

Reflection and Desire

In the sculptures of Barbara Polderman people and animals act as if they have come to a sudden standstill within a wavering film. Their activities have been interrupted, the clocks are stopped. This enables the spectator to unashamedly observe a scene.

And a splendid scene it is, rich in dynamics and interaction, which gives the onlooker an immediate sense of involvement. The tension is tangible and one is lifted into alienating moods, causing bewareness. The human figures are in a dreamlike state, stuck in a loving embrace or interrupted during their lovemaking.

The animals mark time, seemingly wanting to wait and see. Their postures true to nature, they crisply characterize humans and animals. The portrayal of expression and body language is exquisite; the *Woman with hat* is lost in thoughts; the *Standing girl* is stuck in movement, any contact with the outside world postponed; the *Lying couple* touching with intimacy; the wild and raging wolf adopts a threatening pose; the large standing elephant in *Family* keeps a watchful eye on her offspring, the shrewd *Owl in nest* sits, imperturbably looking ahead, on its habitable observation post.

They are all images of reflection and desire. The models do not seem to be bothered by unsuspected observers, beholding their original magic. Through this lifelike portrayal, the visitor is offered a true impression of the exhibition in just a glimpse.

Barbara Polderman focuses her work on the visual representation of human figures and animal portrayals. For the artist, choosing whether to use a human or an animal representation determines the very essence of the sculpture. To the expert eye, the human figure is readable in a fraction of a second. The viewer will instantaneously perceive gender, age and mood. Posture and expression will tell its tale to the keen observer.

Constructing an animal, according to Barbara Polderman, provides more room for interpretation. "An animal can represent anything (...) I try to humanize the animal and emphasize the animal side of humans. My work is based on what moves me, how I imagine or remember something, and I try to create a definite translation of that emotion."

Although there may be a threat in the pose of the animals; the ears thrown back, the head stuck up, the creature often remains inscrutable. Because in our perception its identity still is close to nature. The artist wants to move away from any zoo-like behaviour and touch the creature's soul.

Many artists these days have been fascinated by the phenomenon of animals, of which the images represent primal, exotic creatures and unspoilt nature. Some of them are frightening; others seem to evoke a need to be hugged. People like to project - often unwittingly - many emotions and feelings on to animals.

Because we like to see their human side, they serve as a symbol for some of our characteristics: stubborn as a mule or quiet as a mouse. As close as they are to nature, animals represent our ambition to enhance our respect for all forms of life. In the current political arena animal welfare protagonists can count on a lot of support.

The outside of the depicted humans and animals of Barbara Polderman is, one could say, at the very least unorthodox. The skin is made from a combination of fabrics, upholstery materials and garments, curtains, ribbons and ties, providing the sculpture with a visual richness.

The composition of patterns, performed in collage using a rather virtuoso technique, provides the images with an intriguing appearance.

By using exciting contrasting colours and tactile materials an exotic atmosphere is created, which will thrill spectators. It draws you closer, inviting you to be part of the show. Yet, you wisely keep your distance, out of respect for the unique creations.

Other images are more disturbing and depressing. Associations with mortality and decay are emerging. Elegant applications appear to have a negative side. On closer inspection some ornaments can remind you of scarification, burns and tattoos. Time and time again it shows that even within all their loveliness, humans and animals are vulnerable. Nature often proves to be erratic.

There is a thin line between beauty and agony. For Barbara Polderman this is self-evident.

The hanging strips of fabric and threads are a striking example of her work's imagination. Looking at the *Wolf*, they could have arisen from running through dense bushes and picket fence. All it has seen along the road will stick and haunt the animal. This could be interpreted as the inevitable burden of life. Though it might also be considered as life's virtues, showing dignity, or the urge to survive.

They are a personal testimony of the animal's life. Interpretations of living creatures should be in balance for the artist, form a mirror of nature with its breathtaking beauty and its horrifying confrontations. Things should look exactly as they are, that is reality.

Working with such contrasts proves to be fruitful for artists. Those who can use these contrasts without compromise will offer their audience the best opportunity of a true experience. Images of humans and animals come to life and contribute to the understanding of the eccentricities of nature and motives of life.

The multiplicity of creation is beyond any comprehension. Often without being aware of it, people have created an inexhaustible reservoir of images in their memory. It is an aggregate of all our experiences and insights, the knowledge we need to survive.

Except sculptures, Barbara Polderman also manufactures three-dimensional boxes in which she displays the diversity of nature. With much dedication, birds, large and small, but also many other animals, are brought together in dynamic collages. Sometimes it seems as if during the artist's commitment to embrace the entire fauna, she reinterprets the Ark of Noah. With forests and mountains in the background and colourful details, almost touchable in front, a strong depth is suggested. The animals live peacefully together; it is a tropical paradise where anyone would like to be. She describes the compositions as 'inner landscapes', aptly indicating the intrinsic perception of the microcosm.

It is advisable to allow oneself a moment's rest while looking at Barbara Polderman's sculptures and try intently to fathom them. They will unveil their secrets unexpectedly and it is at that moment the viewer will gain access to the artist's symbolism, which include concepts like progress and stagnation, safeness and loss, death and erotic longing. The *Lying couple*, motionless and in a dreamlike state, is a symbol of the desire to cling on to a frozen moment, the desire to stop the clocks. The couple seem fixated in an intimate lovemaking. The dream is balancing between being and not being. According to the artist: "Whenever you think you've got something, it has already left you, it's gone."

Her work is based on her own experiences. A common occurrence can be a starting point for the development of a work of art. Only when such a personal experience can get a broader scope, when an evocative link with the outside world can occur, the artist sees an opportunity for a definite work of art. It is crucial for the individual cause to be powerful in its expressiveness to the outside world, to be recognizable. Only then personal feelings and memories of the artist become understandable and art will be able to communicate. An example of which is the care and vigilance of the elephant mother in *Family* towards her offspring, supported by the group, fully aware of the circle of life. Another example is the intimacy and trust that speaks from the sculpture *Woman with three horses*. The symbiosis of the reclining female figure and the three small horses, which we collectively refer to as solidarity, is a unique display of natural harmony. It is a challenge for the artist to grasp such common, yet always unique experiences in shape, colour and expression.

With many of her pieces Barbara Polderman has very successfully achieved this. Personal observations inspired her to develop tales of telling

symbolism. In this sense, the collages and sculptures are all autobiographical. In fact, her portrait and form have most often served as a model for the anatomically convincing sculptures. Even though occasionally others have posed, through the representation of private experiences and feelings they have all eventually become self-portraits.

Artists are inspired by the imaginary. They know how to mould emotional tension into a form, which has the capacity to touch and exhilarate others. The authentic experience with which the sculpture was charged reflects on the spectator. Barbara Polderman invites the public to enter her world, guiding them along a track where illusions merge into an art of life. Confronting her audience with essential experiences, the artist occasionally leads viewers along the edge of the abyss before returning them into a safe haven. This is definitely a most intriguing demonstration of life itself.