

For his first exhibition at Galerie Barbara Weiss, the New York-based artist Rainer Ganahl (\*1961 in Bludenz, Austria) presents two video installations and two tableaus, all related to his ongoing series *Manhattan Marxism*.

The artist comments on *Manhattan Marxism*:

Needless to say there is a contradiction at hand since Manhattan is the home of Wall Street, the biggest machine of capitalism throughout the 20th century and still one of the biggest and the most important in the world. But this little island is not only home to many high-wealth individuals – including some of the richest people in the world – but also to many poor people and a neighborhood statistically still belonging to the most underprivileged areas in the United States.

Hence, Manhattan in conjunction with Marxism could easily be understood as radical chic, some kind of provocation if not outright cynicism, but I do not intend it as such. Not only do I myself live in Manhattan – in the area of Spanish Harlem – but also do many theoreticians who read and study Marx's texts that are still taught at Manhattan universities.

I am interested in Karl Marx as a theoretician and a metaphor for his theoretical analysis about how people interact materially and socially thus creating an economic system that gives us work, value, profits, losses, crisis, debts and differences. He says work is the major force for people to deal with the world, to satisfy their needs and to create and shape their – mostly instrumental – thinking. Work for Marx is a basic category that takes on new shapes in whatever developmental phase the individual or society finds itself. It is crucial to sustain life and create our understanding of the world and each other. I would go as far as to say that in a society where basic needs like food, clothing, health and security are nearly all guaranteed by the state without much effort, even consumption, distraction, shopping and wasting is some kind of lying just idle is work creating an overall productive effect.

Marx was also an amazing analyst of the products human- and machine-work produces. Already in the first part of the 19th century he speaks about the fetish character of products and goods, something that is the dominating and driving force of shopping and accumulating stuff and services today. His materialism explains the world from the bottom up and unlike idealists who start with big master gods, big terms and concepts and put the idea of something ahead of that something, for Marx survival comes first which then makes humans make things to become who they are and what they are.

Marx represents for a large part of the left leaning population – to which I count myself – social justice and hope. On the right leaning spectrum, he is blamed for the disasters and brutal repressions 20th century forms of communism produced with all its terror and inefficient economical systems. Even if I am fascinated by Marx’s materialist philosophy and his very influential understanding of economical and social processes of his time including his fight against idealism and any kind of god-business, I am not a Marxist the way it was understood in the 20th century where such a sentence and declaration could cost or save your head literally or metaphorically. Saying all this, I have to point out all the misery, wars and murders that were committed partially under his banner, his ideology, his name – no matter how innocent the mostly London-based writer was or wasn’t. Through this lens, the artist observes his neighborhood in two video installations; the two-channel video installation *El Mundo - a classical music concert*, 2013, documents a performance staged by the artist in a discount department store called “El Mundo” in East Harlem, originally built as a grand cinema theater.

Between metal shelves stacked with cheap products and signs screaming “Lost our lease — everything on sale!!!” and “You pay less than we paid!!!” musicians perform works by Bizet, Schubert and Puccini. Shortly after the performance the shop was closed down and the building renovated, like many of this discount shops for low-income areas. With increased rents and changing demographics these places are about to disappear.

*Haunted Houses - vacant building on Third Avenue between 99th and 120th street*, 2012, consists of two 16mm color films the artist shot in 2012 from the back platform of a pick up truck between 99th and 120th street. The video refers to the vacant buildings in Spanish Harlem, a area Ganahl himself has been living for about 20 years, where houses had been empty and bricked up due to real estate speculations, mismanagement and general distrust in the neighborhood for many decades. That is now changing due to a gentrification process the city is constantly confronted with. At one point, also the building of El Mundo enters the frame.

The third part of the exhibition consists of a so-called *Credit Crunch*. Since 2008, the artist has worked on this series that combines comments on economic mismanagement and crisis with food, obscene graphics and porcelain into nature morte. For the Berlin exhibition the artists presents a fish and chips version of the BREXIT.

Recent solo exhibitions of Rainer Ganahl include *Artists - Recent Photographs from My S/L Series*, Kai Matsumiya, New York (2015), *Manhattan Marxism*, Vleeshall, Middelburg (2014); *Comme de Marxist*, White Columns, New York (2013); *Languages of Emigration*, Alex Zachary, New York (2010); and *Dadalenin*, MAK, Vienna (2009).

A publication on *Manhattan Marxism* is published by Sternberg Press in 2017.

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