

You lucky pig!

In art, there are all types of pigs: Visitors to the documenta X¹ were able to confront live pigs. The Belgian artist Wim Delvoye tattooed pigs². In Hieronymus Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights numerous pigs cavort and in still life pigs' heads lie on princely tables with apples in their snouts.

"You stupid pig!", "you lucky pig!". The pig is an ambivalent animal. On the one hand it is associated with luck and good fortune - especially in German speaking countries - on the other hand, it is the symbol of dirt. Humans are also ambivalent animals. Many people would occasionally love to wallow in mud just like a pig, but will generally opt for more hygienic options. Many people save their money in a piggy bank. Pigs combined with clover leaves are lucky charms.

"The Holy Pig" by Nina Staehli stands in a chancel that she has designed herself. The small white figure has been kept simple and the pig is mainly identifiable by its snout. The implied clothing could be an ermine cape or a monk's frock.

The holy pig fulfils wishes. Or at least that is what all that pay homage to it hope. The ritual is as follows: visitors write down a wish and stick it to the wall. Then they stroke the pig's nose to make the wish come true. Around 500 wish lists have accrued; an archive of wishes, desires and hopes of different people. It is fascinating to watch as it gradually becomes apparent whether wishes are the same around the world or if they are different. For her holy pig, Nina Staehli creates a place where you can temporarily remove yourself from the real world, a place of peace, reflection and concentration. Today's world has mostly been demystified. As world religions now only partially fulfil the need for mysticism, replacement religions, esotericism and charlatanism are booming. "The Holy Pig" reminds us of profane rituals, for example of wishing fountains. A pig as something holy obviously raises doubts. However, every human has a propensity for superstition. A small spark glows in every sceptic. Secretly, everyone hopes for wish-fulfilment like they wish for winning lottery numbers.

The artist is not looking to provoke. Instead, with "The Holy Pig" Nina Staehli is searching for new moral concepts in light of the decay of the old values. All the same, the choice of a pig does reveal how sensitive religious and cultural emotions can be and how these emotions can prevent fertile debate. Outcry from Catholics, Muslims or Jews, who will see their religions mocked, is almost unavoidable.

¹ House of pigs and humans of Rosmarie Trockel and Carsten Hoeller, documenta X, 1997.

² Art Farm, 2007. <http://www.wimdelvoye.be/artfarm.php#>

³ First time 2010/2011 in Berlin at XXX, further targets to follow

The next stop for "The Holy Pig" is Genoa where saints are omnipresent as in many other Italian towns. Many houses have alcoves with votive chapels, so-called edicole votive. Nina Staehli will not be putting her pig in any of these alcoves. Instead, she will build here own place of pilgrimage. She will sit in the room herself. On her head a large version of the head of "The Holy Pig", much like an Egyptian goddess. The eeriness which inheres in every encounter with the holy figure is underlined by the performing presence of the artist. In this way, she opens a new level of meaning. "The Holy Pig" could be interpreted as a criticism of the messianic worshipping of artistic personalities. Is an artist the son of a preacher man or just the son of a bitch?

Urs Küenzi

Curator of the Substitut, space for Swiss art, Berlin

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