

The World is Chaotic

Simon Raab addresses this question in his exhibition at the Galerie Zimmermann in Mannheim

By Milan Chlumsky

Most people assume that the “disorder of things” is only a fraction of a comprehensive body of rules that the individual is not necessarily always able to understand. Only such a comprehensive body of rules makes it possible to suppress the chaos of the world. That is why there is also a social order that props up human existence with rules, and thus ensures survival. But is the truth not the opposite: is not the order of things only a very small part, a tiny element of what we call chaos?

The American artist Simon Raab — born in Toulouse, France in 1952 to parents originally from the Czech Republic, he himself now lives in Santa Barbara, California — originally studied physics and quickly realized that there are many more areas in the natural sciences that can be attributed to the category of “chaos” than to that of order and a body of rules. Since then, as he says, he has been extremely mistrusting of reality, and his work, which can now be seen in the Galerie Zimmermann, is as well.

It would be too simple to call him the Andy Warhol of the sculptural arts. When he first paints a sheet of aluminum or steel, and then deforms it with hammer blows in such a way that real and imaginary contours appear before it is adjusted to fit, after being heated, on a wooden frame and thus achieves its similarity to a relief, then one is already at the border between painting and sculpture.

In this process, photographs serve as the basis for a rough, colored draft. Afterward reliefs that seem astonishingly two-dimensional are created with a press hammer or normal hammer. Finally, Raab takes up the brush again and finishes the image with polymer paint. In his most recent works, the artist also deforms the images to create true steles.

Like Warhol, Simon Raab selects well-known and widely disseminated motifs for his works: Queen Elizabeth II on a stamp; Mahatma Ghandi, but with a small trickle of blood indicating his murder; or a beautiful pastiche of Newton’s apple, which invites us — as once Eve — to take a bite, and makes an allusion to paradise.

The painting of this artist calls all hackneyed paradigms into question, and is everything but unintelligent. In the end, why should images be classically intact when the world no longer is?

Image Caption:

For this work, Simon Raab distorted a stamp motif of the British Queen Elizabeth II. (Photo: M. Chlumsky)