Chris Doyle
Apocalypse Management /Telling about being one being living

For centuries the tradition of constructing altars in a uniform manner has influenced the work of European artists. The so-called triptych, a form of painting comprised of three parts, dominated sacral art for a long time, clearly due to an extraordinary fascination with this form of presentation. Although a different manner of spatial presentation appeared in the Renaissance, the triptych was never fully abandoned. However, due to the development of art independent of church commissions, it lost its leading position and was pushed to the margins.

Many artists rediscovered a diversified manner of spatial expression in painting as late as the end of the 19th century. Their goal was to express in art such issues as social processes, catastrophes and contemporary wars. The form of triptych was ideal for this purpose, as it was the only one that allowed for presentation of a multi-layered painting and expression of movement in time. The openness of the form accompanied the openness of the content. In the 20th century the best examples of the triptych's form are the works by Max Beckmann and Francis Bacon.

In his three-panel video installation entitled *Apocalypse Management (telling about being one being living)*, 2009, Chris Doyle, an American artist (born 1960), perfectly utilises the triptych form, presenting it in a new, dynamic way. Doyle interweaves modern catastrophic images documented in photographs with drawings, and thus with the level of symbols. They commemorate tragic events of our times such as wars, earthquakes, tsunamis, bomb attacks, etc. They impressively present how people lose their homes, lives, freedom, and ability to move as a result of disasters. A disaster-stricken place becomes one of terror and despair. Some of the people in the film are alive but trapped in the ruins. One man lies under debris hopelessly stuck, able only to scream and despair. A woman suffering in pain adds another overtone to her despair, as she has just lost her child.

Another woman notices that she only has one leg. She turns in one spot on the bonnet of a damaged car. Yet another figure waves her hands and tries to climb up a wall, but she fails. Trapped in a hole in the ground, another woman uses the rest of her power trying to reach a hook to get out, but her efforts also bring no results. At the top edge of the scene a man attempts to retain his balance. He tries to grab a lamp post but fails to reach it. Human screams of despair are accompanied by music mixing old mourning songs and *heavy metal* guitar sounds.

All these people strive to find a way out of this disastrous situation in their own way, and primarily to personalise existential suffering; the driving force behind their actions is the fight to live, but at the same time they do not lose hope of being rescued. On the one hand, Doyle presents the ineffective and nonsensical fight for existence, but on the other hand, he allows for the possibility of a happy ending and victory over pain by referring to the apocalyptic history of art exemplified by the works of Albrecht Dürer or Max Beckmann.

In Doyle's triptych, the artist has skilfully compiled and compared various aspects and plots of the scene presented so as to assign them the same values in the end. As far as narrative is concerned, he moves once to the right and once to the left wing of the screens; in one place he isolates a given motif, and in another he turns this detail into a dominating element of a three-part screen. This technology allows us to focus-in the narrative on the tiniest details, and then go back to the horrifying whole. At the end of the seven-minute film the screen is divided into four parts, which creates a new quality that awakens the spectator's imagination and convinces them that people can overcome feelings of isolation, loneliness and despair.

As the basis for his scenery, Doyle creates a kind of predella formed in this case by the lower area of the screens. There he places the motif of rubble remaining after the catastrophe, which consequently allows for the creation of a shining white area at the top that refers to the garments of those rescued from the Apocalypse, similarly to the *Fourth Figure (Vierte Figura)* by Albrecht Dürer, which relates to Apocalypse 6, 9-17. A new dimension appears in the scene, and individual figures rise to the shining space. They are not presented in any special surroundings, and only their movements testify to the ongoing battle that ends with the passage to the "house of light" (according to Marie Luise Kaschnitz, a Jewish poet).

Chris Doyle does not permit this image of war and devastation to present only pain and death. Similarly to works depicting the Biblical apocalypse, hope rises above all severity. Doyle makes the audience aware that life does not end in darkness but moves forward. His "saved" bear the marks of struggle and suffering which help them to find their future and true identity.

Friedhelm Mennekes