

# Challenging Power WITH HUMOUR

JACQUES TILLY'S CREATIONS  
IN THE DÜSSELDORF CARNIVAL



Exhibition organized by MEP Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann

renew  
europe.

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By Dr Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann

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# The Organizer: Dr Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann MEP



Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann (\*1958) studied journalism, political science and German language and literature at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich after graduating from high school in 1978. In 1986, she received her doctorate in philosophy from the same university. From 1989 to 2008, Strack-Zimmermann worked

as an independent publishing representative for the children's book publisher Tessloff.

Strack-Zimmermann has been a member of the FDP since 1990. From 2008 to 2014, she was First Mayor of her hometown Düsseldorf. From 2014 to 2024, she was chair of the Düsseldorf district association of the FDP. From 2013 to 2019, she was deputy federal chairwoman of the FDP, and since 2019 she has been a member of the federal executive committee. From 2017 to 2024, she was a member of the German Bundestag and, among other things, a member of the Defence Committee, serving as its chairwoman from 2021 to 2024.

Since 2024, Strack-Zimmermann has been a member of the European Parliament and once again chair of the Security and Defence Committee, as well as a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee and a deputy member of the Industry Committee.

## Foreword by Dr Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann:

“Anyone who knows the Rhineland carnival and celebrates it has been unable to ignore Düsseldorf artist, sculptor, communications designer and float builder Jacques Tilly for decades. Political, funny, malicious, tough, provocative, incorruptible, pointed - that's how you can characterise his theme floats or political floats. They spark discussions, not only among the parade participants, but also among those he wants to reach. First and foremost, local, national and international politicians, but also other authorities, such as representatives of all religions.

He works on these theme floats until shortly before the parade begins. No one knows what the floats will look like beforehand, and in the past, he has always successfully fended off attempts by anyone to influence their design. He is highly topical and truly in tune with the times. This has undoubtedly made him world-famous: his floats attract a great deal of international attention and are used again and again after Shrove Monday in places where they have been politically classified, such as the float he created on the occasion of Brexit and which ended up in London.

He gives a voice to oppressed women in Iran, as well as to people who have had to leave their homes, abused children, the socially disadvantaged and the weak who are unable to assert themselves. But he also names the heroes of history who have achieved something special.

Always pointed, rarely harmless, expressive and unambiguous. And so, he has also consistently accompanied Vladimir Putin's brutal attack on Ukraine, which violates international law, from day one. The fact that he was reported to the authorities in Russia for this shows that he hits the nail on the head, and that is what makes him so great.

The authorities are afraid of him, of the mirror he holds up to them. Most of his works, made of wire and papier-mâché, are destroyed immediately after the end of the Rose Monday parade. And immediately, the artist begins to observe the world again and depict it in his own way. He once said: 'Bad times are good times for satirists'.

It is an honour and a great pleasure that he has accepted my invitation to show his view of things in an exhibition at the European Parliament. For he also warns us in Europe: 'Democracy does not die, it is held in contempt'."

## The Artist: Jacques Tilly



The artist Jacques Tilly, born on June 27, 1963, in Düsseldorf, has been active in the political carnival of his hometown since the age of 20. Even during his studies in communication design at the University of Essen (1985–1994), he used satire year after year to critique the political events of the time. Since the turn

of the millennium, he and his own team - now consisting of ten people - have been building not only carnival floats, but also oversized, media-savvy eye-catchers for various NGOs.

In mid-December 2025, it became known that a Moscow court had initiated proceedings against Jacques Tilly for the “dissemination of false information about the Russian army for selfish motives.” This incident is a wonderful confirmation of Jacques Tilly’s credo: humour and satire can - and must - hurt, especially dictators, demagogues, and despots of every stripe.

## Jacques Tilly on his Work:

“Whether Trump or Putin, Islamic fundamentalism or Europe’s right-wing populist parties - across the globe and spanning all ideologies, authoritarian heads of state, parties, and movements are gaining ground. The values of the Enlightenment, the idea of human rights, and the liberal constitutional state have been pushed onto the defensive.

Through my work as an artist, I seek to be an uncompromising civil society counter voice to these disturbing developments. My medium is carnivalesque satire: the oversized sculptures that roll through the streets of Düsseldorf every year on Shrove Monday. I am deeply motivated by the fact that my works are now taken up and reproduced each year by hundreds of people around the world, on every continent. The messages clearly resonate and are understood everywhere.

The exhibition at the European Parliament in Brussels offers insight into my political engagement as an artist who defends the utopia of freedom against the power fantasies of authoritarian figures.

## About the Exhibition:

Historically, carnival was the one time of year when ordinary people were permitted to mock authority without punishment. It is rooted in the tradition of *Narrenkultur* (“fools’ culture”), in which social hierarchies are humorously inverted and power is openly questioned.

In Germany’s major cities, this tradition takes a highly visual form during carnival parades, where large wagons carry giant, often caricatured sculptures of political figures. These floats address a wide range of issues, such as German domestic politics as well as European and global developments, and they frequently respond to current conflicts, scandals, elections, government policies, and prominent international figures, including U.S. presidents or Brexit-era politicians. The wagons are deliberately provocative, exaggerated, and humorous, yet they are also designed to convey sharp and often critical political statements.

In the following pages you will find photographs of these floats, all designed by the internationally renowned Düsseldorf-based artist Jacques Tilly. Further information about Jacques Tilly’s work can be found at <https://www.grossplastiken.de/>.



1990 - Gorbachev Melts the Cold War



2009 - Putin's Press Freedom



2011 - Veiling



2012 - Merkel's European Rescue Umbrella



2014 - Pope Francis Scares the Bishop of Bling



2015 - Charlie Hebdo - Satire Can't Be Killed



2015 - Terror Has Nothing to Do with Religion



2016 - The Duel of Noses



2016 - The Afd on the Path of Radicalisation



2016 - Erdogan and the IS Leader Bagdadi



2016 - Kaczynski Suppresses Poland



2016 - Trump for President



2017 - Blonde is the New Brown



2017 - Revealing of "Monstrosity" Float in Manchester



2017 - Theresa May and the Brexit



2017 - Trump in Hamburg at G20 Summit



2017 - Trump Violates Miss Liberty



2019 - A Guardian Angel for Prince Mohammed bin Salman



2019 - Theresa May with a Pinocchio Nose



2020 - Australia is Everywhere



2020 - The Hanau Assassination



2021 - Duel Between Putin and Nawalny



2023 - The Bishop in His Hammock in Rome



2023 - Free Iran



2023 - Putin's Ukrainian Blood Bath



2023 - Strack-Zimmermann Annoys Chancellor Scholz



2024 - Hamas Sacrifices Their Population



2024 - The Truth Behind the Bourgeoisie Afd Mask



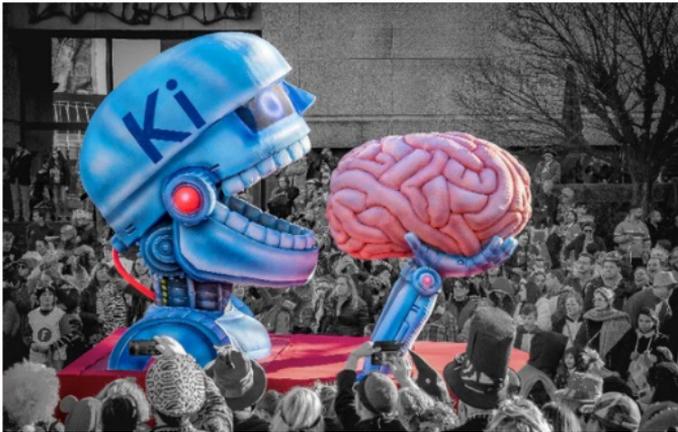
2024 - Putin and Kyrill



2025 - Hitler-Stalin Pact 2.0.



2025 - The AfD Seduces Young Voters



2025 - AI Feeds on Human Brain



2025 - Put(in) Jail



2025 - Elon Musk, the Crazy One



2025 - Putin's Economy: Military



2026 - Generational Conflict of Pensions



2026 - The Mullah Regime is Finished



2026 - The Sad Miss Afghanistan



2026 - Putin Steering the AfD Drone



2026 - Trump and the ICE Force



2026 - Putin's Attack on Freedom of Speech



2026 - Trump and Putin Threaten Europe



2017 - Brexit is a Monstrosity



2017 - Democracy Leave



2022 - Choke on it, Putin



2024 - We Are More



2025 - Putin, Trump and Xi Set on Expansion



2025 - Trump, the New Nero

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