

The fragmentary man

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Is it not true that minimalism is an advantage in order to cling to a moment, if you can include the works of Urban Grünfelder in this? The form of the sculptures cannot be called into question. Their statements are concrete and there are no alternatives left. The social and political reference is always clear.

Urban Grünfelder's work is influenced by overcoming aggression, violence and suffering, hunger and excess. The artist exposes the necessity of the present time, the desire to revoke reality in the sense of justice, which touches every aspect of daily life, and contradicts the domineering culture of consumption and superficiality.

Urban Grünfelder gives his sculptures a deranged identity, like the anorexic in the posture of a crucified human with a sack of bread around her neck, a figure bent backwards, tormented and forced to endure a refuse bag projecting from the chest and attempting, with flowers in the mouth, to make the stench of our trash-filled society have a pleasant fragrance and taste. The artist refers to mental and psychic states in their most blatant form. He shows his audience the status of powerlessness adverse their own weakness. The onlooker attempts to gain distance, turning away partly in irritation. Irony is taken to a moral extreme in the artist's sculptures like the "Devouring crutches". A man seated, without arms or legs, and with crutches, which reach deep into his gullet. The crutches symbolize a cross that is meant to suggest hope. Here, reality is the perception of the limits of our own physicality. Without arms and legs, the figure is incapable of using these crutches. This is a metaphor for a mentality, for humiliation and domineering behaviour and the true relationship of one human being with another.

The observer is unavoidably confronted with ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, there is astonishment about the unmistakable directness of the sculptures, and on the other hand, provocation at having been caught out. Urban Grünfelder's sculptures are a reaction to the decadence of society and its themes. They leave the observer feeling moved and disconcerted.

It is impressive how Urban Grünfelder translates his emotions into the sculptures, superimposing beauty and imperfection on them. He underlines the strength of the face, the weakness, the shy response. Equally, he not only reflects through his sculptural positions, but also provokes partly because of their religious context.

Urban Grünfelder represents male sculptures with highly emotionalized everyday objects like bread rolls, suits, funnels, crutches, measuring tape, which reproduces the content and themes of the sculptures. They highlight questions about human existence and society's behaviour. Since the beginning of time, mankind has been considered as the beautiful, strong lineage. This has changed so radically in Urban Grünfelder's sculptures, since through their poses and postures, their nakedness, weakness, indignities and paralysis they expose brutality in its most crass form as an integral part of our culture. The interaction between the sculptures and the audience refers as such to the existential dimension – everything is at stake, the survival and extinction of humanity.

The selected monochrome high-gloss colours further reinforce this impetus. Of interest are the impact of colour and design. The polish and gloss expose a society that intends these surfaces to conceal the obscene and perverse. Oppressiveness goes hand in hand with voyeurism. Every figure is individual, though they are not suited to simplistic interpretation.

Urban Grünfelder develops his sculptures out of ceramics, which are among man's oldest cultural and artisan skills. Clay – the raw material eventually forming the sculptures – suggests vitality to the observer. The figures grow beyond themselves and overstep their reality. They are a parody of being originally human. Yet the individual sculptures are only realized, as they are unfolded in numerous sketches.

In the context of working with Urban Grünfelder, I became aware of an intrinsic physicality within the body that is implicit to his sculptures. The bodies reflect something much greater outside them; they are a kind of mirror of society, its conventions and constraints.

Urban Grünfelder, the person, as well as his various facets and personal living conditions must be understood as part of his works for the purpose of interpretation. Urban Grünfelder always searches for standpoints and thematic emphases, which preoccupy him artistically, in order to put them at the centre of his work. His own physicality seems to serve as an artistic medium, yet independently of any specific comparison with the body. By the same token, our perception should focus on the human components in his works, and the mentality that is to be expressed. These aspects reflect the disquiet and inhumanity of our time.