

## SYMPTOM : BAROCK

MARGRET EICHER, SIMONE DEMANDT, REBECCA STEVENSON, MYRIAM THYES

Special exhibition at Eutin Castle, 2023

The splendidly furnished Baroque residence Eutin Castle will be showing the special exhibition *Symptom : Baroque* from 9 June to 8 October 2023.

Eutin Castle is a beautiful place. Its centuries-old walls, the colours of the rooms, the paintings and furniture, the view out into the garden and finally the garden itself. The castle radiates a quite irresistible charm in all seasons and weather conditions. So it is not surprising that we were able to lure four international contemporary artists to Eutin for this long summer: Margret Eicher, Myriam Thyes, Rebecca Stevenson and Simone Demandt come from Berlin, Dusseldorf/Zurich, London and Baden-Baden. They bring new fantastic inspirations and great art to the north, allowing us to experience Eutin Castle in a whole new way.

With their interventions in the historic castle tour, the four directly refer to the location. For some years now, the artists have been dealing with the thematic repertoire and aesthetics of the Baroque, which they see mirrored in world-political as well as cultural phenomena of our time: through friction between rationality and highly individualistic beliefs as well as through increasingly present end-time fantasies that lead to disruptions within society and its cohesion.

In Eutin Castle, the architecture and furnishings, the dreams and the reality of the Baroque are still present today. They often trigger emotions in visitors, and yet the level of meaning often remains buried. Images and signs are not immediately comprehensible after centuries. In the context of the fully furnished castle museum, it is particularly appealing that the four artists work in completely different media. In the sense of the Baroque principle of "curiositas", this results in diverse and varied references between historical and contemporary works: sometimes their affinity lies in the material, sometimes in the theme, sometimes it is purely conceptual.

Margret Eicher's media collages and tapestries enter into an exciting and revealing dialogue with the old art treasures of Eutin Castle. The artist finds the material for her digital collages in art history and in mass media, especially the internet. She defends herself against the storm of images that rages around us every day and tries to push us into buying decisions. Margret Eicher takes what particularly fascinates or disturbs her. She copies, takes apart and assembles her digital collages and media tapestries according to the compositional principles of the old masters. Thus, in Eutin, not only the image power of mass media is explicitly demonstrated, but also the agenda of historical ruler staging. In the Knights' Hall of Eutin Castle, for example, Margret Eicher's tapestry *It's a Digital World 4* deliberately covers parts of the dominant equestrian portrait of King Christian IV of Denmark, a potent general of the 30 Years War. As today's equivalent, Elon Musk in a Tesla now takes the place of the king; the SpaceX CEO seems ready for battle with cosmic adversaries. With her tapestries, Eicher has appropriated a genuinely baroque medium. Her works, initially created as digital collages on a computer, are woven in Flanders. In a wondrous way, these works also make Baroque art readable anew. Power-political demonstration and the manifestation of political and ideological convictions become visible in today as in yesterday. Sometimes this results in something marvellous, seductive, sometimes shocking – art shakes us awake and draws our attention.

Myriam Thyes reveals to us that today's media landscape also benefits from the psychological and social potency of the Baroque's political and religious symbolism. Her video works conquer the ceiling stuccowork of Eutin Castle and open the hall ceilings – like the baroque ceiling paintings once did – to an otherworldly realm of ideas. In addition to three new site-specific works, Myriam Thyes has also brought existing works to Eutin. For

example, the video work *After Tiepolo* is exhibited in the chapel of the castle. In 1753, the Venetian Giovanni Battista Tiepolo painted an enormous ceiling fresco for the Prince-Bishop of Würzburg in the staircase of his palace, the gigantic Würzburg Residence. Shots of this fresco are gradually superimposed in Myriam Thyès's video work. Planets and galaxies replace the sky of the gods; skyscrapers and power stations obscure Tiepolo's merchants, artists and craftsmen. The baroque view of the world disappears, but modern civilisation loses sight of the whole world – it sees only itself.

Rebecca Stevenson works as a sculptor mainly with wax. Her technique refers back to baroque wax sculptures, but can also be reminiscent of the glossy perfect imagery of social media: the texture of fur and skin, bright colours, shimmering surfaces characterise her three-dimensional still lifes with dead game, flowers and fresh fruit. But the works are cut open or even torn open. Fleishy roses, peaches, grapes, corals and crystals spill out of the openings. Pleasure and disturbance arise at the same time in the face of these virulently modern memento mori, which are meant to unfold their effect in the historic "tiled kitchen" of Eutin Castle. In the "Strackzimmer", the *Vessels for a Huntress* – oversized baroque pearls shimmering as if pulsating with blood – seem to celebrate a great, imaginary huntress who may have inhabited this flat in earlier times. Rebecca Stevenson creates her own neo-baroque chamber of wonders with her sculptures. Not least, her works confront the preconceived Christian and Eurocentric perspective of the builders and residents of Eutin Castle – they also challenge the limitations of our own gaze and invite us to make surprising new discoveries.

Simone Demandt's object photography negates preservation, safeguarding or the call to affirmative recognition. She questions, unsettles, evokes the magical or the groundless. When, for example, her small-format photographs of fragmented hands and feet of baroque sculptures join the portrait paintings of the palace, as if in passing, the imperious representation of the ruler suddenly changes its expression - the question of humanity becomes possible. Or in the "Wallpaper Room" of Eutin Castle, where Simone Demandt's *Plant Models* react to the precious old wall coverings: Flowers were an essential part of courtly life in the Baroque period. Anything unusual aroused curiosity and was recorded. Pictures and books showed the anatomy of plants, their colours, but also the phases of growth and decay. Simone Demandt observes just as precisely and enthusiastically in her photo series. She presents us with the historical, wooden flower models like Wunderkammer objects. Her camera makes every bewildering detail visible. At the same time, she heightens the mysteriousness of these flowers and our curiosity.

We cordially invite you to be seduced by these sometimes wonderful, sometimes astonishing interventions and to enjoy the sensual quality of the works on display. But we also hope that you will be inspired to question the artworks – historical and contemporary – and to re-read their artistic, political and social positions.

Dr. Sophie Borges, curator, Eutin Castle, June 2023