



Klaus Wehner, **ARCH OF FLORIAN**, digital photomontage, 2016, print size variable.

ARCH OF FLORIAN

WORDS BY KLAUS WEHNER

The appreciation and evaluation of much of our own pre-modern cultural heritage and art usually focuses on formalistic aspects. We appreciate beauty and marvel at artistic talent and skill. A blind spot in our appreciation is often the way in which art was and is used at all times to support, justify and 'sanitise' power structures and extreme wealth. An obvious example for this function of art are triumphal arches.

Triumphal arches are monuments built to commemorate a person or a specific most often military event that is important to a country's history. Apart from the famous monumental architectural arches that originated in Roman culture, there are also numerous images in print form with Albrecht Dürer's monumental woodcut Arch of Maximilian I. the most spectacular of its kind. A lover of Wimmelbilder and images within images it is these engravings that I find most fascinating and inspiring.

These thoughts were on my mind when I decided to use digital photomontage to create some contemporary triumphal arches, not celebrating the deeds of a ruler or military victories but people of our contemporary every day life. I didn't even think of everyday 'heroes', but of self-portrayal (Selbstdarstellung). Tattoos added to the theme of Selbstdarstellung in a multi layered way. The outside of the body of the portrayed already presents imagery and it is not a rarity that tattoos are connected to or even distinctly depict and celebrate life events. Within the arch, the tattoos are images within the image, just like one would find in the intricate imagery of historical triumphal arches.

As it happens, the subject of 'Arch of Florian' works as a hospital nurse. The Corona crisis cast keyworkers like nurses into the spotlight. Medical workers do risk their health and are suddenly rightly called superheroes. We do have a problem by not valuating these occupations enough even though nurses and carers are essential to our wellbeing. Everyone who has been gravely ill or cared for a loved one also knows what an extraordinarily different moment of life a time of sickness can be – how removed from the hubris of everyday life periods of suffering from sickness are. That is when nurses are there for us.

Florian is a colourful character inside and outside. He is an unconventional man and presents that message on his outside. He is a kind guy whose company is a delight, both in his professional life and as private man. He might not look like the 'type' of person people would think would work as a nurse. But he does. He made it his life's occupation to help people in hours of need. Because of the Corona crisis, people are rightfully grateful to medical staff. We have those clapping events which I find touching, also simply as evidence of the momentary 'us' feeling of unity. However, as many people have pointed out already: what nurses need is a recognition of their value and better pay and not applause. Let's hope that this will not be forgotten once the crisis is over.