

## **And Zarathustra climbed back into the mountains, thus to speak no more.**

*Alexander Pühringer*

The man had become wise over the ten years past, which he—now forty years of age—had spent as a recluse, high up in the mountains and far from any form of civilisation. He was now finally ready to share his life's epiphanies with the human race and thus began preaching in the marketplace. His explications of what he referred to as the Übermensch [overman or superman], however, were met by his fellows with nothing but scorn and derision. Henceforth, Zarathustra wilfully avoided any places where groups of people might gather and embarked upon the search for kindred spirits. The most important aspect of his sermons nonetheless remained what had always been their central message: 'God is dead.' Women too, however, were also stringently attacked by the originator of Zarathustra's words, Friederich Nietzsche. Indeed, the philosopher developed, in the poetic bale of four sweeping bands, a vision of future man, which was to be contrasted with the purported state of his contemporaries. A triumph over all that was Godly was finally to be realized in the form of humankind. Viewed from the perspective of Zarathustra, all had been thus far equal before God. Following Nietzsche's proclamation of the latter's death, by contrast, human beings were henceforth to be equal only before the eyes of the riff-raff. It was thus accordingly that the death of God presented Nietzsche's supermen with an opportunity that was not to be missed.

It is to this very God, declared by Nietzsche in his renowned work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to be dead, that the Vienna based artist Zenita Komad has recently addressed a letter, which reads: 'Dear God, I love and cherish you. There is nothing other than you. I plead to you for help, because I myself am unsure of what to do. I entreat you to grant me remediation. Bequeath unto me the capacity to believe, despite reason and in the face of everything. Yours truly, Zenita.' We may subsequently be want to pose the question of whether the artist is simply playing a prank with us, the beholders, or as to what might otherwise be intended by this childishly naive manner of writing to address the Almighty. Persiflage? Irony? Or, even blasphemy? By no measure! Zenita Komad means what she has written, just as it is, in all sincerity. In a recently published discussion with the artist concerning her works on God and love, she speaks forthright to the necessity she felt as a child to speak with God: 'It is a loving relationship, which, through doubt and insecurity, is repeatedly endangered. However, now that those working in the fields of science, quantum physics, molecular biology and the like have begun to acknowledge the existence of a "supreme authority", many people have begun to prick up their ears again.'

The drawings, collages, paintings and installation images by Komad that are dedicated toward handling the topics of God and love are, regardless of what they might possibly otherwise be, primarily one thing: they are intensely moving. In place of a head, a giant heart presides upon the shoulders of a figure from a time-honoured black and white engraving, the main arteries of the blood pumping organ exposed. As evidenced by the subtitle that Komad has generously refrained from omitting, the original engraving by the Dutch artist Adriaen Lommeln (1620–1677) portrays the likeness of Johannes de Wael, who, having already been portrayed in a more well-known copper engraving by Antony van Dyck, was a colleague of the artist and lived from 1559 to 1633. When interpreting this work on paper by Komad, one might, by way of detour,

even arrive at Johann Sebastian Bach's renowned cantata, BWV 147: 'Heart and Mouth and Deed and Life'. The central theme of the work is one's public confession of faith in God and Jesus Christ. (Among Bach's most renowned and popular works, this same cantata managed, in 1972, to find its way, as a pop version performed by the group Apollo 100 to number six in the US charts with the title 'Joy'). Below the newly interpreted portrait, one now reads: 'Um würdig zu werden, braucht man die Erweckung von Oben' [To become worthy, one requires an awakening from above].

This magnanimous heart, which we colloquially allude to as elevating humankind, is the prerequisite to any engenderment of a great virtue in mortals—that of the capacity to forgive. In her floor and wall piece (ICH) VERZEIH MIR (UND ALLEN ANDEREN) [(I) FORGIVE ME (AND EVERYONE ELSE)]—in which the 'I' appears to have fallen to the ground and 'FORGIVE ME' is read vertically, from top to bottom, upon the sand-painting—the artist has integrated 'holy substances' with the profane materials of wood, granite, sand, cardboard and sizing. Sculpted of sand, the words (which form a sentence that can be read repeatedly to various effect) recall, through their specific materiality, the transience of the world and of interpersonal relationships. Likewise, they can be viewed as visual symbols of eternity and eternal return, which would, in turn, be sure to please Zarathustra. The relics, on the other hand, suggest here the presence of religious practice while nonetheless resisting any direct correlation to the dogma of Catholicism. Though having been baptised, Komad has, in a conscious act of self-determination, left the dogmatic church to design her own individual spiritual connection to a 'higher whole'. In so doing, she has been known to unnerve her friends and acquaintances at times, to the extent that her utterances might occasionally tend to ring of sectarianism or sound sheerly esoteric. Yet, two virtues clearly distinguish Zenita Komad's character: earnestness and pertinacity.

According to the words of her mother, Komad already knew, at the tender age of four, that she eventually wanted to become an artist. She made a conscious decision toward that end at the age of sixteen, when she resolved to begin studies at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. With unparalleled creative potency and persuasive power, she proceeded, over the subsequent sixteen years, to bring forth an astounding breadth of intensely inspired works from within her prolifically creative heart. Among these being not only an entire opera but even the performance of a Mass, her groups of works have been, at times, elaborately conceptualised to encompass entire productions—achievements for the realisation of which many of her companions, including actors from the Imperial Court Theatre and other heroic figures from amongst the widest range of artistic disciplines, have stood by her, shoulder to shoulder. After many years of activity working within the most various of genres, she has, for some time now, concentrated her energies toward addressing God and love, the relationships between people, their centres of conflict and their envisioned solutions.

Another key work from among her 'God and Love' series is comprised of a French language text image which, suggestive of a page from a religious calendar, is titled 'Legs gave us the Lord in pairs, / toward striding onward took great cares / and wanted not 'twere but stuck to the soil / that humankind should for ages toil. / Had serving stasis been for us His device, / a single leg to that end would suffice.' As it happens, this passage of text was appropriated by the artist from a French translation of the first stanza of what is a considerably longer, religion-critical poem by Heinrich Heine. This being as it may, Komad also references, in Heine, the free spirit that the poet clearly represents. In concert with him, she gives voice to an unwaveringly critical yet still fervently loving view of the world as a whole. It is thus that the topos of healing is—alongside the hopeful quest for meaning, forgiveness, humility and truth—emotionally palpable in many of the works from this larger conceptual body. In a further work on paper, she allots more than half of the entire format to a passage of text from the Luniaric Kabbalah, as quoted by Michael Laitman. Here, her work examines the position of the individual human being

in the face of divinity—the perception of the self and the responsibilities that are demanded by the relationship between the two. It questions the notions of fate and providence, and the super-ordination of the coherencies in which we function and through which we live.

If by no other means, one is sure to apprehend that the artist thinks and creates in universal terms upon visiting her Website. It is there that, at the very latest, one encounters the 'Zenita Universe', an advancement to what originally found its impetus as the world dubbed 'Zenita City' by the artist, a place in which everything and everybody is connected to all. Likewise universal is her conception of artistic undertaking, which knows no temporal bounds and is altogether willing, in the course of following its visions, to expose itself to ridicule. Like a small child who writes letters to God, Komad tirelessly formulates her proclamations geared toward achieving a better world peopled by better beings. Akin to Sisyphus, she, however willingly, bears the heavy stones comprised of what, for the human race, remain the generally valid problems of life—life's cramped battles and pains—upward, along the steep pass of the Parnassus, only to witness, once having reached the peak, them roll back downward through the Earthly pastures of life's realities within the universal chaos that encompasses humankind. One must carry chaos within oneself, should one desire to beget a dancing star, as once proclaimed by the author of Zarathustra's words. It is with compelling stringency that Komad proceeds when formulating the conceptual planning of her artistic realm: 'I concern myself with the heart, as it is the primary residence of my soul. That is where the altar is to be found, and everything that I need is there: the possibility of connection and the perception of the 'others' as outsourced parts of my own being.' The universe has a sun just as each human being has a heart, the dwelling place of the soul. There are also shadows, however, to which Komad speaks in connection with her 'Zenita Universe'. It is akin, in her view, to an instrument of connection, within the bounds of which she attempts to imitate the instruments of creation. This too is where she touches upon visions of an altruistic community of human beings. Sketching out utopias is still permissible in art, even when reality has long since ceased to provide for any possibility of their existence. In her piece Gott ist kein Bankomat [God is not a Cash Machine], she admonishes the misuse of prayer to God as a means by which to ease the conscience and a method by which to satisfy selfish desires or wishful thinking. One might also detect a subtle allusion therein toward those discontinuities evidenced by the late capitalist outgrowths of a disastrous monetary system that has not failed to sideswipe even the banking sector. Her parallel piece Der Bankomat ist die Klagemauer der Postmoderne [The Cash Machine is the Wailing Wall of Postmodernism] ties in closely to these same themes. All artistic pathos aside, however, there is one thing that the artist is certainly not: a naively worshipping churchgoer. Zenita Komad pays no heed whatsoever to any institutional seizure of religion or any meddling with how people's faiths ought to be practised. Zarathustra proclaimed that God was dead. What he had not taken into account thereby, however, were the artistic powers of Zenita Komad. It is thus that he seems to have crept back up into the mountains to become shamefaced and silent in self-imposed hermitry. For, to be sure, it is only in community with one another that people shall be able to actualise the deepest essence of their individual beings.