

Great Freedom

In 2003 Reinhard Blum and Uwe Bressnik presented their first artistic version of a tour bus. With a specially treated exterior and semi-transparent windows, the more than 30-year-old jalopy evokes a slew of associations indelibly linked with freedom and transgression, even the lesser or greater transgressions involved in a »revolutionising of everyday life«.

Such a vehicle finds (at least potential) use not merely as a practical band bus. As the sculptural materialisation of a variety of myths, pop and urban legends, it functions both this side of and beyond the borders of the realm of art. And while the special metal finishing of the outer skin makes it into a kind of tabula rasa for all sorts of projections, these also bounce right off the highly reflective surface. As if the old jalopy no longer wanted to carry the layers of history loaded onto it. But the Große Freiheit (great freedom) —as the object has been dubbed — irrevocably carries these as its symbol wherever it goes.

From the historic viewpoint, the bus is the prototypical vehicle for pop and countercultural freedom and flight fantasies. »Further« – or »Furthur«, as the inscription actually read – was the name of the old school bus, painted in neon colours, with which Ken Kesey and his »Merry Pranksters« took off on a trip across the USA in 1964. »Further«, both in the direction of a better future and toward expanded limits of consciousness, was the thrust of it, which a multitude of pop hymns subsequently went on to pursue: Magic Bus by »The Who«, or Omnibus by »The Move«. »The Beatles« promised »the trip of your lifetime« when they invited us along on their enterprise in 1967 in their bright yellow bus with the rainbow inscription Magical Mystery Tour – a promise that was ingeniously parodied 10 years later by the »Sex Pistols« (or by their graphic designer Jamie Reid): »Nowhere« or »Boredom« – these were the only remaining travel destinations on their famous cover (the single Pretty Vacant).

The whole bandwidth between magical wonder and boring no-mans-land was explored in the 1970s by young people who by then had wheels, or wings, to take them on trips all over the countryside. Often in the exact make of Volkswagen that Blum and Bressnik have torn from the (auto)cemetery of quotidian history. In that they remove the layers of color and varnish, thus exposing the skeleton of the bus, they are also metaphorically working their way through the countercultural ballast with which the VW-bus is historically loaded. At the same time, special depth effects, which the metal finishing and the gauze layers project outward, help to keep safe a promise that the vehicle apparently still bears within.

Whether this involves more than an abstract reference to past myths, the object itself won't say. But as it said on the back of Kesey's »Furthur«: »Caution: Weird Load«.

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