

Dorota Jurczak

Blumka

Opening Nov 22nd, 6 – 9 pm
Nov 22nd – Jan 4th, 2025
Sies + Höke, Düsseldorf

Dorota Jurczak's relief busts appear almost slightly archaic in their stylization. This is partly due to the fact that these sculptural portraits with their long necks, timeless clothing, and only subtly individualized facial features assume a representative function: they are abstracted characters, but nevertheless endowed with striking attributes. Despite their restrained self-sufficiency, they exude a subtle eloquence. You can't escape the feeling that you have encountered them somewhere before in a similar form. Something almost folkloric radiates from them, filtered through its distorted representation in advertising, comics, everyday culture, and design. However, these works lack the dumbed-down cuteness that characterizes the latter, and their consistent rejection of apparently contemporary influences, the choice of classic materials and techniques—in this case glazed stoneware—lends them a timeless intensity.

Form and material are always directly connected in Dorota Jurczak's works: the material from which something is made, the process by which it is created, the motif that materializes, and the use of color form a fusion in which the decision-making chains are causal, but not necessarily linear. Her human beings and animal creatures exhibit slightly surrealist distortions, but above all, their stylization draws on a modernist idiom that embraces the vernacular, the folkloric, and has refined this into an organically grown, pre-modern form. For the Arts and Crafts movement, and later Art Nouveau, the new interpretation of a formal language that translates the artisanal into the decorative was a central pillar. Art Nouveau and folkloric motifs entered into a genuine symbiosis that made folk culture part of an advanced contemporary art and gave it positive connotations. Later, it was elements of popular culture, poster design, puppet and marionette theaters, and silhouettes—with their references to a new form of production—that were inscribed into the visual arts. All of this plays a role in Dorota Jurczak's work, but what she produces is rather unique, elegant and simple, direct yet enigmatic. It seems antiquated without being anachronistic, and almost defiantly asserts the sovereignty of its form, which acknowledges these references without deploying them in a purely strategic way.

The three stoneware reliefs are coated with a white ash glaze reminiscent of traditional Japanese tea cups. Matt and shiny areas merge together and produce light effects that seem to break up the static nature of the works. The eyes of all three figures are closed, but their mouths are slightly open, creating the paradoxical impression that they are alert and in a deep slumber at the same time. It is precisely these kinds of disorienting elements that make Jurczak's creations representatives of a vaguely unearthly species, revenants from the past that confront us like the busts of ancient tombs or stone statues of benefactors in churches. They face us head-on, but do not seek contact. The longer we look at them, the more we turn them into projection surfaces for our own selves. Perhaps these lifeless objects might be animated after all. The artifacts become increasingly charged with significance without providing any rational answers for their ambivalent, idiosyncratic appeal.

The dark glazed animal sculptures initially appear to form a contrast to this ensemble. The pigs' heads on their bottle-shaped bodies give the impression of vessels that have mutated into living creatures. With their distinctive snouts and pointed ears, they are reminiscent of depictions from children's books, films, and comics, where they appear as lovable creatures in the form of Porky Pig or Peppa Pig. And yet this combination of a domesticated animal form and a practical purpose seems to have darker connotations here. Their size makes the viewer think of ancient vessels, possibly ritual objects, more than exaggeratedly decorative everyday objects. As with the reliefs, nothing is clear and every point of view is legitimate. Although their figurative execution seems easy to interpret, Jurczak's works remain enigmatic. They evoke a knowledge stored somewhere, an intuitive classification, which they neither affirm nor negate. In this gray area, they oscillate from one extreme to the other, seeming approachable and familiar at times, and then far removed from our present age, surreally distorted, and deeply psychological at others. Their materiality builds a bridge to the past, while their formal language forges a connection to cultural and historical references that can usually only be accessed associatively.

Everything lies clearly before us, and yet its clarity fades the longer we look at it.

Text
Vanessa Müller