

Art Charlotte Weise

# Venus without a mask

Charlott Weise puts female archetypes such as the Venus, the witch and the vampire in unusual situations.

## Joke the Wolf

'Painting is like writing, but with more freedom, because language limits abstraction.' So said Charlott Weise in 2020 when she was one of the laureates of the Royal Prize for Painting in the Palace on Dam Square. Words always have a meaning, a function within grammar and language. You don't have to worry about this when painting: a line on a canvas can easily be nothing more than a line. Weise describes her work as notes that represent stormy accumulations of obsessions and thoughts. She does this in elongated vertical drawings and smaller canvases in which one or more female faces can usually be recognized, in ink, pigments and other materials.

In the painting *Erde* from 2015, a woman with a bare upper body hangs with her arms folded, one breast hanging nonchalantly over what appears to be a white sheet. No matter how beautifully painted, the main focus is on it

head of the woman: it consists of a bright blue celestial sphere. A woman's face can be seen where Chile and Argentina meet. This must be the goddess of the earth. Her nonchalant attitude is irritating – she could do with being a little more concerned about her current state. Irritation is probably exactly what the artist wants to achieve.

Weise was born in 1991 in Görlitz, in the former GDR. After studying painting for a few years at the University of Dresden, she became a student at the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam in 2012. Here too she continued to paint, after graduating (cum laude) she continued to work as a resident at De Ateliers, she now lives and works in Amsterdam and Görlitz. She loosely based the paintings that won her the Royal Prize on the 1964 book *The Passion* by the Ukrainian-Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector about a woman who eats a cockroach.

In a photo on her website we see Weise in her studio. She lies on her stomach on a couch, books are open on the floor. She is wearing a black blouse and has her long hair in a tight ponytail. In her hands she has a sketchbook and a pen, she seems to be comparing her drawing with the one in the book below. In a stack you can recognize books about Rembrandt and Sophie Taeuber-Arp. On top is a book about the work of Rita Ackermann, a Hungarian-American painter who combines clear, recognizable images with associative colors and lines – which must have been a great source of inspiration for Weise. In the foreground are fruit and vegetables: blue grapes, artichokes, parsley. On the stack of books is an ashtray, like a clam, the thin white line in her mouth must be a cigarette.

With the photo, Weise shows what she describes in words in her *artist statement*. That on the one hand she starts from classical figurative painting, but focuses on representations, reproductions and expressions of femininity. She places female archetypes such as the Venus, the witch and the vampire in unusual situations. The mise-en-scene is well-considered, she writes. In the photo on her site, Weise is an archetype herself.

She says she is 'madly in love' with the liquid-flowing properties of oil paint and its similarity to make-up. She also uses pigments and lipstick as a medium. In painting she lets her unconscious speak.

Each painting thus becomes 'a postmodern tableau, thinking cave art and wall painting with MTV playing 24/7'. *Carte blanche* from 2016 is such a post-modern tableau. It is an enormous canvas, 2.5 meters high, on which two female figures in red chalk and oil paint are entwined under a round arch. The woman at the back looks at us, the one at the front appears to be wearing a mask and her long wavy hair reaches the ground. Hair and faces are protection of a sensitive inside, a buffer, but also symbols of beauty and seduction.

How can a woman appear in a painting without the artist using those accessories? Is it an option, Weise seems to wonder, to start with a clean slate, and what would that look like?

These questions are reminiscent of the work of Rosa Loy, the Leipzig painter who fills her canvases with surreal scenes in which women play the leading role. They are women with decisiveness, sometimes in pants, sometimes with wings or a carpet of flowers for hair. Loy works with clear figures that, despite their unreal qualities, exist thanks to the painting. In her work, Weise mentions the layering of her paintings – she often works with an invisible underdrawing, after which come the associations and meaningless forms. The great thing is that the images, despite their difficult to read shapes and surfaces, are at the same time of inexpressible clarity. ÿ



Is it an option to start with a clean slate?

Charlott Weise, *Carte blanche*, 2016. Red chalk and oil on canvas