

Cornelia Baltes

Eigenbrötler

EIGEN + ART Lab

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A lot has been said about painting: Who took it to a new level. Who revolutionized painting, who killed it, and who supposedly reanimated it. There have been “painter princes”, geniuses, lunatics, addicts, the mania-driven, obsessives. The lack of ambiguity that the medium demands makes it easy for myths to twine around the originators, and the fascination with painters and their work is unbroken. But there are other ways to approach painting that are often neglected in the traditional discourse: approaches characterized by clarity and unambiguousness that develop their humor precisely from that. Something that can be expressed as much in a picture as in all the human fragments of a late capitalist period that demands much from its inhabitants and therefore needs an opposite pole with even greater urgency.

Cornelia Baltes’ painting presents such a counter-pole. In 2011, the artist completed her studies at the Slade School of Art in London. And it may have been the distance from Germany and its mythical painters that gave her the freedom to respond to the world in her very own way – detached from the expectations still so often projected here on painters, who, if they want to be recognized as serious artists, somehow are supposed to poke around in people’s brokenness. Under the title “Eigenbrötler” eight paintings and three murals are now assembled in Baltes’ first solo exhibition in her home city, Berlin, in the EIGEN + ART Lab.

All the pictures are connected, but each can stand on its own.

The densely layered, deep pictures bring clarity into a mess of expectations that one is exposed to daily; they do so by eluding every all-too-precise categorization and by inventing their own rules. They shimmer between figuration and abstraction – and between cozily sweet and humorously roguish.

To give the pictures their own satisfied satiety, Baltes works with up to ten layers of paint and densely pigmented black. This is a depth that requires courage, because it produces unambiguity and, in this simplicity, a space in which one can grant one’s thoughts a pause, before returning to bustling life in which one must constantly direct one’s attention to ten different things to avoid being catapulted away from the constantly whirling carousel of productivity. In this kind of jam-

packed everyday life, one seldom has the opportunity to cut capers or to practice activities whose sole purpose is fun and joy; the thick, soft black of some of Baltes' pictures feels like an invitation to precisely this.

The painterly gestures are so exuberant and large that they sometimes leave the canvas to land on the walls. The forms she designs are expansive and generous. Indeed, Cornelia Baltes' work is characterized by a generosity that is displayed in the depth of the colors, but also in the size of the pictures. Her pictures reject every renunciation and negate everything that smacks of modesty imploring to be seen as understatement. It is a lusty, ruthless way to deal with color and form, and it gives the viewer a calming satisfaction.

Sometimes one can read a face into the forms, sometimes recognize an arm or a leg. The idea of corporeality is no coincidence: Baltes usually works with vertically oriented canvases that, if one consistently follows the narrative of the motifs, spur one to think of very boxy people. And so her pictures radiate their very own bodily presence; if they were really people, one would gladly go out with them for a drink. Lost in thought, one follows the thick brushstrokes and notices that here everything has its place and that, in its mirthful restraint, each of the pictures is exactly where it should be.

Precisely these days, when one practices social renunciation and the future slosses around between R values and incidence figures, Baltes' oddballs are the right contemporaries for surrounding oneself with a little amiable lightness, some humorous pointedness, and exuberant gestures. Nonetheless, despite all the clarity and resoluteness inherent in these pictures, they still have room for what is uncertain and unspoken -for the hope that implants itself in the interstices, that shines through in joyful expectation, and that heralds the future and the summer, and with them the end of all abstinence.

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