

With the exhibition ›Figuren+Bilder‹ Barbara Gross Galerie honors Norbert Prangenberg, whose more than thirty-year career as a painter, sculptor, and creator of drawings came to a premature end with his death last year. The small ceramics and oil paintings he produced in the last years of his life comprise the centerpiece of the show. Supplementing these is a selection of early drawings and paintings, as well as a large clay sculpture.

Prangenberg's characteristic signature can be seen in this gathering of the different groups of works. He reacts to the material with great open-mindedness and allows himself to be guided by the opportunities presented by the clay, watercolors, oil paints, or pencil. The artist's physical presence is always palpable; it can be perceived in the traces of the artist's fingers in the oil paint, or the imprints of his hands and knuckles in the clay.

In his later paintings the artist essentially departs from the repertoire of geometrical shapes of his early works and concentrates on "painting colors." The thick impasto application of the oil paint creates vivid surface structures, broken up by miniature-like pictures-in-picture. Small, colorful islands of color refer to the long tradition of abstract painting, but could also be regarded as citations of Prangenberg's previous works. Here, the signs and forms that long characterized his work reappear: circles, rhombuses, waves, floral and mandala-like patterns.

The small ceramics are closely related to the oil paintings, and the two genres enter into a dialogue in this show. While the distinctive surface relief of the paintings turns them into sculptural objects, the organically shaped clay figures take on the role of painting support: small planes glazed in brilliant colors create an intriguing contrast to the muted earth tones of the open-pored clay. The title "Figur", which Prangenberg chose for his ceramics, reinforces the impression of vitality and physicality, while transcending pure abstraction.

At first, the size and simple shapes of the life-sized clay vessels—either standing or reclining figures—make them seem massive, yet the delicate formation of the surfaces—soft glazes, patterns and shapes etched into the clay, openings, and flower shapes placed atop the surfaces—lend them a sense of playful ease.

A processual, intuitive work method is typical of Prangenberg. Especially when it comes to drawing—a very direct and spontaneous process—he allows himself time. Often, he lets a drawing rest for a long time before beginning work on it again, adding new lines, a watercolor shape, or more color to the drawing. In Prangenberg's own words, the work only ends "whenever I have the feeling,

including in a spiritual sense, that it has a certain mass, an aura that transcends the mere thing itself."

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