

*Mahagonny* – that's the city of unbridled hedonism invented by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, where having no money is a crime punished by death. It is shocking how much that world resembles our present.

Ulrike Theusner has turned her years of interest in *Mahagonny* into her current exhibition. She conceived an oversized fictional studio wall on which she has pinned pastels and drawing, prints, and photographs, all shreds of memories of her life between Europe and the United States. The viewer is initially overtaxed; this is intentional and reflects our daily inundation by images.

The studio wall is organized in three areas that shade off into each other and follow Brecht and Weill's *Mahagonny* idea: first the present, reality, portraits of the current generation including a self-portrait. Much furious irony, but also much pity. These impressions shift to pictures of the city of Mahagonny as a site of whiskey, prostitution, and uninhibited intoxication. Finally the threat from nature, which could demand its right: the fear of a volcano eruption and the great tsunami that puts an end to everything.

The devastating image of a society is portrayed here, whose manifold possibilities keep it from knowing what to do. It oscillates between a gruesome burnout and deadly boredom, and seeks to numb its fear of itself and of death with ever-new sensory impressions. The Reaper, symbol of death in the dances of death of earlier times, is always present. Is there any salvation?

Ulrike Theusner is a painter who draws and a draftswoman, who paints. Her pictures, including her prints – which should all be viewed with calm – can always be traced back to a meshwork of lines, each of which shows a motion, an immediacy between head and hand. All the lines together seem less to depict something than to make something visible: an aura, evil or benevolent spirits that we only gradually recognize. Therein lies the beauty of this art: that it can open up something that's hidden and gives us the chance to return to the heart of the matter and to ourselves.

*Text by Ulf Küster, 2023*

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