

Grzegorz Siembida
Helena Frank N. Furter

27.09. – 18.10.2024
new jörg wien

Helena Frank N. Furter

Image disruption, image destruction and image restoration are recurring processes in Grzegorz Siembida's painterly and sculptural work. The reuse of found objects and materials gives his art a new meaning and order.

Born in 1984, Grzegorz Siembida belongs to the second generation of Polish painters (after Marcin Maciejowski and Wilhelm Sasnal), who deal with the contradictory turning point of the political and aesthetic transformation of the 1990s, sometimes critically, sometimes ironically. Since painting is always also a process of citation, his works always contain references to his studio as a place of work and source of inspiration, for example, as well as media and art-historical citations and idiosyncratic appropriations that raise questions about the representation of identity, gender and the beauty of art.

The current exhibition by Grzegorz Siembida at the New Jörg in Vienna has an enigmatic title reminiscent of a Super-Heroine: Helena Frank N. Furter. It is an invented idiom for a woman who worked in the Polish enamel factory in Olkusz during the communist era and, like other female workers, secretly practiced as a non-professional abstract painter outside of working hours. The name Helena Frank N. Furter also appears as the artist's alter ego and is a hubris made up of the names of two characters: the fictitious Frank N. Furter, self-proclaimed transvestite and main character of the musical *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), a drag queen, and Helen Frankenthaler, famous painter and representative of American Abstract Expressionism.

Siembida's exhibition, which is a kind of memorial and homage to the aforementioned anonymous painters, shows a variety of works by the artist that combine different materials and techniques. These include his sculptures, which look like archaic totems but are not made of wood or stone like these, but instead consist of enamelled metal jugs, vases and plates from the enamel factory in Olkusz. Also on display are abstract compositions by the artist on paper and textiles with typical floral patterns, which were used to sew the aprons worn by female workers at the time. The floral fabrics became a symbol of women's labour in poorly paid production areas. They also emphasize the class and gender differences in society at the time. The original vases and plates from the factory in Olkusz as well as archive material - edited photographs and collages - round off Siembida's exhibition.

The project is dedicated to an ethical-aesthetic dilemma: with his exhibition, the artist honours the anonymous female painters of the enamel factory in Olkusz in order to draw attention to their neglected presence. Nowadays, such actions are usually carried out by women and artists who choose other women to commemorate their role (often these roles and the artistic aspect of their work are unimportant). The ar-

tist says about his project: 'The fact that I am gay and thanks to the painters from Olkusz I can speak with the voice of a woman and vice versa, gives my personal story about enamel colours and the writing of Herstory a different, new perspective'. Grzegorz Siembida thus uses his abstract art and research to explore questions of self-image and self-presentation, marking the boundaries between reality and illusion, between male and female, between past and present as minimally as possible. Situated between the familiar and the strange, his exhibition invites us to reflect on our own ideas of gender identity and at the same time offers a critical examination of social norms and stereotypes. At the same time, it is a plea for the diversity of forms of expression.

Text Goschka Gawlik
Curated by Goschka Gawlik