

DETRITUS & ART / A personal point of view on Environment and Art

by Rainer Stegmann

Artists seldom provide an interpretation of their own work; they leave this to the observer. Each of us will have his/her own individual view of a specific piece of art, seeing different contents and experiencing a range of own feelings and emotions. Bearing this in mind, I created this page where you will find regularly selected masterpieces from different epochs and I express my thoughts on what the work conveys to me personally. My interpretation will refer specifically to the theme "Environment". Any comments or suggestions regarding this column should be addressed to stegmann@tuhh.de.



RENÉ MAGRITT / The Lovers, 1928.

The term Surrealism comes from French language and means "above realism". In surrealism artists did not only depict reality in their paintings but also dreams, the unreal and fantastic and combine these different worlds. To a certain extent this art direction was a reaction to World War I. René Magritt (1898-1967) is one of the main representatives of surrealism.

I selected his painting "The Lovers", which exists in several versions. I chose it because I think we also live in a somewhat surrealistic time, a time that human society only imagined in movies and books but not in reality.

When I saw the masked faces on Magritt's painting immediately Corona came into my mind. A man and a woman in love are separated by the pieces of cloth that cover their faces. The prints of the faces on the pieces of cloth and the way the heads are positioned show that the persons are in love but cannot come closer to each other, the cloth separates them. The analogy to our situation during the Corona pandemics imposed itself on me and I might "translate" René Magritt's title to "Love in times of Corona", as a

symbol of the difficult time when people are separated and cannot come together.

One may also find an analogy to living in times of climate change, which to a certain extent is also surrealistic, the effects as changing weather conditions, rising ocean water tables, intense melting ice in the pole areas are real but the relation of human action to climate change – although they can be scientifically explained- remains surreal, unreal.

When looking not only on the faces but on the entire painting of Magritt I see light on the two faces and a partly blue sky with fair weather clouds, which give a kind of mellow and not a depressing atmosphere. Maybe we can also find some "positive" effects of Corona pandemics. Especially during the first lock down in spring, nature benefitted from less tourists, fewer airplanes in the air, emptier roads, less consumption. There were many reports about the recovery of nature, of cleaner air and water (e.g. dolphins in the channels of Venice, cleaner air in big cities, less NO₂ in the atmosphere above China). I was surprised how fast nature in some areas recovered and this gives hope and should encourage all of us to reduce planet's CO₂ footprint and strive for sustainability. What we can learn from Corona pandemics is the necessity to take drastic measures now; otherwise we will not succeed.

In order to make in the future the pieces of cloth around our heads redundant new pandemics have to be avoided. Transforming human society to sustainability also by implementing animal welfare, avoiding pollution and increasing biodiversity will help to reduce the chances for new pandemics on our globe. In a healthy environment virus has less chances for finding appropriate living conditions.

Next issue: In my next column I will present Paul Cézanne's beautiful painting of the landscape of "Anvers du Cote du Valhermeil". Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) is the pioneer and one of the main representatives of expressionism.