

## **Meyer Riegger**

### **Waldemar Zimbelmann**

#### **SYMBIOSE**

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Zimbelmann's human figures are always shaped by internal experience. Even if old family photos are the source material from which the figures are developed – “ I always found the absurdity of it particularly attractive – the trashiness of us all standing there in our jogging suits, when we had just arrived in Germany from Kazakhstan” – these memories are nevertheless always confronted with the unforeseeable aspects of the process of painting, thus taking on a unique life of their own.

He juxtaposes decisive and firm statements in painting with processual traces and multi-layered shimmering coats of paint. The use of a scalpel is characteristic for the painter, who started out his artistic career drawing. He employs it as a drawing tool with great precision, carving delicate lines and contours, scratching or scraping out surfaces, sometimes even radically ripping shreds of paint layers off of the painting. With this candid painting style Zimbelmann creates layers of colour, which lend space to his stark sceneries, sometimes interiors, often recalling the atmosphere of deserted suburbs and back courtyards. The sparing references and distinct creation of figures, forms and structures make Zimbelmann's artwork a laboratory of formal transformations and transitions, which he ultimately always furnishes with stability and formal stringency.

While in the past portraits were predominant, their internal conception gradually solidified from the pure abstraction of colour fields and lines in the course of painting through innumerable formal trials and rejections; in the paintings of this exhibition the painter engages in this process of open form-finding for the first time with large-format portrayals of figures. “The painting with the bushes triggered it. In the abstract tangle of colour I suddenly saw this figure embracing a bush, and so I pursued the idea of this strange symbiosis, until I had captured it in paint. I never create an image based on preconceived mental images, instead I subject them to the process of free development up until the end.”

The concept of symbiosis is a recurrent theme for Zimbelmann. His interest is directed on the one hand toward the close relationship of two individuals and their interwoven corporeality, and on the other hand toward the symbiotic integration of man and nature. The different forms or stages of the symbiosis range from partners who are locked in a close embrace, but are still separate entities, and figures that are completely or partially conjoined with another's body, to figures with single limbs transformed to branches.

In natural science the larger organism in a symbiosis is often labelled a host, it provides the habitat for the smaller symbiont, enabling a relationship which is beneficial for both partners. In this sense a “host” often also exists in Zimbelmann's artwork – a dominant figure, whose extravagant and captivating posture affords a second figure just enough space to yield and dovetail with the predetermined posture of the host. However, he or she is by no means detained in this subordination, but creates his / her very own autonomous area of liberty in a subtle way, and so in turn exerts an influence on the “host”. For example, at first glance a Turkish woman with a headscarf seems to stand obediently behind her charismatic partner, but on closer inspection one notices that she moves forward implicitly – this perception is caused solely by the vaguely perceptible body contact of her and her partner's shoulders, which suggests a gentle pushing impetus.

In another work, which portrays a girl sitting alone on a bench, the original “host” seems to have simply departed from the picture, leaving behind a free space on the bench for the viewer, who then becomes the new symbiotic partner in the suspenseful relationship. Does the girl's look contain an invitation, perhaps even an urgent prompt to take a seat, or rather instead an apprehensive rebuttal? Does her rigid, insecure posture suggest shy demureness, or is it, on the contrary, proof of her hostile scorn for her counterpart?

The viewer's efforts to pin down the girl's expression in favour of one or another truth will by and large fail, as so often with Zimbelmann's work. The ambivalent countenance is precisely what breathes life into his figures and portraits, making it impossible to categorise them in familiar schemes of emotion and thought. Frequently even the two eyes of a face express completely different moods or dispositions, which in turn are contradicted by the highly pronounced cheeks, or the fine features of the mouth, so that it is not uncommon that mischievousness, melancholy and earnestness collide – and yet form a coherent entity – within a single face. The conception of Zimbelmann's pictures allows for the contrasting of different stages of consciousness and psychological density, which are always his main focus, and in which the entire tension of the painting escalates and discharges.

In this regard his works on canvas differ from his drawings, which have become more and more like small-format paintings, their paper bases no longer visible as such through the application of dense layers: With the exception of the portraits and wood collages, here the artist's focus lies less on the development of an individual character, and more on a search for ambivalent head and body shapes. These often remain visible, side by side – whether as simple silhouettes or fully developed heads – thus providing insight into the previous painting process. Generally more fantastic and keyed up, the paper work is thematically directly linked to the canvases through symbiosis: here three heads share one body, there two figures share one leg. Like the larger artworks, they combine clarity and irritating restlessness.

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