalisation is taking place in Europe too, if they do not already arrive in Europe radicalised anyway. The fact that this migration policy is also heavily criticised in Germany is shown by the increase in registered crimes committed by immigrants in recent years and, in response to this, the strengthening of the national-conservative faction in this country.

The growing up of the “Alternative for Germany” (AfD) demonstrates that criticism of local politics has meanwhile found a channel and is obviously not heard in the established parties. In view of the radical developments in the Arab-Sunni as well as Shiite world, it is quite likely that conflicts with Muslims in Europe will increase. When they realise just how much Israel is under pressure, how Wahhabi Islam terrorists support and ignite terror, and that Iran does not bathe in innocence, German politicians must pay attention to the developments in Germany and be alerted. Instead, internal politics against Russia’s Crimea and Ukraine policy are sparked and are also discussed in talk shows and party events ideologically focussed as anti-Russian. The real problems are in this country: the gap between poor and rich, the established low-wage sector with its minimum wage conditions, the associated Hartz IV debate and the search for the “lazy unemployed” and “begging beggars”, industry, economics and Internet- dependent regions, care needs and the quality downturn in the German budget policy. Only very few directly or indirectly have anything to do with migration. These are structural failures that are invariably caused by government and politicians.

But Lisa Chandler also knows how to show us ways out in her painting. Because the inner “exit” sign in us hopefully saves us and humanity from the apocalypse of the “walking dead”. The hazard warning system in us should be flashing brightly and not only because of foreign policy distortions but also because of domestic policy in terms of migration, economic and social issues.

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