

The Forgotten Monument

Philipp Grieb

The Bavarian town of Straubing on the Danube river proudly looks back on a rich history. With a population of around 50,000, it is a regional centre and school town in eastern Bavaria with four Gymnasiums (high schools) and a branch of the Technical University of Munich.

In 1961/62, Richard Pickl, a teacher at the Johannes-Turmair-Gymnasium, built a large sports ground for the Gymnasium's sports education, the sports activities of the DJK Sportbund and the youth organisation ND (Neudeutschland). A youth house for the ND youth groups was attached to the area near the Danube. With great idealism, Richard Pickl financed the facility from his private money. Fellow teachers supported the project, including my art teacher Karl Tyroller.

At that time, the horror of the Hitler regime and the Second World War was still very present. Associations and youth groups with a Christian-Catholic orientation had suffered from harassment and prohibition by the Nazis. Only after the war did these youth and sports associations slowly reconstitute themselves. Richard Pickl's initiative was aimed at their revival.

The planners intended to remind of the overcome Nazi dictatorship and the brutality of wars with a large mural in sgraffito technique. Karl Tyroller, a well-read literature lover, was inspired for his design by Bertolt Brecht's poem "An die Nachgeborenen". From this poem he quotes the lines at the top edge of the 480 x 275 cm sgraffito across the entire width of the picture:

"IHR, DIE IHR AUFTAUCHEN
WERDET AUS DER FLUT, IN DER WIR
UNTERGEGANGEN SIND, GEDENKT
WENN IHR VON UNSEREN



Karl Tyroller: Tilly, 1963, Sgraffito, 480 x 275 cm, Straubing (Photos: Ph. Grieb).

SCHWÄCHEN SPRECHT, AUCH DER FINSTEREN ZEIT,
DER IHR ENTRONNEN SEID." (You who will emerge from the flood in which we sank, remember when you speak of our weaknesses, also of the dark times from which you have escaped.)

In the poem, Brecht reflects on his own threats by the Nazis, escape and exile. He speaks in the plural and generalises for all those who suffered similar hardships.

In their abstract ambiguity, these lines seem to us today like a prophetic speech and admonition to those of us born afterwards. At the time of its publication in 1939, the full extent of Nazi crimes was not yet known. Brecht demands: Never forget the horror of tyranny and violence, even if you were lucky enough not to have had to experience this horror yourself.

Tyroller likely considered the multiple meanings when he chose the quote. He had experienced the horrors of the Second World War. From 1946, after returning from war captivity, he learned of the abyss of inhumanity in the concentration camps. The generation of our parents and grandparents had to admit to themselves: We went to war for a criminal regime. Our sons died for war criminals. We made mistakes, were too weak to resist, perished in real or moral terms because we were too naive, not strong enough, bowed to force or allowed ourselves to be intimidated.

Putin's regime and the brutal invasion of Ukraine currently show us how fascism works, how the Russian people are controlled and manipulated along the lines of the 1930s, how journalists and



Detail, group of drummers

opposition figures are suppressed, arrested or murdered. We sense how people can become followers, accomplices or even murderers through hatred and disinformation.

In his sgraffito, Tyroller uses the 'Thirty Years' War (1618 to 1648) as a metaphor for the horror of all wars. At that time, campaigns of conquest and plunder, looting, hunger, misery and disease depopulated large regions of Germany. It resulted in a historical trauma and marked a low point in human history in Central Europe. It was not until the Nazi regime that the abyss of inhumanity became even deeper. It seemed impossible to capture its inconceivable crimes in a realistic image.

In his work, Tyroller highlights the figure of Tilly, the commander of the Bavarian troops amidst his mercenaries. Tilly campaigned for many years and mostly victoriously in numerous cruel battles across the German lands, until he died at the age of 72 after defeats and serious injury.

In traditional historiography and on monuments, Tilly was depicted as a hero. From the distance of four centuries, the assessment of his action is more realistic. As the supreme commander on the Bavarian side, he was responsible for countless massacres and war crimes, as were the commanders on all other sides.

Tyroller takes up the traditional view of Tilly, but puts this view into perspective with two details: the drummer in the front row is the Grim Reaper and the inscription "HOMO HOMINI LUPUS" on the marching Landsknechte's drums clarifies: This is no peaceful

parade, here comes a death-bringing troop of butchers and murderers. The Latin sentence comes from a text by the Roman author Plautus (254-184 BC). It literally means: "Man is a wolf to man" or "Man is an evil beast to his fellow man". Above Tilly hovers the image of the Madonna of Altötting, a reference to Tilly's sarcophagus in a church in this place.

Tyroller's monument with its thoughtful appeal to those of us born after the war has not only disappeared from public perception in Straubing, it has suffered weather damage on the north-west façade of the youth centre, is still under threat and hardly accessible. Its significance lies in the emphatic way it exhorts a humane culture of memory and provides a suitable setting for the wise words of Bertolt Brecht. It deserves protection from further damage or even better – reconstruction in a place with higher visibility.



Detail, text by Bertolt Brecht



Detail, mercenary group with cannon