

Press release

“Love Displaces Violence”

Art historian Eva-Bettina Krems on persistent motifs of peace in art from antiquity to the present day – Dove, rainbow or victory of love: artists draw on recurring motifs – Horrors of war as a powerful argument for peace – Internationally renowned researchers will attend the Cluster of Excellence’s Peace Conference next week – Public lectures – Part of the exhibition “Peace” at five locations in Münster

Reporters invited (registration at religionundpolitik@uni-muenster.de)

Münster, xx May 2018 (exc) According to researchers, artists from ancient times to the present day have kept using the same symbols and metaphors to depict peace. “Dove or rainbow, kiss or embrace, peace banquet, horrors of war or the victory of love over violence – artistic depictions of peace have a long history,” says art historian Prof. Dr. Eva-Bettina Krems from the University of Münster’s Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”. She will discuss this topic in Münster with international researchers at the research association’s conference “PEACE. Theories, Images and Strategies from Antiquity to the Present Day”. “Ancient theatre has already shown how love displaces violence. This peace motif is repeated in early modern art as well as in modern media motifs.” In the Greek comedy “Lysistrata”, for example, women from Athens and Sparta force their husbands into peace by denying them sex. “In Roman mythology, the goddess of love Venus, by means of her arts of seduction, persuaded Mars, the god of war, to lay down his weapons – a popular motif for depicting peace until the 19th century,” according to Prof. Krems. “‘Make love, not war’ was the protest against the Vietnam War in the 1960s. John Lennon and Yoko Ono took this up in their “bed happenings”. The motto ‘Make love, not war’ has shaped peace campaigns worldwide ever since.”

The conference is part of the programme of the exhibition “Frieden. Von der Antike bis heute” (Peace. From Antiquity to the Present Day), taking place at five locations in Münster. In the LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur, works by renowned artists such as Peter Paul Rubens, Eugène Delacroix, Wilhelm Lehmbruck, Käthe Kollwitz and Otto Dix bear witness to artistic strategies to convey the ideal of a world free from aggression. The idea and basic concept of the exhibition project are the result of the many years of research at the Cluster of Excellence on the topic of peace.

Terrible horrors of war

“Artists have often shown the terrible horrors of war in order to invoke the ideal of peace,” says Krems. This tradition, which continues to this day, can be seen impressively in the works of the Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640). According to the art historian, “Rubens occasionally negotiated peace talks and in the Thirty Years’ War, like many other artists of the pre-modern epochs, commented triumphantly on ongoing negotiations in painting and exaggerated peace agreements achieved. Practical political conditions and the reality of the war,

however, could dampen optimism: in the 1630s, Rubens demonstrated in his works the devastating effects of the war and the pessimism of those years.” The oil sketch “Allegory of War” shows a woman sitting on the ground at the edge of a battle among the dead and seemingly despairing of war (image 1).

In art history, the path leads from Rubens to Francisco de Goya's prints “Desastres de la guerra” (1810–1814) and ultimately to Otto Dix's (1891–1969) drastic depictions of the horrors of war in the face of the destruction in the First World War. “Even without precise knowledge of the respective circumstances in which the artists created their works, the political and thus also accusing aspects of these works is impressive.” The artistic efforts for peace achieve their greatest possible impact through the depiction of the devastating consequences of war. Krems adds: “A frequent statement of early modern depictions is also the fragility of peace.” In the famous painting “Mars and Venus” by the Italian painter Paolo Veronese from the 1570s, the Roman god of war and the goddess of love look like a harmonious couple at first glance. “But the bond of Mars and Venus is extremely fragile, and the god of war's horse is pushed back with great difficulty by a Cupid, a little angel.”

Ancient myths or the Bible provide the reference images for most allegorical representations of peace: later epochs intensified their statement by linking various allegories, such as peace and justice in the Middle Ages and in the early modern period – Pax and Lady Justice. In the 16th century, the Italian painter Battista Dossi created almost life-size portraits of Pax and Lady Justice for the Duke of Ferrara (images 2 and 3). The figure of peace holds a torch for burning weapons in one hand, her other hand holds a cornucopia with fruits, flowering branches and grain ears. “In this period, Pax without Justice was considered an unjust peace, no more than a temporary ceasefire,” according to Prof. Krems. In this sense, the paintings show the complementary concepts of statecraft and of the art of governing at that time.

Popes and their staging of peace

Pope Gregory XIII also had himself depicted together with the allegories of peace and justice, which identified him as a Prince of Peace, although he had endorsed the massacre of the Huguenots on Bartholomew's Night in 1572. “That the allegories of Pax and Justice legitimised authoritarian state control seemed logical in the context of the Counter-Reformation, because at this time one doubted whether peace agreements would be possible across confessional boundaries,” according to Prof. Krems. At the conference of the Cluster of Excellence, she will speak about the media stagings of peace by the Popes in the 16th and 17th centuries.

“The rainbow and the dove,” says Prof. Krems, “are examples that show how persistent symbols of peace are, but how they are at the same time, again and again over the centuries filled with new meaning by artists.” In the Old Testament, the dove with an olive branch in its beak announces the end of the Flood to Noah, while the rainbow symbolises the new covenant between God and man. “When German artist Otto Piene organised spectacular ‘Sky Art’ events in the late 1960s, where rainbows were flown in the skies over Moscow, New York, Rome and Paris, he was no longer concerned with the sign's Christian semantics, but with the long-secularised image of the rainbow as a symbol of global peace,” according to Prof. Krems. The exhibition at the LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur features screenprints by Otto Piene entitled “Pax”, peace, which are reminiscent of the ‘Sky Art’ events (image 4). “The popularisation of both art and the peace movement contributed to symbols such as the dove and the rainbow being semantically reduced further and being easier to read as symbols,” explains the art historian. (asc/sca/vvm)

Conference “PEACE. Theories, Images and Strategies from Antiquity to the Present Day”

At the public conference of the Cluster of Excellence, which will be held from 22 to 25 May 2018 in Münster, internationally renowned researchers will address the question in 21 lectures of why people throughout the ages wanted peace, but never succeeded in securing it in the long term. On the basis of many historical examples of European history, they address strategies, behavioural patterns and processes with which people from antiquity to the present day have tried to establish and maintain peace. The researchers focus on how many of the images, rituals and strategies have remained valid over time. At the same time, they show changes typical of their time and their causes. All lectures will be held in the auditorium of LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur at Domplatz 10 in Münster.

Art historian Prof. Dr Eva-Bettina Krems organises the conference together with historian Prof. Dr Gerd Althoff, philologist Prof. Dr Christel Meier-Staubach and, from the Cluster of Excellence, historian Prof. Dr Hans-Ulrich Thamer. The conference is part of the **exhibition “Peace. From Antiquity to the Present Day”**, which will present the topics in a variety of exhibits at five locations in the city of the Peace of Westphalia from 28 April to 2 September 2018. (asc/vvm)

Pictures:

Image 1: Peter Paul Rubens: Allegory of War, 1628, Liechtenstein. The Princely Collections, Vaduz-Vienna.

Image 2: Battista Dossi, Pax, 1544, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, © bpk, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Hans-Peter Klut

Image 3: Battista Dossi, Justizia, 1544, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, © bpk, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Hans-Peter Klut

Image 4: Otto Piene, Tag (Day; sheet 3), Pax screenprint set, 1969–1970, LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur, photo: Hanna Neander, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2018

Image 5: Prof. Dr. Eva-Bettina Krems, photo: Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster/Benedikt Weischer

For images 1–4, please note: Free publication of these photos only for topical coverage of the exhibition until 30 September 2018 and only including the full references of the picture. The works of art may only be reproduced completely and without any changes.

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The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” of the University of Münster

Some 200 academics from more than 20 disciplines of the humanities and social sciences and from 14 countries do research in the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” of the University of Münster. They deal with the complex relationship of religion and politics across epochs and cultures: from the ancient pantheon and Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Middle Ages and the early modern period to the current situation in Europe, America, Asia and Africa. It is nationally the largest research association of its kind and of the 43 clusters of excellence in Germany, it is the only one to deal with religions. The federal government and the state governments support the project in the second phase of the Excellence Initiative with 40.1 million euros from 2012 until 2018.