

KIRCHGASSE Maximiliane Baumgartner Galère des Femmes

A cart rattles through the pictures.

The title of the exhibition *Galère des Femmes* (Women's Drudgery) refers to the French word 'galère' for painful toil – and at the same time to a copperplate engraving from 1780 from Baron de Zurlauben's *Tableaux de la Suisse*, a monumental work with idealised illustrations intended to map and show the scenic sophistication of Switzerland with its castles, lakes, bridges, valleys, waterfalls, mountain peaks and glaciers. In the course of the "Enlightenment" in the 18th century, the colonial project of categorising the world was also enthusiastically tackled by Baron de Zurlauben, and everything that could not be measured and therefore could not be made usable was excluded within this logic or made subject to ridicule. Like the sex workers in this engraving, who must pick up the shit from the street in a public 'Walk of Shame' in Bern under the amused, disciplining gaze of the proud men of urban society.

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The Swabian-Alemannic "Fastnacht" was added to UNESCO's Cultural Heritage List in 2014. While carnival in the 18th century developed into a new form characterised by the emerging bourgeoisie, the Swabian-Alemannic carnival, called "Fastnacht", has revived the partly imagined traditions of medieval and early modern carnival since the 20th century. The So-called 'witches' guilds' are the most recent manifestation of the Swabian-Alemannic carnival. These predominantly male associations have staged the image of the threatening, historically unproven 'carnival witch' in such a way that it not only serves patriarchal and misogynistic prejudices but also inscribes them into the public sphere. Many of them were founded as associations during the Nazi era and enjoyed great popularity in line with Nazi ideology.

In the parades organised by these associations, which were only invented in the second half of the 20th century, young women are thrown onto carriages, beds and into cages on wheels and pulled through the village by men wearing 'carnival witch' masks. They are led past the jeering locals standing at the roadside.

Witch hunts, in which women were defamed as witches and executed right up until "Enlightenment", took place in various regions of Germany. It is significant that 'witch guild' associations are particularly widespread today in the southern foothills of the Alps. In the context of the neoliberal zeitgeist of the 1980s and as an echo of the 1986 historians' controversy, this form of patriarchal staging was revitalised by the public in rural areas. For decades, new generations of men have been able to allegedly ironically appropriate the imagined past and give free rein to their misogynistic fantasies in public. Theorist Sayak Valencia says: „The rise in macho necropolitics as a form of managing populations through their elimination of women is a return to feudal/colonial policies of expropriation of women's bodies, knowledge, and territory carried out in Europe and the United States in the period known as the witch hunts.”¹

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The exhibition 'Galère des Femmes' aims to visualise various forms of these patriarchal image practices that have structured the local public sphere using the example of the Alpine foothills, where the exhibition takes place and where the artist grew up. In doing so, Baumgartner looks at the cultural space beyond today's national borders and national definitions. In her paintings, Baumgartner reviews these historical image politics, which aim to control, defame and make invisible bodies read as female in order to stabilise social power relations. The exhibition aims to show how images were and are used to manage, marginalise and re-appropriate bodies. To this end, Baumgartner often uses engravings in her paintings that originally had an educational, disciplinary function and inverts their content within her painting process. One type of feminist self-empowerment and symbolic reversal of these forms of patriarchal social order is the anasyrma. Anasyrma refers to the exposing gesture of lifting up clothing to reveal the naked body - often the vulva - as an act of confrontation, defence or magical effect. This archaic cultural technique appears in ancient myths, ritual practices and artistic contexts, in which it transforms shame into strength, undermines taboos and short-circuits power relations. In Baumgartner's pictures, this cultural technique is inscribed in the compositions like a palimpsest.

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Medicinal plants and shrubs from the foothills of the Alps also appear in the paintings. They were used in folk medicine for 'women's ailments' and are known in the Allgäu under misogynous names: For example, lady's bedstraw - 'Liebfrauenbettstroh', the spurge - "Hexamilch" or the deadly nightshade - 'Bella Donna'. - *Deadly nightshades wander through the pictures. Like watchful eyes, they are present and look out of the pictures. What happens when the picture looks back?*

¹ Sayak Valencia, Necromasculinity, in: Voices of Mexico Nr. 121, 2023