

A Tour

Glaube
Liebe
Hoffnung

Faith Love Hope: three telling words form the title of this exhibition. They describe the 'three divine virtues', yet also play a role in non-religious contexts. The three terms have many meanings and we associate them with various aspects. What do we believe in? When do we experience love? Where do we find hope? The exhibition in the Kunsthaus Graz and the KULTUM – Kulturzentrum bei den Minoriten marks a special anniversary of the Catholic Church in Styria: in 2018 the Graz-Seckau Diocese celebrates 800 years of existence. Several questions lie at the heart of the exhibition *Faith Love Hope*. How do religion and contemporary art interact with one another? How do notions of faith, love and hope find expression in art? This tour touches on a number of terms and issues which appear of interest in this context and relate them to selected works of art.

A Tour

Time and again Willem De Rooij has ten kinds of white flower bound together into an impressive bouquet for the exhibition. The heavily-scented flowers offer welcome to the public. They recall the still-life pictures of Old Dutch painting. Concerning the exhibition, they refer to two different things. On the one hand, flowers have strong symbolic power. The lily, for example, stands for the innocence of the Holy Virgin Mary in many Christian Annunciation pictures. From a modern perspective, the flowers have another meaning, however. As they do not bloom at all times and everywhere, they are often sold as a commodity half-way around the world.

Space02

Abstraction & Corporeality

Since time immemorial, humans have processed their faith through images, developing various languages of form to do so. In Catholic Christianity there are numerous pictures in which God appears in human form, as a father, for example, a king or an elderly man. In contrast, Islam and Judaism forbid this kind of pictorial rendering of God. Yet it is precisely in these religions that a rich language of form with religious signs and patterns has evolved. In *God is Design* Adel Abdessemed makes the symbols of Christianity, Islam and Judaism blend into one another. In addition, he adds depictions from science to the mix, for instance those of human cell structures. Before our eyes impressive patterns form, then dissolve again. Provided we are able to recognise them as religious symbols, they are much more than mere decoration, however.

The belief that God became man in Jesus Christ is essential to Christianity. Thus, the question arises of Jesus' actual appearance. Pictures supposedly showing the real face of Christ are called 'vera icon' (Latin/Greek for 'true image'). In the exhibition, a folding altar from the 15th century shows an image of this kind, a face marked by suffering. In *Glass Dome I* by Berlinde De Bruyckere we look upon something that seems like a piece of battered flesh. The body is transitory and weak—a bleak message? That hope can always be drawn from physical suffering, too, is a defining idea of Christianity.

Love & Self-Determination

The Virgin of Mercy shows a very special image of the mother. She offers protection under her cloak to all believers in need of succour. Iris Andraschek has placed a drawing underneath her that was recently created with women from the emergency shelter in Graz. Maria appears as a caring mother, and, in contrast to our notion of God as a father, as approachable. In Christian art—but also in the western world influenced

by it—the images of mothers are greatly influenced by images of Mary, as too are those of women. VALIE EXPORT deliberately draws on this pictorial tradition: she replaces the child by a vacuum cleaner, thereby questioning the woman's role in the 1970s. Linda Fregni Nagler uses many historical photos to show children held by their veiled mothers. Only the child should be portrayed, not the mother, yet the infant needs her to provide support. Ulrike Rosenbach, in contrast, asserts: *Don't think that I am an Amazon*. Amazons were women who went to fight in war just like men. Like VALIE EXPORT, Ulrike Rosenbach has always fought for gender equality with her art. So does she shoot arrows at the image of the Virgin Mary, or at herself? Under the cloak of the Mother of God, all humans appear equal in value.

Miracle & Transfer

Miracles are supernatural events. Beyond human understanding, they must be believed. A sequence of images from the late Middle Ages tells of the power of the Madonna of Mariazell, a pilgrimage site in Styria that's still important today. In Harun Farocki's work, the power of objects and pictures is transmitted to people through touch. Often saints perform miracles; in principle, this power is the reason for their canonization.

Identification & Proximity

Religious pictures endeavour above all to release strong feelings in the viewer, such as enthusiasm, anguish or compassion. For sure, there are situations and characters that one can or would wish to identify with, more or less. The extent to which spirituality and religiosity are embedded in one's own life is a very personal question. Karol Radziszewski puts it to several people in *The power of secrets*. Can we find subject matter in religious rites and stories that are of interest today? The artist also draws our attention to Saint Wilgefortis, known as 'Uncumber' in Great Britain: her legend tells the story of a woman who asks God to prevent her marriage to a man forced upon her by her father. God fulfils

her wish, making her grow a beard. St. Wilgefortis' struggle for self-determination ends up with her crucifixion. The question of autonomy is also posed by Artur Żmijewski's *Sztuka Kochania / The Art of Loving*. Here we become observers of private moments: people stroking, kissing and caressing one another. Some of them are ill with Parkinson's—they no longer completely control their bodies' movements. These people transcend boundaries: on the one hand, they defy their own physical limitations. On the other hand, they also overcome conventional notions of love and affection.

Space01

Sacrifice & Ritual

To make a sacrifice represents in religious terms a ritual action that is mostly understood symbolically. By the offering of a sacrifice, one enters into a relationship with God. In his actions, Hermann Nitsch has made the cycle of life his theme. Blood and flesh thus symbolise sacrificial offerings, providing 'an especially sensuous experience'. 'Everything is sacred' says Alois Neuhold and arranges his numerous works as if for an altar. The process of their creation has something meditative about it, yet also ritualistic. The colourful plethora of forms that are always similar contrast with Kris Martin's old, empty glass domes, which may originally have harboured saintly relics. In *Mythical Protest*, Slavs and Tatars juxtapose Shiite and Catholic rites and search for the forms of protest underlying them.

Inclusion & Exclusion

People join together to form communities, organise themselves and support one another. Belonging to a community can offer stability. But it may also be accompanied by a feeling of lost self-identity. Is one really determining one's own life or acting as others wish one to do? In religious affiliations there are generally rituals for accepting someone into the community of the faithful. Anyone who breaks the rules of that community can be threatened with exclusion. In Manfred Erjautz' *ME/WE*, the 'ME' is placed on the one side, the 'WE' on the other. The 'ME' of the individual and the 'WE' of the community are here indissolubly linked. Can the 'ME' assert itself in the 'WE'? Azra Akšamija is concerned in *Diaspora Scroll (Graz Chapter)* with the extent to which culture and religion shape societies. In the exhibition she collects embroidery designs on a fabric roll. In this way, patterns are mixed from a variety of eras and cultures.

Guilt & Power

Many religions work with ideals which the faithful are meant to emulate. Yet instead of serving as a helpful model to follow, an ideal can produce pressure and feelings of guilt, too: will I ever meet the required standards?

In general, who should be given the power to decide over our own guilt or innocence? In *Double-Bubble*, Maja Bajević shocks us with statements that demonstrate the abuse of power by religious dignitaries and the hypocrisy of believers. Santiago Sierra shows us in *Person facing into a corner* a man who stands with his face towards a wall in the corner. It looks as if he is being punished. In fact, Sierra has paid him to stand like that for one hour every day over a period of three weeks. Is the exercising of power a question of money?

KULTUM – Kulturzentrum bei den Minoriten

Liberation & Continuity

Norbert Trummer's drawings of *Seckau* are a storyboard for an animated film. The animated crayon drawings offer the artist's view of the highly symbolic, impressive abbey architecture. Adrian Paci shows the power of Christian symbols in his film. The cemetery in Albania has survived political turmoil and secularisation. In very poetic images he shows how children expose and clean the graves. Werner Reiterer, in contrast, tackles the theme in a seemingly more light-hearted manner. He describes the notion of an 'eternal life' as a closed circle, in which beginning and end are linked to one another and time becomes relative. A fluorescent tube is thereby transformed into one of the most important Christian symbols, the 'halo'.

Commerce & Presentation

For many people, religious faith is a very personal matter. However, private and public can not always be clearly separated. Meanwhile, the private life of some people in large part takes place online—and so is publicly visible. To market oneself online is fashionable. The extent to which social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram influence our lives is the concern of Anna Meyer in her two series *Being or Online* and *Digital Beings Commanded*. Is a life now considered a successful one if it has been 'liked' by the greatest number of others? Honest messages seem to recede into the background if they are not fit for the masses. Anna Baranowski and Luise Schröder direct our gaze towards the small Polish town of Świebodzin in *Facing the Scene*. The Catholic Church has erected a massive memorial here, a statue of Christ that is 38 metres high. Is the Catholic faith enacted here with an especial degree of passion? May there also be an element of self-promotion to this?

Pain & Identification

The Risen Christ overcame all his suffering. Free of pain and relaxed, he shows the noticeably gaping wound that bears witness to his death on the cross. Berlinde De Bruyckere likewise engages with the finite nature of the body and with the rendering visible of human physicality in suffering. The many faces that Jesus Christ can have are shown by Marlene Dumas, who thus foregrounds his humanity. Anri Sala shows human weakness, in which it remains open as to whether *Uomoduomo*, between contemplation and devotion, could also succumb to his exhaustion. Some pictures are hard to bear and demand openness towards a situation that is certainly disquieting. An example of this is shown on a large screen—people who are deaf or have impaired hearing struggle to sing a Bach cantata in a singing lesson by Artur Żmijewski, thereby reaching the limits of their potential to articulate themselves through sound.

Faith Love Hope

800 Years of the Graz-Seckau Diocese

13.04.-26.08.2018

A Tour

An exhibition to mark '800 Years of the Graz-Seckau Diocese' mounted jointly by the Kunsthaus Graz and KULTUM – Kulturzentrum bei den Minoriten in cooperation with the Alte Galerie, the Neue Galerie Graz and the BRUSEUM, the Folk Life Museum and the Diocesan Museum Graz.

Curated by Katrin Bucher Trantow, Johannes Rauchenberger and Barbara Steiner

Text: Monika Holzer-Kernbichler, Antonia Veitschegger

Translation: Andrew Horsfield

Proofreading and layout: Karin Buol-Wischenau

Title sujet: buero bauer

This text is published as a medium of the art educational team of the Kunsthaus Graz.