

## Sweet Bird of Youth

In 2018 I began the portrait series of drypoint etchings in a small edition called *Sweet Bird of Youth*. Some of the works shown here are artist prints from the editions created at the time, which I later reworked with shellac ink.

The portraits depicted are friends or acquaintances from my near and distant surroundings. The drypoint etchings were soon followed by larger pastel drawings on paper and canvas, such as the most recent portrait, *Riva*. The individual pictorial elements such as the clothing, the posture and demonic motifs on the clothing or in the background provide information about the inner situation of the people portrayed.



Dream and reality become blurred, as in the colored etching *Sleep of Reason*. Ghostly dogs are visible above the sleeping girls in the subdued light. The work refers to Goya's well-known graphic *The sleep of reason produces monsters*.

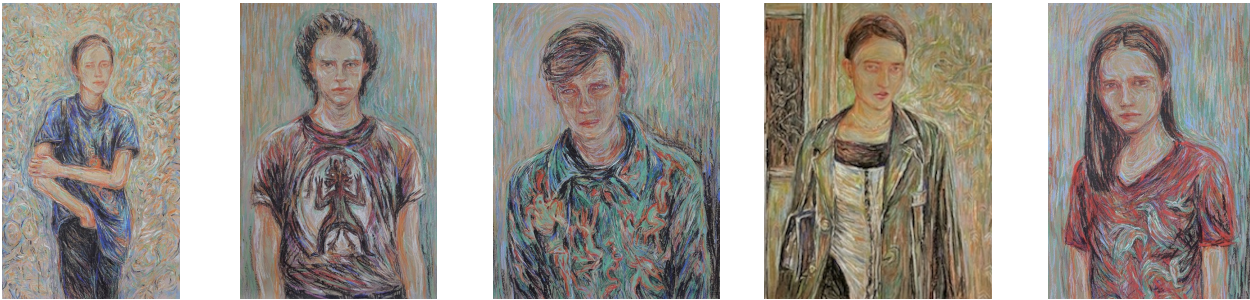
Despite all the possibilities, *Venus* gazes closed off into a world that can seemingly offer her nothing more.

The tightly combed hair and the jacket with militant hunting motifs contradict the sad expression on *Eires'* face and leave an ambivalent impression. An inner chaos lies in the nature of youth, which encounters the world with different perspectives in its search for orientation, often experiencing a lack of understanding and a feeling of loneliness. The resulting misunderstandings lead to discord, as the title name, which refers to *Eris*, suggests - in Greek mythology, this is the goddess of discord.

*Alma*, who hides her character behind her tight-fitting black clothing and her closed, protective posture, appears just as withdrawn and inaccessible.

The drypoint etching *Portrait of a Boy*, whose questioning gaze carries a mixture of perplexity and serenity, makes me think of a quote from Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

„The world is yours - for a brief span. The moment I saw you, I realized that you have no idea what you are, what you could be.“



This contradictory feeling, which also constitutes the power and magic of youth, is also conveyed in the pastel drawings. On the one hand, they radiate guileless openness, exuberant curiosity and proud superiority; on the other hand, there is also hesitant uncertainty, apathetic resignation, mistrust or skepticism in their gaze. This ambivalence reflects a world that has become unpredictable and incalculable despite the abundance of its possibilities.



Every generation is shaped by the time they live in and questions the old, is in search of new paths and solutions, in a sometimes furious urge for change or takes refuge in dream worlds and disinterest, in a resigned defensive attitude as in *Beautiful Boredom*. The ink drawings from the *Weird Feelings* series reflect the inner worlds: feelings of being torn and overwhelmed, isolation and forlornness, the search and desire for orientation are depicted in sometimes metaphorical grotesques, as in *My time will come* or *I almost made it*.

Love also plays a role, as in *I'm waiting for my man*, which either does not appear or leaves traces of injury, as in the drawing *I found a heart and I ate it*.



The *Weird Feelings* ink drawings are an open series that is constantly finding new equivalents and has been growing steadily since 2021. It had already played a role in my work before that. A part of it is pictured in a small edition of drypoint etchings and monotypes. They are ideas, inspired by Goyas *Los Caprichos* - strange, funny, unusual, uncanny drawings which come across as curious nightmarish visions, and now and then cast a nihilistic look at the world like the grinning fox in *The World is mean place*, as well as humorous commentary like the woman bathing in the champagne glass. If you try hard enough, you can decipher a delicate lettering above it which says: *They plunged headlong into woeful puffy faced decay*.

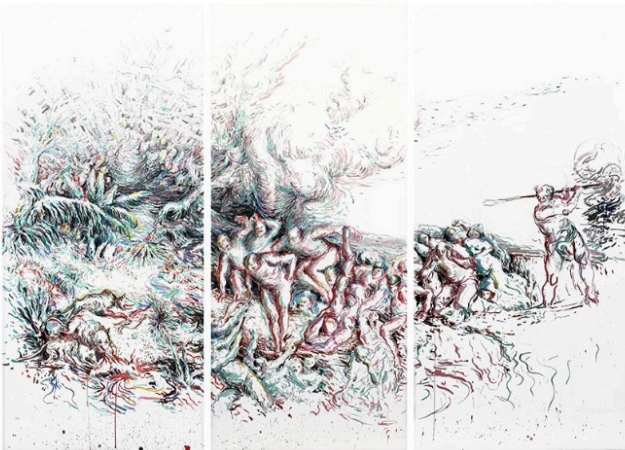
The ink drawings, drypoint etchings, monotypes and pastels are a mixture of perceptions, feelings and impressions that I have experienced, especially during my stays in Berlin and New York. My encounters and experiences convey a strange sense of being lost in a world full of options. Despite their willingness to engage with life, the protagonists of my drawings fall short of their potential. They often make little use of their abilities, follow strange models and wander ghost-like through an illusory world in search of success, recognition and self-optimization as in the monotypes *Mahagonny Girls*. They are in danger of losing their sense of connection and connection to themselves.

The urban landscape becomes an inner landscape and also a metaphor for a world torn apart and at odds with itself, as in the large-format, multi-part pastel drawing *Tale of Two Cities I*. The ancestral spirits are always there, clinging to the walls of the houses and sitting in the courtyards, revealing themselves in silence only to those who pause for a moment. The title of this drawing refers to the novel of the same name by Charles

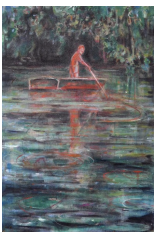


Dickens, whose antagonistic opening sentences seem very topical today:

*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,  
it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness,  
it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of  
incredulity,  
it was the season of light, it was the season of  
darkness,  
it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.*



Where does the path lead in a world that seems to be disintegrating into its individual parts, in which we are finally driven out of paradise in the face of global disruption and danger - not by the devil or God, as depicted in *Land of Plenty IV*, which refers to Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, but by our actions alone?



How will the future generation be able to change and influence the world according to their ideas? The world that we will leave them. Is it a time of awakening or resignation, is it *all just a dream eventually*? And when, if not now, should we ask ourselves these questions?

*I ain't happy, I'm feeling glad  
I got sunshine in a bag  
I'm useless but not for long  
the future is coming on  
it's coming on.*

*Gorillaz*



Ulrike Theusner, October 2024

