

Art is a hand grenade

New work by Simon Raab in the Galerie Zimmermann in Mannheim

By Milan Chlumsky

The initial material with which he begins is a more or less thin aluminium sheet that can be easily formed. Previously, Simon Raab had first applied rough contours to the as-yet unwarped surface – such as that of a face, a landscape, or a Christian motif. Then the sheet was formed into a picture – and finally painted: this is how Raab's portraits of Goethe or Queen Elisabeth, Isaac Newton or Nehru were created. A certain distance from the picture is required in order for an image to appear from the uneven surface.

Now the artist, who comes from France and lives in California, reacts in his own way to the feeling of general threat, warlike escalation and increasing violence in the Arab world – with the creation of oversized mock hand grenades.

The "main work" seems to have originated in an ideal printing press, with the oversized military device being so smooth and perfectly imitated to the very last detail. Only the smoothly polished surface of the detonator and the use of chrome indicate clearly that something here is not right. The deliberate provocation and Raab's humanist contempt for all military tools cannot be overlooked.

In the current exhibition in Mannheim's Galerie Zimmermann, portraits and large-format pictures in the familiar Raab style can also be seen, but these are finer and sometimes more colourful than his earlier works. In other sculptures – such as the 1.70 meter high work "Tower of Babel" – the dashes of colour recall the confusion of tongues that accompanied its construction.

This new development becomes apparent as soon as you enter the gallery: a female nude holds a hand grenade in her right hand. And Simon Raab makes us bear in mind that these weapons "are activated and inspired by the hand of man... They are defensive, aggressive and work in the name of good and evil... I invite you to pull the pin."

Info: Galerie Peter Zimmermann, until 5 January.

Internet: www.galerie-zimmermann.de.

Caption: Grenade-like: Nude with Explosive by Simon Raab, which can be seen in Mannheim's Galerie Zimmermann.