

## MICHÈLE PAGEL

### *Rats Roaches Pigeons People*

11.2.–25.3. 2023

Pagel: *"We already have enough dystopias behind us. Their hybrids determine our present. What has grown together, mutated, emerged has established itself as everyday figures. Executed in ceramic, steel and concrete, the sculptures contain allegories of what was washed up from the past onto the shore of the present."*

For Michèle Pagel, dystopia, as a draft of a pessimistic vision of the future of questionable social developments, and utopia, as the possibility of positive counter-drafts, seem to be discursively opposed to each other. However, many utopias and dystopias arise when they develop determinate ideas whose disadvantages they conceal. This is politically dangerous and aesthetically weak in an artistic sense and prevents any attempt at improvement right from the start.

The two-sided lever "Utopia-Dystopia" seems rather suspicious to Pagel, because it becomes dangerous to any speculative fantasy, whose challenge to mind, heart and soul consists precisely in inventing the appropriate and 'artful' way to expand the respective mental horizons. This sometimes has to be fought for when it becomes politically and socially necessary, but the joke her sculptures evoke is different.

Pagel flexibly locates her often two-part sculptures between Aristotelian poetics and Brechtian dialectics – that means on the one hand between the examination of means of expression, function and effect of sculpture and on the other hand the consideration of socio-political dimensions. It is obviously important to her that both the causal relationships and the ethical dimensions are explicitly understandable and that the arousal of emotions and a critical, rational attitude are not mutually exclusive.

In the current exhibition, Pagel transforms objects from everyday culture into nine expansive sculptures. Fired from bricks and glazed, the objects embody heaviness while contrasting with the selected lightness of their appearance:

**Widerstand (Resistance).** A concrete cast, female-looking body that looks like a battered tree is crowned by a clenched fist visibly made of bricks.

**Spirit of Extasy.** The famous radiator mascot of the luxury brand Rolls-Royce, a symbol of lightness and freedom, made of silver glazed bricks, stands on a headless caryatid, with a bound, obese body.

**Sorry we are closed.** On the stem of a rose, two stone butterflies hibernate with folded wings.

**Sorry we are closed too.** The butterfly sits with folded wings on a forged wall sign that conveys opening hours rather than seasons.

**Solide Anlage (Solid Investment).** A birdcage poured with concrete standing on a turned wooden pillar, is crowned by the bronze door handles of a bank foyer. A dream house as a cage – but with the back door open.

**Give Peace A Lance.** A dove of peace impaled on the handle of a lance.

**All Creatures Are Beautiful.** An assemblage of several found objects. A ceramic table centrepiece stands on a burnt period furniture, with the headless torso of a police uniform protruding from it. The uniform stands empty and abandoned, like a knight's armor from older times, with flies swarming out of it. The centrepiece, surrounded by a variety of small creatures (spider, earthworm, snail, cockroach...), is inscribed "All Creatures Are Beautiful" a euphemism for the acronym ACAB (commonly used for All Cops Are Bastards or Attribute-Based Access Control, or even Annalena Charlotte Alma Baerbock...).

**Abendhimmel (or: Good Night White Pride).** Tiles were forcibly broken out of an old tile table to serve as a frame for a painting. This shows a romantically painted cloudy evening sky framed by the tile jags. A sign on the frame reads, "Good Night, White Pride".

**They Paved Paradise.** A miraculously grown dragon tree sprouts from a rusted industrial gas tank reminiscent of a bomb. The explosive shape of the leaves evokes nature's triumphant fireworks.