

*"Beneath the layers of varnish the past and a childish world of piety evaporate, which every connoisseur of morbidity can only enjoy."
(Anton Gugg)*

Erich Gruber

There are some intimate aspects of art which it is best not to talk about; it's better simply to look quietly over the artist's shoulder. And even this act of observation can be disturbing. One does not observe someone who is praying or doing the opposite. Disputes in this private zone have an exclusiveness about them, perhaps something even forbidden, which as everyone knows, always exerts a special attraction. To watch Erich Gruber means penetrating a strange, sometimes even alien intermediate zone between the spiritual and the erotic – a humus layer of sensuous temptations and mental and physical punishments which has always nourished the ambiguous art of Catholicism. In these encoded and yet so eloquent works much is touched upon which is central to celebration in the sacred spectrum of portrayal between a shop selling devotional objects and the high altar – the blossoming and decay of the flesh, incarnation, martyrdom and the ascent to Heaven, the suppression of desire, the cult of purity, the immaculate and ultimately its ineffective desecration. The modern age has always been preoccupied with these open wounds. Films by Bunuel or Fellini, for instance, are full of them, and provocative analyses of church folklore and religious kitsch are not exactly a rarity. The veins of originally sacred picture motifs extend to the refined pornography of revered cult art stars. Erich Gruber penetrates dark emotional nests, layer upon layer bearing fatal cultural and social characteristics – very similar to the writer Josef Winkler in his early texts, who has recently received some of the highest awards. Erich Gruber plunges into the aura of weeping madonnas, mawkish communions, crepuscular catacombs, decayed relics, sentimental souvenirs, flaming hearts, ice-cold dolls and sweet little Loreto babies. In some pictures one can hear Francis Bacon's Pope continuing to shout. Beneath the layers of varnish the past and a childish world of piety evaporate, which every connoisseur of morbidity can only enjoy. The secret of this world sparkling in tones of decomposition unfolds on the tongue. The chocolate Christ created by Erich Gruber wants to be consumed in the very sense of the word. Passion as confection. That has always belonged together in southern Germany and in the Alps. This downhill sphere is deeply anchored and finely ramified. Every panel a memento.

Dr. Anton Gugg 2008