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Ulrike Theusner
All there is
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Ulrike Theusner likes the idea of the world theater, of people as an ensemble, of characters as actors. Her works reflect this fascination: “Every picture is a little stage, a cosmos all its own, a world in miniature. With them, I create a space. Each work is a little play. In it, something is offered and, in the best case, is carried forward in the viewer’s mind.”

If one regards viewing Theusner’s pictorial world as a rendezvous, then one begins to understand oneself as part of the staging. After all, one is present on the same stage in the same space at the same time. Is the young woman depicted in a green turtleneck sweater in the pastel drawing “Venus” (2019) taking a selfie, or is she photographing the viewer? The white-hatched silhouette of an angry bird can be made out in the folds of her pullover. A dystopian messenger from Theusner’s universe, in which youth is not imaginable without age, Eros without Thanatos, beauty without dissolution, love without pain, nor good without evil.

Under the fragment of a Janis Joplin quotation “All there is”, the artist subsumes about four dozen monotypes and pastel drawings. Landscapes, demons, masked people, grimaces. Portraits of usually disoriented-seeming young people in garish, motley colors. “Pictures of my generation, my surroundings,” says the artist, “an inventory of our time and our moods.” Joining this are props from her repertoire: skeletons, birds, harlequins, devils. Theusner’s worlds bundle this side and the beyond, life and death in an inextricably interwoven meshwork. Her works remain as if tied to the present as snapshots. “Our actual life takes place only in the moment,” says Theusner. “‘All there is’ is the realization of the current ‘now’ situation, nothing is shifted to the future, everything that there is happens at this moment. Art helps one know oneself, clear the buried path to a deeply hidden emotional world, and penetrate to one’s own core, one’s own reality.”

What are the capabilities of an art that condenses the moments, that does not permit any escape back in nostalgia or forward in projections of the future, that reduces every self-presentation to absurdity, in which those portrayed play their poses and stagings back to the viewer? Art can neither save lives nor change the world, but it can make life

more worth living and can direct our gaze toward the world of our inner landscapes. Curiosity, courage, and gaining knowledge go hand in hand in this. The many-faceted ensemble from Theusner's cabinet of curiosities can provide the occasion. The imponderabilities and discontent, what is precarious and what flits about erratically in her works are an offer to plumb one's own depths in the middle of the curiosity cabinet of her protagonists.

Text by Thomas Girst

Translation by Mitch Cohen