

Life during Wartime

Is a song by the Talking Heads from 1978. It says, among other things

The sound of gunfire off in the distance
I'm getting used to it now
Lived in a brownstone, lived in the ghetto
I've lived all over this town

This ain't no party, this ain't no disco
This ain't no fooling around
No time for dancing, or lovey-dovey
I ain't got time for that now

The market hall and Christophe Schneider from *Spot*, who grant us hospitality here, is a place where coexistence takes place through the offer of food from a wide variety of origins, it is a place where the need for food and enjoyment is lived and celebrated. Man, we artists could also be a little jealous of the way in which basic needs are satisfied relatively peacefully. Well, we are here now and we claim: Art is food for the mind and for the soul. And further: Art is vital. And further: without art nothing works. And further: Art can heal.

I recently heard from a Ukrainian curator, Alona Karavai, who runs one of the first residencies in Ukraine, how she explained that even today, under the prevailing conditions, there are contemporary artists who want to paint a forest, for example, and that they herself sees this as a relevant expression of art and a comment on the circumstances: She went on to say that it is the circumstances that make people look at a painted forest differently today than they did two years ago, because, she said, you look at the individual tree and wonders what could be hidden behind him, is there danger from the invisible thing he hides? But there could also be a couple hiding behind it, for example.

This is how ambivalence arises.

The artists' discomfort with becoming producers of socially sanctioned places of escape in the midst of various crises, and with their work being seen as a confirmation of the status quo, is obvious. This is perhaps the reason that each work is followed by another in order to pursue the demand for a more precise correspondence. This means that no work is truly finished. Every work remains a fragment. Every work could be continued. For example, from you.

The question arises as to why art is always a reaction to actions that are in the process of physically establishing their impact. Power that changes our lives, our everyday lives. Power that manifests itself in the economic distribution struggles that actually take place. Is that a disadvantage now? Yes, if you are caught up in concepts like realism as a form of representation of reality. No, if art accepts its position as an outpost in the negotiation of the conditions surrounding it.

Accept that Potemkin villages will remain just that, that nothing will change behind the beautifully painted facades. Accept that creating a facade, a deception, still describes the social function of art quite precisely.

Art plays the role of a precisely defined playground, a Disney Park, which was installed as a balance and compensation for the relatively powerless situation of the population when it comes to influence and self-determination.

The freedom of art, the freedom of art as a counter-example to the effective, otherwise prevailing lack of freedom. About the conditions, about the wars, about the structural conditions, which I don't have to explain individually, which increasingly threaten us all. Works of art are not tanks, they are simply there, as an antithesis to the increasing madness. Following them is voluntary, there is no compulsion, that's something. Anyone who wants to can participate and whoever doesn't doesn't have to.

And the clearer statements are, the easier they are to deform and reinterpret. The more complex content comes together, the more difficult it becomes to exploit it. Art does not dissolve the prevailing conditions, but it offers us a distance, a distance, a space for thinking. We are establishing an experimental station here, a construction site, a laboratory, today you see a possible situation, tomorrow everything will be completely different again and that until January 12th, so follow us to experience difference and with a pan to Jimi Hendrix from 1968, At the time he asked Are you experienced?

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Matthias Aeberli, artist, Basel, 2023