

## People, nature and emotional landscapes

Ingrid Pröller paints young people, usually lost in thought, sensitive, sometimes dreamy, almost transported. They wear modern, often sporty, clothes and accessories. Otherwise the paintings have nothing in common with our hectic present day reality. They appear as if from another world, radiating calm, warmth and contemplation, but also feeling, passion, and, sometimes, aggression. In recent years, the people portrayed by Pröller are increasingly surrounded by natural environments, dissolving landscapes with an expressive mood. Nature is trying to take centre stage, lets the human beings appear fragile and vulnerable. Sometimes it crowds them out of the picture altogether. Then trees and shrubs dominate the scene, a kind of natural environment that the deliberate observation of the artist turns into a landscape, a sphere that resonates emotions.

Ingrid Pröller lets nature crash in on human beings. The landscapes are terribly beautiful: trees and forests dominate the painting in wild abundance; shrubs proliferating ferociously between meadows and lakes. The densely painted surfaces form a stark contrast with the blank spots on the canvas that even heighten the intensity and concentrated power of the pictorial worlds. They are like a projection screen that makes it easy for us viewers to delve into Pröller's paintings – paintings that exhibit many facets, ranging from very subtle, fine, drawing-like elements to sketches that let the preparatory drawings shine through, to pastose, very expressive areas whose colour splashes and paint dripping can easily manage the transition to an almost abstract painting style. Many things develop directly on the canvas. Pröller reveals the actionist process, her struggles and efforts in painting.

The nature scenes she paints seem to be pure and untouched by civilisation, they look idyllic, but also eery; human beings appear both secluded and threatened in them – the environment is beautiful but also incalculable and wild, like human nature itself. Human beings are part of the natural scenery, and yet the human figures stand out in the refined manner in which they have been painted from the very powerful, expressive nature parts. It is precisely this fragility which illustrates how unprotected the figures are, how vulnerable we humans are in physical and emotional terms. Even if they are painted very finely, Pröller's human figures have a powerful physical and emotional presence. The artist succeeds in rendering the human body in a way that is less impressive due to demonstrative postures and gestures than by a very natural, sensitive depiction which awakens the viewer's empathy, and conveys a slight melancholy. The sensitive portrayal of the young people gives viewers the chance to engage with them and their environment. The effect is achieved subtly and unobtrusively and precisely for that reason difficult to withstand.

The landscape touches human beings in their innermost cores; it embodies nature, remoteness from civilisation or ideas of paradise. It is familiar and yet distanced and alien in its independent and sometimes uncanny spirit. Seen from this vantage point, there can never be a "true" perception of landscape. More than any other painting subject a landscape is more of an idea and mental image. For the artist, the landscape is both vision and reality. Her protagonists seem to be embedded in emotional landscapes, perhaps in their own dreams, dream worlds. Of course one could be reminded of the awe-inspiring landscapes of the Romanticist era, the surprise and wonderment that the vast and infinite grandness of nature inspires. But this should not be considered more than one of the many sources of inspiration for a very personal, emotional perspective that the artist takes on humans and landscapes. Painting landscapes seems to be a deepfelt need of humanity; it reached its first heyday in the Romanticist era, when humans started to feel separated from nature in their search for individuality and freedom and wanted to recover the unity that they believed lost.

One may wonder whether Pröller's artistic focus is based, among other things, on a reflection on the situation of humanity in the world of today, whether it means a kind of compensation for the perceived loss of nature and subliminally echoes a general yearning for an idyllic state. With the progress of civilisation, nature is withdrawing. Because of its remoteness we have forgotten how close we are to nature and that everything we inflict upon it we inflict upon ourselves, because we are part of nature and not only living in it. The precarious ecological situation, discussions about ever scarcer natural resources, the reckless exploitation of nature can evoke apocalyptic visions. Such fear of loss and perhaps a renewed tendency of sensitisation explain why landscape paintings such as those by Pröller are so topical, and why we feel a need for them. In our fast-paced life, the natural environment, lakes and forests with their century-old formations and structures offer the values of permanence and reliability. These natural phenomena that our eyes and our minds shape into landscapes will always exist despite all losses and transience. And they may give human beings a sense of being part of a higher order.

With her sensitive paintings the artist runs counter to the hectic pace of the art world, to shortlived fads and the flood of media images. This may precisely be the reason why she grasps the needs of the time more than many superficial critiques of consumerism or painting aesthetics in line with popular trends. Our view of nature, too, is influenced by the media. Pröllner deliberately taps existing media images, filtering them and forging them into her very personal and inimitable style. Her work has authenticity. One can sense in her work how much respect, but also affection and passion the artist has for human beings and nature. As viewers we can share in this attitude. Ingrid Pröllner caters to the need of every human being for empathy, feeling and sensuousness, perhaps also security – emotions that will never go out of fashion.

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