

## **Jennifer Baumeister**

Jennifer Baumeister, who graduated in sculpture at Kunsthochschule Weißensee, Berlin, is an extremely versatile artist, truly an all-rounder. She works in various art categories and expresses herself through different media.

But whatever she does she does with great competence and always with highest levels of technical professionalism.

Apart from her multimedia installations (of which let me mention only her "comforting machine", which was much-reviewed by the press), she is particularly convincing as a painter.

The human being is the focal point of her work. Her theme, her leitmotiv, is the human being as an individual or as a part of society. Painted with traditional techniques, in rich, fragrant, and slow-drying oil paint.

Jennifer Baumeister's human images seem like snapshots, like stills of the moment, fixed up for a breeze of eternity. Her models rarely seem surprised; usually they pose to be closely examined and yet, they are somehow indifferent to the artist's presence and the viewer.

Besides the women and a few men, first and foremost there are children. Many of them wear elaborate, carnivalesque masks or grotesque costumes which they anxiously, stubbornly hold like protective shields towards the looks of grown-ups and the world out there.

Street children have been portrayed as well, such as the "Accordion player", the "Girl" or the numerous "Child soldiers", all of which, through their intense representation, get under your skin. These children seem to have been dislocated from their own world into strange adult surroundings where they now seem forsaken, lost, out of place.

Most of these little and big people, shown as portraits, half-lengths or whole figures, are placed in front of bare backgrounds that only occasionally are provided with a few props and do not betray a specific location.

They are usually passive, do not perform an activity, but seem enclosed in themselves.

The visual variables are reduced and arranged deliberately. The pictures' compositions convince through a skilful efficiency of plainness that emphasizes the isolated figure.

This staged form of composition creates formal clarity and visual immediacy. This way the respectful distance to the model breaks over and over again. For instance through close angles, characteristic of modern painting and certainly influenced by the possibilities of photographic close-ups. Or through the unusual perspectives and irritating pane details that Jennifer Baumeister arranges so masterfully. It's not easy to elude these figures. They are present—omnipresent—simply intriguing.

An enormous emotional power flows through the elaborate, clear lines of formal structures—with affects and passions, anxieties and abysses, emotions and drivenness, melancholy and abysmal sadness. These paintings largely celebrate and also update the tradition of expressive figurative painting. They show something that has become rare in contemporary art—the (painted) soul. This is particularly evident in the way eyes and the gaze of the figures are presented.

The paintings of her landscapes cycle, most of them small-sized, are rather emotional as well. Again, their composition is extremely simple, and their restrained colour shades hardly make you think of a Mediterranean coast. There are no motivic overloads, what is represented is reduced to a few elements of nature. Occasionally you can vaguely discern the silhouette of a single lonely figure that seems to suddenly step out of the shadow of a mysterious mist of colours.

The clear-cut concreteness of her figurative images dissolves here into an atmospheric blur. This abstract understanding comes to life through the expressiveness of paint and form—often intermingled with a haptic surface texture. The nature shown refuses any event, which keeps the horizon of imagination open to the observers' fantasy.

These atmospheric, strangely touching landscapes with their uninhabited nature, with their artistic emptiness stand in the tradition of landscape painting that originated with Caspar David Friedrich.

All in all, Jennifer Baumeister's art breathes much seriousness, but—and that's what's pleasant and special about it—without being pathetic, without any calculated intellectual and psychologising efforts. But with poetic and, well, humoristic attitude.

Without doubt, there is something special about this art: clarity—complexity, up-to-dateness—consciousness of tradition, individuality and social criticism. And, it leaves room for associations and interpretations.

Dr Heike Welzel, art historian  
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