

From the series FLAG METAMORPHOSES (www.flag-metamorphoses.net):

Armament at Lake Constance

Myriam Thyes, 2008, Flash animation, 3:50, stereo



This animation explores the cult of death in Catholic ideology as manifested in numerous images in churches and monasteries around Lake Constance – and the association of this cult with warfare, a link represented locally in the armaments industry at Friedrichshafen.

The term 'cult of death' here refers to:

- Vanitas themes; an emphasis on transience;
- sin, dread of Divine retribution, Purgatory, Hell;
- self-sacrifice for God and Country;
- persecution of those of a different faith – they are 'sent to Hell' (Jews, Reformers, 'heretics', 'witches');
- executions as 'God's will' or 'Divine judgment' (trial by ordeal);
- missionary campaigns in which the other religion was prohibited on pain of death.

The Catholic Church not only made and financed war amply; the ideology described above also promoted the readiness for war psychologically, as it did the annihilation of dissenters. It legitimised these wars internally (as 'crusades'). The cultic aspects of National Socialism can be traced to a number of sources, not least to Catholic propaganda (Fascist anti-Semitism could not have arisen without the precedent of Catholic anti-Judaism).

The cast (in order of appearance)

- The flags of Switzerland, Germany and Austria
- The waters of Lake Constance
- One of the large iron gates from the Church of SS. Ulrich and Afra at Kreuzlingen (CH)
- Lake Constance – first, the western shore (Kreuzlingen / Constance), then the southern shore (Bregenz, AT), then the eastern shore (Friedrichshafen, DE)
- The Council Building at Constance, Germany, where, during the Council of Constance (1414 – 18), a new pope was elected
- The surveillance camera on the Council Building (2007)
- Jan Hus (John Huss) at the stake, after a drawing from the Richental Chronicle (the reformer Jan Hus, from Prague, was condemned to death by the Church in 1415 during the Council of Constance)
- The flag of the Czech Republic (Bohemia and within it, Prague, form two thirds of the present-day Republic)
- Relief of a reclining putto with a skull, from the Cathedral at Constance
- S. Gebhard (of Bregenz, Bishop of Constance c. 900) with a Bible, skull and tiara (papal crown), sculpture of wood, from S. Gall's, Bregenz's Catholic parish church (or from Herz-Jesu-Kirche, the Church of the Sacred Heart)
- Zeppelin LZ127 from Friedrichshafen (after photographs and a model)
- One of many scallop-shell reliefs from the Schlosskirche/Castle Church at Friedrichshafen
- Bevel-wheel train produced at ZF Friedrichshafen (the Zahnradfabrik was a subsidiary of the airship builders, Luftschiffbau Zeppelin GmbH; ZF supplied toothed gearing for zeppelins, war planes, tanks...)
- Four different aircraft flown by the German Luftwaffe in World War II. Built by Dornier (Dornier-Werke – again a Zeppelin subsidiary)
- Four different German panzers from World War II, with engines built by Maybach Motorenbau (today MTU Friedrichshafen; Maybach Motorenbau was another Zeppelin subsidiary and manufactured engines for zeppelins and those of almost all German panzers in World War II)
- Truck from the Überlingen tunnel (to transport blasted rock out of the shaft)
- Interior of the Überlingen tunnel, with barred window and view onto Lake Constance. (The tunnel was built in the Second World War by the Wehrmacht, using forced labourers. Intended to enable Zeppelin and its subsidiaries, Maybach, Dornier and ZF, to continue arms production underground, it never saw use. At least 168 slave labourers did not survive the conditions of imprisonment and labour.)
- Woman in Purgatory – Baroque carving from the Cathedral at Überlingen
- Gears from the ZF works at Friedrichshafen
- German flag

Sound: three pieces of sacred music from monasteries in Upper Swabia, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
Use of the music for this animation by courtesy of Berthold Büchele. www.buechele-musik.de