

Between Poetry and Political Commitment

Büttgen. Why did Carmen Hay Kolodzey ten years ago leave the professional and financial security as a teacher for secondary schools in the fields of art and textile in Germany? This question wasn't quite answered at the opening evening of her exhibit at the Municipal Gallery Kaarst at the Town Hall Büttgen. But, the person who has eyes to see, will have noticed how lively and highly imaginative but not at all unworldly the works of Carmen Hay Kolodzey are.

Not unworldly

One may be able to comprehend that her work, which appears so light and casual, can only be created in an open environment, which allows for more than a little bit of comedy and cabaret, as a resistance against everyday poverty, injustice and sometimes even joy. Martel Wiegand, her former teacher at the university of Essen, gave the frame of reference in her opening speech: “From visual observation, pattern and material, poetic inventions to political message. Everything can be combined in one work: A banal basic pattern, playful free improvisation and information about inhumane situations.”

This is not very difficult to understand. Even though the materials are fabrics and it is named “textile art”, nobody would associate immediately with socio-critical subjects. However, a painted table cloth has been good enough as a canvas for ideas before.

As a warning sign, with the spots of a meal, declared as an art object against wastefulness, it is plausible at any time. But such a formula is much too obvious for Carmen Hay Kolodzey. She is looking for the stipulation, wandering on the thin line between beauty, even prettiness, and strict political compassion. She shows contradictions.

In the lobby there are several pillows on view. They are not pillows to rest on. On the shiny cover you can read next to the outline of Germany words like “Absagen” (Rejections) and “Langzeitarbeitslose” (Long-time unemployed). In addition you see images of groups of people and playful remnants of material and fringes.

Colorful Forms

In the large exhibition hall hang two oversized dresses made from a white, semi-see-through material. They are painted with cheerful, amorphous, colorful forms. However, the seam is closed by fringes. Nobody would be able to walk in it. A beautiful, decorated straitjacket.

The breaks between the material, the common knowledge of what it's used for and what Carmen Hay Kolodzey makes out of it, hides in it is what sometimes could irritate us. But then we are surprised, because in the end we might think this work containing the loudest protest, may be the most beautiful. The exhibition is on view at the Town Hall Büttgen until May 16. **Stefan Skowron**