

[Kritik der Kritik – Francis Mallet erwidert eine Kritik von Dr. Harald Tesan](#)

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Der Kunsthistoriker **Dr. Harald Tesan** publizierte jüngst auf on-index.de eine [Kritik](#) an der Ausstellung "[Menschliches, Allzumenschliches](#)", die mehr als 100 Werke des 2002 verstorbenen britischen Künstlers Robert Lenkiewicz präsentiert. **Francis Mallett**, der Kurator der Ausstellung, nahm dies zum Anlass, seinerseits eine Kritik an Dr. Tesans Kritik zu formulieren, die wir im folgenden ebenfalls veröffentlichen. Die Redaktion von on-index.de überlässt es dem Leser/der Leserin, sich sein/ihr eigenes Urteil zu bilden – am besten durch direkte Anschauung. Die Ausstellung ist noch bis zum 13. Oktober in Nürnberg zu sehen (Auf AEG, Halle 15 – Öffnungszeiten: Mo-Fr 14.00 – 19.00 Uhr; Sa./So. 11.00 – 19.00 Uhr).

"Let's not dwell on the two things striking most people deeply fascinated by Auf AEG's Robert Lenkiewicz exhibition: firstly, that here was an exceptionally talented painter, and secondly, that his paintings and the ideas behind them are thought-provoking and speak directly to many people about their lives and the world they live in. Dr Harald Tesan is not 'most people'. He is one of that superior breed turned out in ever-increasing numbers by our education system: the intellectual critic. For these self-appointed arbiters of taste, it's a political ideology that matters most. And ironically, it's the left-wing post-modernists who hold most contempt for the 'kitsch' taste of the uninitiated masses because they don't like what they're supposed to like.

This kind of art critic is easily spotted by their politicised vocabulary: 'easily consumable subject matter', 'educated classes', 'subversive sideswipe', 'ironic alienation effect' etc.etc. Yes, all their favourite jargon is here. But then, I guess, what should we expect from the author of such unforgettable texts as 'Form without Knowledge – Knowledge without Form. Writing, Image and the Impossibility of Absolute Thought. Plus Reflections on The Order of Things in Maciunas, Beuys and Derrida' ? Our complacent academics must produce this stuff in their sleep. Maybe that's why it makes everyone else yawn. Have they not realized that no-one is interested – apart from their fellow academics, of course? But certainly not those queuing up in Leipzig and Nurnberg to see the Lenkiewicz show. This is reinforced by a voluminous comment book (largely in German) by those previously unfamiliar with his work. I'm happy to post it all but typical comments are as follows: 'Simultaneously fascinating, impressive and repulsive'; 'We were totally unprepared when we came to see this exhibition. We came out completely overwhelmed and moved.' It is deeply insulting to invalidate these people's experience.

Dr Tesan criticises Lenkiewicz's paintings as sentimental and seeking to evoke pity for their subjects when nothing could be further from the reality. Has he really looked at a painting such as the magnificent 'Diogenes in the studio window at night'? These individuals, tramps, addicts, the mentally and physically disabled, are painted without any trace of sentimentality or any moral judgement. Like Nietzsche, Lenkiewicz saw pity as life-destroying: his whole argument is that altruism does not exist and that any claim that we are concerned for the welfare of another person – independently of our own needs – is of a pathological nature and is the 'straight road to fascism'.

Despite his pretence of education, Dr Tesan's knowledge of Nietzsche is obviously limited. Maybe he should sign up for The Lenkiewicz Foundation's educational program which he tries so hard to mock? (Did he not read the detailed catalogue essay tracing the influence of Nietzsche on Lenkiewicz, or did he just prefer to ignore it?) His jibe that Lenkiewicz's traditional style would not have lived up to Nietzsche's 'revaluation of all values' is a fatal misunderstanding. Nietzsche's artistic taste was highly conservative: his favourite authors, for instance, were Goethe, Stifter and Keller; his favourite sculptor Bernini; music, apart from 'Der Fall Wagner', Mozart and Chopin.

So what does Nietzsche say about painting? This, in fact (ironically from 'Human All Too Human'): 'Similarly (to music), some painters have made the eye more intellectual, and have gone far beyond what was previously called a joy in form and colour. Here, too, that side of the world originally considered ugly has been conquered by aesthetic understanding. What is the consequence of all this? The more the eye and ear are capable of thought, the more they reach that boundary line where they become asensual. Joy is transferred to the brain; the sense organs themselves become dull and weak. The symbolic increasingly replaces that which exists – and so, like on any other path – we arrive at barbarism'. Not exactly a post-modern manifesto, and in its insistence of the significance of physiology, uncannily like Lenkiewicz.

Finally, we may as well turn to Nietzsche for his view of the significance of cultural critics (again from 'Human All Too Human'): 'The whole class of modern men of letters is not far removed from the *feuilleton* writers; they are the 'fools of modern culture'. A classic case of 'Plus ca change', I guess."