



Marlies Pekarek – Parades and Processions

Like the artistic borders that surround the pages of some manuscripts, the installation by St Gallen artist Marlies Pekarek frames the Baroque Hall of the Abbey Library. All kinds of animals and fantastic creatures parade along the shelves that hold time-honoured folios and leather-bound books. The artist uses a variety of sources for this, from illustrations in manuscripts to legends and fairy tales, such as the Gallus legend and “Puss in Boots”, to the ancient Egyptian world of gods with its numerous animal-human hybrid creatures.

For her small sculptures, Pekarek draws on many different models, for example traditional wood carvings from Brienz, trinkets made of porcelain, but also cheap souvenirs from all over the world. In so doing, she thoroughly shakes up stories and figures and, above all, our expectations. Little Red Riding Hood, for example, stands like a shepherdess in the midst of a pack of wolves. The model for the animal is the Capitoline she-wolf that nurtured the abandoned boys Romulus and Remus. This is a surprising fusion of the fairy tale of the bad wolf with the founding legend of an ancient global empire. Ba, who represents an aspect of the soul in the Egyptian cult of the dead and is depicted as a bird with a human head, is given the head of a doll-like baby Jesus with a crown by the artist who thus blurs the boundaries between ages, cultures and religions.

In her work, Marlies Pekarek is interested in the transition of religious, mythological and artistic collector’s objects, once produced by master craftsmen, to meaningless, mass-produced souvenirs. Through the materials she uses, such as bronze, the artist refines cheap mass-produced goods; at the same time, she reproduces what were originally costly objects in ephemeral materials such as wax and soap. However, since all the figures are in black and white, it is hard to tell what an object is made of. Thus, the game of deception and confusion extends to the materiality of the figures. In view of this cycle between art and kitsch, original and mass-produced item, value and worthlessness, the question arises as to what meaning we attribute to these things.

The parade also resembles a masquerade, where each being pretends to be something else. A Scottish Terrier puts on a Nefertiti bust or a stag’s antlers, while his head appears on a monkey, which in turn squats on a donkey and pretends to be one of the Town Musicians of Bremen. Again and again you will encounter a sweet little girl growing out of all kinds of animal bodies – like a harmless playful version of a centaur.

With her installation, Marlies Pekarek plays a surprising and enjoyable game with her animals and creatures. Safely put away behind the grilles of the cabinet doors, the fantastic parade circles the venerable Hall and the treasures in the display cases, inviting us to invent our own stories.