

# Younger Than Jesus

ZIERVOGEL

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At first glance, a light, white tape stretches through the church interior of St. Matthew's Church – dotted with filigree clouds of figures that lead the eye in meanders up high above the altar. On the occasion of Passiontide, the artist ZIERVOGEL – following the pictorial tradition of wrapping the altar during Lent – has covered the altar of the church with a 30-metre-long paper ribbon that runs through the central aisle of the church like a ski jump. Visitors are drawn to these delicate drawings – only on closer inspection do they realise what the scenes are: Torn and disemboweled, raped and amputated figures torturing or assassinating each other. Palm-sized swarms of figures that wedge themselves into and with each other, forming scaffold-like structures that could collapse again in the next moment. A seemingly endless dance of (un)death, a human theatre of cruelty, runs through the church during Passiontide. Petrol canisters underline the explosive power of the tape, which seems to become a fuse in view of the flammable liquid.

The artist ZIERVOGEL is concerned with our access to the world through digital media and its effects on our image of man: In the left side aisle of the church, an I-Phone is fixed to the church floor – like a digital stumbling block. The smartphone as an entrance gate to a dark world via touchscreen: Not only the notorious Darknet, but also the seemingly bright, publicly accessible World Wide Web is woven through with depictions of violence and hate speech that run like cancers through the net. Younger than Jesus of Nazareth at his death (»Younger Than Jesus«) are the under 30-year-olds who access the world mainly through digital media. Violence and pornography are just a click (better: a »touch«, as shown by the touchscreen images – the Eskimo Song series – on the left gallery) away, all content is available at any time. How does this access to the world change our image of the human being?

Violence, sex, advertising and hate speech are the motifs around which ZIERVOGEL's work revolves. Since the 2000s, he has been drawing and overdrawing the abysses of digital image worlds with a fineliner: in his pictures, relevant symbols of the world of goods and luxury (smartphones, luxury accessories, trademarks) combine with pornographic fantasies of violence, opioids and written, tourette-like rants in seemingly endless hidden object images. Using the tools of horror aesthetics, borrowing from comics and caricature, ZIERVOGEL heightens, exaggerates, caricatures and intensifies the horrors of the digital world into a nightmarish scenario along and beyond our pain thresholds. However, not with superficial criticism, but – therein lies the explosiveness – in the mode of a paradoxical affirmation. ZIERVOGEL's pictures have the dynamics of a playful circus.

From a theological perspective, man was created in the image of God. Part of his history of disaster is that a little later – the symbol of the Fall – he damaged it beyond recognition. Since the Church Father Augustine, the history of theology has spoken – with ambivalent consequences – of »original sin«, an inescapable damage to the image, of a connection of guilt and sin inherited through the act of procreation, which only Jesus of Nazareth, as the »second Adam«, could break through through his vicarious sacrifice on the cross. The image of the so-called »Last Judgement« at the end of all time draws the picture of a final restoration of the likeness of the world and of man. The associated horror visions of punishment, purification and damnation gave rise to pre-Reformation visions of hell such as those of Hieronymus Bosch.

In the church of St. Matthew's, a view into the abyss of souls is created for the duration of Passiontide, a parade of figures of pain, which in their drasticness almost physically affect their viewers. On display are men and women in pain, but no Christ figures. Their suffering seems self-made, self-entangling and without redemption. Disgust and revulsion at the goings-on, but also paradoxical amusement and mockery, set in. This is – »let he who is without sin cast the first stone« – a mirror: »Who has so smitten thee, my salvation, and so ill judged thee with plagues?« asks a chorale in Bach's »St. Matthew Passion« - and answers: »It is I, I should atone, bound hand and foot in hell. The scourges and the bands and what you have endured, that my soul has earned.«

The old linguistic images seem strange today and yet have not lost their disturbing power to point to the contexts of violence and guilt in our world. In this way, the white tape veils the altar in a double way: it leads into the distance from God. At the same time, the almost physical experience of pain and suffering, which has almost been lost in the image of the crucified through habituation, returns all the more present in the church space of St. Matthew's during Passiontide – even if it is in the form of disgust and indignation.

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