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contact

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new jörg wien

Dry as in Humour

Do you have an alter ego?
- The sorcerer's apprentice.

Evocation, the act of calling forth images, is a form of summoning ghosts. Just like a sorcerer, a painter follows a formula to create something magical. And indeed, painting is connected to mystery. The piece "Zauberlehrling" (engl. sorcerer's apprentice) suggests a template for Lisa Slawitz' work in many ways, two of which seem important to mention here. For one, it serves as a synopsis, presenting us with the namesake of the piece, as well as a bundle of flowers, a book and a face – all are part of the cast within this story. Secondly, it is a self-portrait of sorts. Indelibly the evoked phantoms are connected to the life of their author.



Now then, I am looking at an image that might at least be two. One off-centre, casually pushed to the side in order to make way for the second, hidden area behind the foreground. Within, an arrangement of isolated figures, similar to pictograms, each somehow floating in its own dimension, as one might imagine how memories exist in our heads. The matt surface effect enhances a collaged impression of the elements. A composition of bodies and spaces, shapes and faces, amongst an accumulation of vertical brushstrokes, which in their sum produce an enchanting atmosphere.



In this scene, one character's delicate appearance is positioned above the others. With an expression of scepticism, they are not clearly gendered in the rendering of the soft facial features. Two sweeping arches that complete the roof of this face result from a parted hairdo. Long eyelashes and a pointed nose give it a sweet semblance; however, the eyebrows curved inwards provide a doubtful twist. Here lies suspicion, the question is what for – the energetic act of reading performed by the other subject in the group, with a heavy nose ominously hovering over a book?

Reading novels, Lisa says, is one of her favourite things to do, and during this, her mind quickly generates visuals. Perhaps her inner voice is not that but more so an inner movie theatre. We all need some time to express our thoughts orally, yet for her it might take slightly longer. If we were willing to connect our brains with computers, we could choose a more efficient mode of translation, in order to exchange thoughts in a flash. "There are, of course, things I keep to myself" she tells me, and while her conscious thoughts come across clearly in her speech, I start to wonder how, in a state of painting, her subconscious might indeed be even more tangible to herself.



Upon another inspection of the piece, strangely isolated in the dreariness of the rain of paint, is a hard cover book. This one is opened up with its unfolded sheets confronting the viewer. We are denied the opportunity to read anything, because the evocative pages are empty, like those of a journal waiting to be filled with ideas.

Lisa's aesthetic reveals a Japanese influence from the comic books she devoured in her youth, for example Galaxy Express 999 and Lady Oscar, just to name two. These early inspirations were somewhat neglected during her academic studies, temporarily suppressed with canonic, art historic knowledge. Today, the quintessence of this training has amounted to a distinct practice. A concoction of photo-realistic as well as idiosyncratic depictions come together, images that develop in her imagination during a process of sketching, reading, colouring, thinking...



And then there are the flowers, adrift in this amorphous pictorial scape. Somewhat forlorn, with their slightly yellowed petals, plump only for a short while longer, on the verge of drying out. As if left there, lying in another dimension, waiting to be chosen for a new purpose. What is the timeline of these three white peonies – before or after the suspicion arose? The subject of knowledge is something else for the subliminal than for the conscious mind.

Slawitz' prepares her painting base in two different ways: either ultra smooth or rough. Working on canvas or MDF-board, she may sand down layers of gesso or white acrylic to achieve a flat ground, and in other instances, she uses a transparent prime on canvas to keep the surface coarse. Normally, she paints one picture at a time, in layers, either wet, applying fresh colour onto the plain, or dry, rubbing pigment into the uneven material. Therefore her approach is slow and deliberate, contemplative vs. affective. With her eyes, she rummages through the now, stirring up a past memento with each brush stroke. The scenery is generated as she goes on, Lisa explains, painting brings her closer to her unconscious.



What might it be like to talk to someone telepathically? Is it like talking directly to someone in your brain? Wouldn't that count as self-talk though, or is it similar to texting? Before people will be able to exchange thoughts telepathically, they will be able to communicate voiceless with computers. Sometimes, the magical stuff of life is the most mundane to us. That we have developed plenty of different languages or that we exist for the reason that our heart is constantly beating. Similarly to telepathy you can experience a painter's creation and find meaning in it for yourself. A painting functions as an interface between one brain and another. The "Zauberlehrling" reminds us of this.



With a final look at the scenario, we cannot ignore the use of hierarchical proportion. Not only is it the large nose that makes the larger one of the two subjects appear like a dwarf. As it sits in the bottom right-hand corner of the green picture plane, this figure is also the largest one of the entire bunch. This must be the Zauberlehrling themselves. Despite the rather stationary behaviour of reading, they have a force to themselves, with the possessed eyes, and the small hands, frantically turning the pages of a book. A volume that is somehow dissolving under the speed of flipping through the papers whilst simultaneously protruding into the second realm. The outward curving sheets of paper against the angry furrow of the sorcerer apprentices forehead and the inward arch of their eyebrows describe a tension. The depicted figure is an avatar with an unfavourable feature. In painting, Lisa opines, it is difficult to leave anything standing in plain seriousness. Self-deprecation is a method that helps distancing yourself from your ego.

For this sorceress, painting is a pictorial language that is more potent than any other form of communication, and with it, she can explore the subconscious. What is slumbering there in the arms of Morpheus? Your own person is always the first subject of experimentation. Perhaps we can liken this body of work to that of the psychological fiction writer Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), whose introspective style is prominent in "The Lighthouse," a piece of auto-fictional writing, where stream of experience is recorded by stream of thought. In this case, we are invited to follow a stream of conscious in her image making. „I'm painting what I want so see," she says, quoting Philipp Guston, and with that, defending the power of our innermost selves.



Words by Jennifer Gelardo

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