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ENGLISH

Jan Kiefer  
Rather Laugh

24.02. –  
07.07.2024

In 1878 during excavations in Neumagen on the Moselle, Germany a large stone sculpture was discovered representing a Roman wine ship. A model of it serves Jan Kiefer (Trier, Germany, 1979) who lives and works in Basel, as point of departure for a new series of paintings. The first painting of the work group shows the bow of the wine ship, the last shows the stern. The artist presents the middle part of the ship with a large number of pictures that form an unusually long hulk. Jan Kiefer creates a succession of sequences that reference the image-logic of the wimmel- or story-book and turns the ship into a stage, on which gesticulating Romans are talking about the sense and purpose of human culture. As a cultural asset wine is a complex symbol in religion and art and a recurring motif in the work of the artist. The decadent looking Romans, which the artist stages in front of the wine barrels, are in a lively exchange with each other. "What significance will our culture be given in the future? Will it even still exist at all?" We can derive these questions by reading the speech bubbles above the heads of the Romans, in which images can be seen of selected curators and animal species threatened with distinction. With sly humour and astuteness Jan Kiefer does not only question the cultural significance of art in our society. With the figure of Obelix, made of antique glass, he brings the Romans face to face with a symbol of resistance and reflects on how even formative epochs are short-lived but still have an impact on our current world-view.

The archaeological find of the stone sculpture is a tombstone. The predator heads at the bow and stern indicate that it was a warship, which in peacetime was presumably used as a merchant ship. On deck wine barrels and seated figures can be seen. Grapes have been cultivated for more than six thousand years and wine trade was part of the gigantic economic area of the Romans. In Roman and Greek mythology grapes are a symbol of fertility, ecstasy, prosperity, and intoxication. Jan Kiefer also sees the Romans with their wine ship as a symbol of early global trade that already followed rules similar to those of capitalism. Beyond the historical ascriptions of meaning, grapes are to this day an economic as well as a cultural asset and serve Jan Kiefer as a metaphor reflecting the relationship between culture and consumption. With his resort to the multi-branched Roman trade network the artist scrutinises present discussions around globalisation and liberalisation.

Jan Kiefer's pictorial references to the well-known names of his field such as George Grosz or Honoré Daumier show how caricature as satirical representation can throw a critical light on political, social or economic themes. By exaggeration and distortion Jan Kiefer comments on economic structures of today and asks after similarities in the narratives of economy and culture. Most services and products are now based on effective narratives. We no longer just buy products but we purchase the pre-fabricated story along with it. In his image series Jan Kiefer unmasks the ever-present "storyselling" and

with his paintings guides us to a deeper level that shows that there is an aspect of cultural heritage far away from prefabricated narratives.

## ÖFFENTLICHE VERANSTALTUNG

### Kunstgespräch

Do, 11.04.2024, 18 Uhr

Jan Kiefer im Gespräch mit Kurator Damian Jurt

Bitte melden Sie sich für das Kunstgespräch an über:  
[www.buendner-kunstmuseum.ch](http://www.buendner-kunstmuseum.ch)

Wir danken für die grosszügige Unterstützung:



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