

ELISABETH NEMBRINI BELLES ET BÊTES

Because man is the only animal in the animal kingdom that sets the tone. Man dominates what is happening and stands over all other animals. Elisabeth Nembrini employs own, art-historical or media pictures: portraits of the upper class with animals such as stoats, parrots or unicorns. She transforms in a long process these photographs by embroidering, perforating oder enlarging them as a projection, thereby striving to taper a subliminal ambivalent mood. In the eponymous French fairy tale the girl named La Belle has to remain instead of her father in the castle of the animal La Bête, or else the animal dies. Disgusted by the external ugliness of the La Bête she eventually falls in love with that noble creature which then turns into a beautiful prince.

The characters and images of this beautiful and yet disturbing story speak to our innermost part. Already in the earliest times, it is readily apparent: There is no history of mankind without animals. No matter if domesticated or wild. Man is not only above animals, but also lives with them and of them. In shamanic rituals and religious traditions the threatening and the powerfulness of the wild was submitted and occupied. But what we left behind on the way to civilisation was retrieved and survived in various forms: masks, totem, fetish, lucky charms, trophies, depictions, fairy tales or symbols. We embellish ourselves with the wild power of nature, which we have tamed and appropriated. As for the happy end of the story, La Belle has to use neither weapons nor ropes or cages. It's only love that can free the animal from the evil curse and lead it to a human existence.

Elisabeth Nembrini's baroque images depict a similar civilized narrative. The signs and body language are graceful and noble: aristocratic ladies pose with exotic, domesticated animals. Of course, the animal in Leonardo da Vinci's painting 'Lady with an Ermine' is not a pet. The story goes that Anne de Bretagne, the last independent Breton ruler and the wife of two successive French kings, saw a group of hunters chasing after an ermine. When the ermine reached the edge of a muddy lake the ermine decided to stand up to his attackers rather than risk soiling his beautiful white fur. Anne, it appears, was so impressed that she saved the ermine and adopted it as the emblem of her dynasty along with the motto: 'Potius mori quam foedari'. (It is better to die than to get dirty).

In her quiet works Elisabeth Nembrini creates an arc of tension that touches the invincible sincerity of nature and the rational, civilized modern man. Alienated from his impulses and instincts he employs the animal world, integrates it, directs it, tracks it and imitates it. There are no claws, no stings, no fangs. It used to be mimesis—today we call it avatar.

Elisabeth Nembrini lives and works in St. Gallen. She graduated from the Lucerne University of Applied Science and Arts. Her works have been shown at: Hiltibold St. Gallen, White Space Zürich, Kulturraum S4 Bahnhof Lichtensteig, The Others Turin, Geiler Block Trogen, Werkschau TG 16 Kunstmuseum Thurgau, 'Ausgezeichnet' Kulturraum des Kantons St. Gallen and 'Ausbeute' Kunstzeughaus Rapperswil. She has received a number of awards and realized quite a few projects in public space, such as Landwirtschaftliche Zentrum Salez SG, St. Galler Kantonalbank Heerbrugg SG and University of St. Gallen.

Exhibition

August 25–September 29, 2018

Wed, Thu, Fri 2–6 pm | Sat 11 am–4 pm | and by appointment

Opening reception

Saturday, August 25, 2018 | 3–10 pm

3 pm: Opening of the exhibitions

4 pm: Welcome address

5 pm: Exhibition tour

6 pm: Summer party

Sunday, August 26, 2018 | 11 am–4 pm

Long weekend

Saturday, September 15, 2018 | 11 am–9 pm

Sunday, September 16, 2018 | 11 am–4 pm