

GALERIE MICHAEL WERNER

JÖRG IMMENDORFF
DISTANZ ZU SICH SELBST*

Paintings and sculptures 1985–2007

Jörg Immendorff (1945–2007) came to fame with “Café Deutschland”. In this set of works, and he developed them over the course of ten years, the painter, illustrator, and sculptor devoted himself to the representation of Germany. In his hands, the insipid realism of the 1970s regains the phantasmagorical fire that shines so bright in Grosz’s unusually constructed pictorial world in the early days following World War I. In addressing such historical-political subject matter, Immendorff perfected his pictorial vocabulary, whose arresting symbolic content forms the colorful counterpart to Beuys’ object art. During the 1960s, Beuys was Immendorff’s teacher and patron at the art academy in Düsseldorf, and subsequently his senior partner in the search for contemporary symbols. In 1976, a friendly suggestion from A.R. Penck prompted Immendorff, who was likewise conversant with Action Art, to take up scenic painting, something with which he was already familiar from the theater stage. In “Café Deutschland”, Immendorff serves up an epic iconography of the German Republic, which can be considered a founding idiom for a reformed national art.

Immendorff subsequently explodes the narrower socio-political framework of these images with the artistic and art-historical pictorial reportage of “Café de Flore”. Finally, after 1998, in the last phase of his work the artist devoted himself to life itself. After being diagnosed with an incurable nerve disease that was soon to paralyze him, he set up a painting workshop in the Baroque style, where helpers would perform the tasks in place of his hands. With his imaginative eye, Immendorff remained active there until his final days. The work was divided up as in the time of Rubens and the result was now paintings whose themes Immendorff pieced together from European art history. He mined the treasure trove of emblematic images lying dormant in engravings collections and grouped his finds around his own inventions and their reminiscences. With his own end constantly in sight, he concentrated on the final things at a strange distance from the disenchanting lifeworld. Like readymades, he reawakened symbolic figures such as Baldung, Hogarth, and Friedrich as well as Modernist figures, presenting them to his audience as companions in life.

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Immendorff finds a contemporary, striking solution to posing Gauguin questions anew: “Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?” – with a muted palette and grisaille.

The exhibition *Jörg Immendorff, Distanz zu sich selbst* * opens on Friday, February 14, 2025, from 6 to 9 p.m. and runs until April 12, 2025, at the Galerie Michael Werner Berlin.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalog with texts by Danièle Cohn, Rudi Fuchs, and Catherine Millet.

*Cf. Helmuth Plessner, *The Limits of Community*, 1924