

Theo Boettger: THE SNEAK

Theo Boettger's Sneak is bald. With black tongue stretched out venomously and greedily staring bulging eyes, he drools at the thought of his next victim.

Every generation and society has its sneaks, inquisitors, informers, snitches, vilifiers and bullies. Sneaking can happen out of malice, envy and thirst for revenge. It can serve as an outlet for aggression or be motivated by moral convictions or social pressures. Sneaks always sneak on their own group and allow themselves to be used by employers and authorities for checking up on and penalising in-house or system-endangering misdemeanours.

Against a backdrop of global terror and fear of losing one's job, sneaking is increasingly losing its moral taint. The Internet provides new dimensions in this respect. On websites such as www.verpetzt.de or www.anschwaerzen.de anyone can betray, condemn and insult his or her fellow humans under the cloak of anonymity and in uncensored form. Meanwhile, Süddeutsche Zeitung has introduced a "Sneak and Evaluate" function into its online forum to regulate the daily flood of unqualified reader comments.

Theo Boettger's Sneak is joined by other dubious creatures: a neighbour with scarred face contorted in a grimace, pierced eyes and bared teeth; a bloody, battered, bent figure on his nocturnal way home; a tormented heap of flesh stretched out on a kerbstone with the bodiless legs of passers-by trampling indifferently over it.

Scarcely has one tried to relax and create a distance by drawing comparisons with the Expressionist metropolitan art of the 1920s but scraps of words like plus, reopening and big bladder drag you back to the here and now that Johannes Schmidt aptly described as the "pandemonium of modern life on the edge of the abyss." Boettger paints the uncomfortably commonplace margins of our everyday life in an excessive, aggressive and authentically unattractive style with a great deal of black and blood red and all the less exuberant colours or areas of light. They include a supermarket checkout assistant, her body torn apart by shopping trolleys, extended opening times and screaming kids; a family whose supporting legs begin to totter badly while waiting in the job centre queue; they extend to rampant mass hysteria in the battle for the lowest prices at the Media Markt store opening.

Theo Boettger deals with areas of life of those failed or neglected in capitalism, who surround him daily and affect him personally. He does so with brushstrokes in oil, grotesquely distorted slogans and bulky layers of collage. He translates individual destinies and inferno-like mass battles into psychograms on canvas and wood. Boettger's painterly realisations may be apocalyptically grim, but the circumstances he describes are perfectly normal everyday madness. His artistic commentary is more personal than political, never other-worldly, but in the midst of life – and close to the abyss.

(Text by Carla Orthen)