

Mysterious, Monumental, Crumpled

New in Mannheim Galleries: Kunstverein shows Annelie von Faerber, Seascapes by Arató at the University, Simon Raab at Zimmermann

By Sigrid Feeser

Before the summer holidays also begin in Mannheim, some/a few galleries have upped the ante: the Kunstverein (art association) is showing mysterious drawings by Annelie von Faerber at the Berufsgenossenschaft Nahrungsmittel und Gaststätten, monumental seascapes by Robert Arató can be seen at the University, and in the Galerie Zimmermann, one becomes convinced that the painter Simon Raab is also a good sculptor.

Her pencil drawings are reasonably small, the line runs over the page with meticulous zeal, and the subjects are always somewhat mysterious. Strange things occur in quite ordinary spaces. They could be indications and remains of crime stories. Schematic figures busy themselves, and pistols lie around. Details are cut short, and living rooms shown from rather unusual perspectives are places of terror in which there are no shadows. “Blüten” (Flowers) is what Annelie von Faerber, a Mannheim resident born in Cape Town in 1979, calls her exhibition in cooperation with the Mannheim Kunstverein in the foyer of the Berufsgenossenschaft Nahrungsmittel und Gaststätten. If it is about the spring, are counterfeiters meant? The question of reality in art is once again posed.

In the east wing of Mannheim Palace, the University in cooperation with the Ludwigshafen Galerie Lauth is currently showing an exhibition in which the hyper-realistic seascapes by the painter Roberto Arató, who lives on Ibiza, play a central role. The 51-year-old wants his images, which oscillate between reality and appearance, to be understood as “quantum painting”.

In order to understand what this means, it is best to quote the master himself: “With the term quantum painting, I refer to my universal art idea – as painting free from tradition, style, objects, or the intent to express personal mental states. Like in quantum physics, I am concerned with the state and action or elementary energies. The constitutive elements in the images are only freely selectable forms of infinite possibilities.” That is, if I may say so, largely nonsense. The fact that Arató’s showy exhibition, with monumental formats as if created for executive suites, is far better than his speech bubbles camouflaged as theory allows one to breathe again.

A shrewd gallery owner like Peter Zimmermann is always open to the new and spectacular. Already one year ago, he showed works by the trained natural scientist, entrepreneur, and painting autodidact Stefan Raab. This time, the solo exhibition is accompanied by a work monograph and the title “Also Too Late For Shame”. Should this be taken seriously? After all, the director of the Mannheim Kunsthalle, Ulrike Lorenz, and the head of the Kunstverein, Martin Stather have contributed texts, and serious galleries such as Baumgarten in Freiburg have committed themselves to presenting Raab in the art world.

It is, of course, charming how Raab crumples his motifs painted on sheet metal by hand to become spatially effective image-objects, as if they were candy wrappers. The step to free standing, stele-like sculptures is logical but also leads to the intellectual crumple zone. One should also not let oneself be fooled in this case. In place of a commentary, again a very impressive Raab quote, which refers to the suggestion of rippling water on the surface of the works, which he terms “Parleau” (from the French “par l’eau): “Parleau lets the probabilities of the sculpted surface and the play of light control the perception and the emotion of this moment’s reality.”