

80 Days around the World. 10 Years of Zenita City.

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It has to be somewhere between Alice in Wonderland and Around the World in Eighty Days: Zenita City. Stumbling over a root picture, caught sight of behind the door opened by the golden “sad door handle”, one can glean the contours, and then it is almost too late to escape the vortex of the Komadian universe. But what awaits one there? City, country, river? Promises of undreamt of possibilities, broken and unbroken promises, a picture and text world, mounted into houses of cards, which demonstrate protection, warmth and fragility – in a word, Zenita City?

Once the trapdoor is opened and having dropped through to the other side, one then discovers that the universe is populated by a number of permanent guests. They reappear again and again in the works as if work on them has not yet been brought to an end – as if not everything had yet been said. Often they are women: role models, soul mates, who, in their lives exercise a permanent fascination for Zenita Komad. One of her permanent companions is Maria Callas – something which, in the light of Zenita Komad’s background, ceases to surprise, since she grew up as the daughter of an opera singer to whom the stage meant everything; playfully exploring the boundaries between tragedy and comedy, reality and fiction. The series of Callas pictures are dominated by portraits of the opera diva, the mouth and eyes being especially pronounced, simultaneously mirroring life of the soul. The first Callas picture appeared in 1997. The diva peers out at us, while ropes hung in front of the canvas, though not coming into immediate contact with it, warn of the compulsions that threaten to bind one fast. The pouting mouth, smeared and painted over with blood-red lipstick, leaves its traces across the canvas, appearing again in large splashes on hands and clothes. White streaks cross the face, like the crossbar of a window through the glass of which the diva, head clasped in hands, meditates on the world beyond. One year later, again a portrait of Maria Callas, although this time we witness the Prima Donna imprisoned in a golden cage. The gaze, at once patient and yearning, is directed towards the outside of this cramped cage as if liberation, though not yet in sight, is at least guaranteed. And, sure enough, a good while later, in 2004, we encounter a new Callas: very stylised, a mixture between pop icon and a cheap imitation of herself, set against a pink background. The message is political: after oil, they’ll fight for water. A water pipe sprouts out of her head, from which a fountain of water pours over her face. Tears stream from the eyes and a red pistol, like a beam, lies across the hidden mouth. A certain helplessness there, but which is nowhere to be seen in another picture of the diva from 2006: with a demanding look, pointing through a three-dimensional red arrow, pointing at Callas’ forehead, and which is highlighted even more, the face of the artist self-confidently peers out from the black canvas. The series of Callas pictures elucidates an interesting aspect found in Zenita Komad’s work: the canvases become independent and grow within the room. They appear to want to explode the borders of the canvas in order to conquer the third dimension.

Komad has been dedicating a further picture cycle to Louise Bourgeois for a number of years. As a pioneer and fighter in a male-dominated art world, in which she continued to produce and to persist, even in spite of her late success, she has become an almost indispensable aspect of Zenita City.

I can’t make you love me if you don’t is inscribed under Louise Bourgeois (1999) – Bourgeois looks back at the viewer with a poisonous green fringe, and an impishly knowing grin. All around

are freely hovering small red hearts. It appears as if the protagonist is not in the least bit worried by this insight – on the contrary, the wise face, permeated with wrinkles, radiates softness, calm and composure as if the rigours of life were of no concern to her. And yet, she does not seem to be absent from the world but very close and present. The smile returns in all Louise Bourgeois' pictures. In 2005, clad entirely in black, the Grande Dame poses the sixty-four thousand dollar question: have you begun to play yet or are you still fighting? The letters form, as they often do in Komad's works, a picture within a picture and lend to the content a second level and dynamic. In this case, it seems as if the vertical and inversely tilting letters are wont to ridicule, in a kind and playful manner, as if to soften the struggle.

Komad's oeuvre functions in cycles. One work conditions the next, thrusting it further along. One is thus a little surprised when *Madame Sensible* (2006), alias *Comtesse de Broglie*, taken from a picture by Dominique Ingres, again concurs with the work of Louise Bourgeois from the sky is no limit! (2006), that is, with a reverse message: the sky is the limit. It is in this manner that the various figures communicate in Zenita Komad's works, also among themselves, forming a grand whole.

Experiment painting, extended painting, is closely interwoven in Komad with the search for meaning and enlightenment. Thus considered, the texts also represent a support in the search for the deeper meaning of being and its imperatives/Waltens. In *Erleuchtung* (Enlightenment) (1998) a yellow lampshade replete with over-sized light bulb pushes against the head of a young woman, who is then literally pressed down by the illumination and who loses the sharp contours of her face. Everything blurs and dissolves, the face thereby being reduced to the unrecognisable. Nine years later, the reverse scene appears – and a self-portrait. The face of the artist, illuminated like a light bulb, moves towards us – whereas, in the first version, the illumination comes from above, the rays in the second version are no longer necessary. They clearly come from within.

Feelings such as helplessness, imprisonment but also of liberation, enlightenment and of promises stand in close proximity with one another in the works. Much as in theatre and in the opera, the artist is concerned with explaining and spanning the entire spectrum of human feelings. She succeeds in touching on these themes without thereby succumbing to pathos since, in most instances, her pictorial messages also contain humorous, ironic and playful registers, which effortlessly relativise melancholy. It is to some extent as if the artist would want to enact the history of the half full or half empty glass – she leaves the viewer the choice and simply indicates various ways of making it. And if on one of the routes around Zenita City a "waiting for Godot" syndrome steals its way in, one would do well to recall that there also exists another possibility: namely, *Back in a minute Godot* (2000?).