

Who are you?

... this is a question for which there are no quick or conclusive answers. Who someone is highly depends on the situation and the era they are living in. Therefore the question of identity is always a political one. As each era and each country sets different conditions that facilitate and restrict people's freedoms. "Who are you?"¹, according to the philosopher Hannah Arendt humans are confronted with this question from the very first moment they were born. Identity is formed in connection with other people, fellow human beings, since humans are situated always within a network of different relationships. In this sense, the question is addressed not only to the people to whom it is asked, but also to those doing the asking. Identity is a life-long confrontation with the world, with values, regulations and political contexts.

In the series of paintings entitled "I climbed the mountain. Entdeckerinnen" Zsuzsa Klemm confronts these philosophical, existential and political questions. Here, gender and ethnic origin play a role, often creating categories and causing people to be ascribed to certain roles. Pushing the limits of those roles, or moving beyond them, requires personal strength and political and artistic commitment. Klemm tackles this issue with a painting style that is at once impulsive and delicate. And as if it were a symbol for the whole series, an orange "Who are you?" shines out of one of her paintings. The question of who someone is opens up a whole series of other questions and thematic spaces: Who do you want to be and who can you be? What possibilities do you have? What can and do you want to discover?

Zsuzsa Klemm's series "I climbed the mountain. Entdeckerinnen" approaches these questions via artistic means, combining images with text and paint with collage: fragments of faces cut from black-and-white prints peek out from overlapping layers of paint, and painted lettering criss-crosses figurative and expressive forms. Dynamic visual layers result. Every painting, it seems, tells part of an ever-evolving story. And a closer look reveals: it is women that are creating and shaping this/these story/ies. For her paintings, Zsuzsa Klemm has chosen women whose work and lives represent equal rights, intellectual and artistic freedom and pluralism, and has sensitively integrated them into her artistic world. There, these female figures – such as Rosa Luxemburg, Nina Simone, Jane Birkin, Hannah Arendt, Marie Curie, Rosa Parks and Caitlyn Jenner – enter into a dialogue with Klemm's own artistic expression and seem to want to direct the artistic world as well as the real one. And that is one of Zsuzsa Klemm's primary wishes: to create a reality in which women's self-determination becomes visible as a dynamic potential.

The subjects oscillate between homage, vision and painterly manifesto, demonstrating the artist's personal point of view and appealing to the viewer not only through the recognition and rediscovery of famous writers, singers, politicians and scientists and their words, deeds and lives, but also through symbolic details.

In "Blick in die Welt/ View to the World" your eyes are drawn to a pair of glasses and a smiling mouth: Zsuzsa Klemm has given a young woman's face a pair of oversized glasses, and further to

the left, the same woman, now looking older, smiles out from under a layer of yellow-coloured paint. Klemm hasn't drawn a portrait of Hannah Arendt, instead she lets her world facing and inquiring gaze meet the gaze of the beholder. A moment of reflection, doubling and fading arises, which closely is interwoven with her art. Zsuzsa Klemm herself explores this in her series of artworks. Pictures like "Still alive", "Life is now" and "Let it all out" demonstrate a powerful form of painting that wants to go beyond convention: expressive swathes and sprays of colour combine with and surround delicate faces and diverse shapes, while words tumble in colourful, graffiti-like letters across the canvas and lead feminism, identity and diversity into the open realm of (artistic) possibility. Zsuzsa Klemm works associatively. A fragment of lyrics from a Nina Simone song merges with the words of Rosa Luxemburg to create a third text, while in many of Klemm's pictures, we see the semicircular spatial forms familiar to us from icon painting serving as a contemporary stage for a group of women who take to it and use it as a platform to express their view of the world.

In one small picture in the series, a female figure's yellow hair (or is it her thoughts?) is piled up like a mountain, overlapping with a blue hill in a seemingly calm mountain landscape. This quietly poetic image could be seen as a metaphor for the whole of Zsuzsa Klemm's series "I climbed the mountain. Entdeckerinnen". Since the question of who someone is accompanies you life long as a creative process. It is a question that requires introspection as well as communication. In this series of paintings, Zsuzsa Klemm declares that the act of discovery is one's own, willfully-chosen path, one that is shaped by our thoughts and desires. Identity is a never-ending narrative that feeds from deviations, complexities and transgressions. The fact that Zsuzsa Klemm turns well-known women into the protagonists of her paintings and stages them as courageous pioneers, as well as companions on that journey, is a painterly path of its own.

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¹ Hannah Arendt, »The Human Condition«, Munich 2002.