

Thomas Wagner, Luis, or the Ludicrousness of Monstrosity

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*Our art is a way of being dazzled by truth; the light on the flinching, grimacing face is true, and nothing else.
Franz Kafka*

Today, monstrosity emerges as suddenly and unexpectedly as a figure out of the wings in a tunnel of horrors. Monsters are close to us, yet hard to grasp. Who is this "Luis"? A sad, sallow and bloated character that frightens and, in its helplessness, also touches us? A scarred glob distorted to a caricature? Or simply a failed specimen of a human being whom we look down on with derision? Luis is a contemporary homo sacer – even if he is in agony and a bit creepy. Yet, as drastic as he appears, Luis is an allegory in which repulsion, disgust and compassion are condensed, as is terror of the maltreated and misshapen.

In Spain, naturalistically painted sculptures with expressive physiognomies form a traditional part of religious processions. Enrique Marty's sculptures are also related to the historical depictions of men of sorrow and the Baroque sculptures of a Pedro de Mena. Yet one thing has changed: Both veneration and monstrosity have left the sphere of the sacred. As a memento, the monstrum no longer points along the right path. What makes Luis a monster is our inability to distinguish between sorrow and ludicrousness. It seems as if we can only fend off horror and its figures by masking and ridiculing them. Luis, however, has shed all masks, all civility and all shame along with his clothes. He hides nothing. He thus turns into an attack on the liberal double standards entrenched behind cleaned-up media images that make the body as a political forum disappear. Luis simply stands before us, he is just there. He's telling us that nothing is harmless anymore. We are all Luis. Ecce homo.