

Ruhe!
25/01 — 21/02/2025

Dear Lou,

Have you ever found yourself in the peculiar position of reading someone else's correspondence? If so, perhaps you share my sense of unease: it is as though one steps, unbidden, into the innermost chambers of two entangled souls engaged in an exchange of letters. And yet, so many correspondences—hidden in archives, tucked away in literary estates—seem to have been composed with at least the possibility of an expanded readership in mind. The act of bearing witness to their thinking, loving, quarrelling, and despairing does not feel wholly illicit, nor purely voyeuristic.

A similar sensation, I imagine, arises when visiting an exhibition like yours. For—allow me a moment of speculation—it is not solely an artistic force that brings a work into being, nor that conjures the images of Babi Brüller and Benedikt Gahl. Before that, there is an utterly human urge, a desire to give form to emotions and thoughts. Of the paintings you will be showing at PIP, my understanding remains tentative—woven from fleeting encounters, online traces, portfolios, a telephone conversation, and no less from my own composite impressions. Let me attempt to put them into words:

Some time ago, I encountered Babi wandering through a garden on the outskirts of Jerusalem. At the time, I was immersed in research on the grotesques and paintings of a Jewish exile artist. I was slipping into an aesthetic cosmos orbiting figures like Meidner, Chagall, and Lasker-Schüler—a world of visual excess, of nightmarish dreamscapes at once delicate and overwhelming, a *mélange* of biblical and Jewish narratives entangled with visions of political utopias and apocalyptic reckonings. It was, in short, the perfect moment to encounter Babi's images and her dolls. The photographs on her phone revealed Medusa-like heads, eyes wide and staring, mouths crimson and raw, or neatly coiffed bobs in uniform-like dress. A pale choirboy sang, Mary Magdalene crowned the crucifix, a trio of Hasidic men contemplated (or resigned themselves to) the roadside. Here and there, an incongruous flash of contemporary footwear appeared. The figures and dolls seemed themselves uncertain as to the era they inhabited—somewhere between the Third Reich and January 2025. Perhaps this strange temporality was heightened by the fact that I had only seen Babi Brüller's works within the confines of Instagram's square format. As a result, a particular *zeitgeist* asserted itself—one that is never truly absent but often remains imperceptibly embedded, subtly shaping the viewer's perception. Tell me, how do the real paintings manifest themselves in your space? What shifts when they step beyond the screen?

Speaking of space: Benedikt Gahl mentioned to me, during a recent conversation, that the nature of the exhibition site—simultaneously a space for art and gastronomy—posed something of a challenge for him. How does an artwork resist becoming mere decoration in such a context? To negotiate this, he is metaphorically stretching the four corners of his canvas: his recent works engage with the idea of banners, those carried through the streets during early twentieth-century May Day demonstrations, their fabric bearing the faces of communist leaders. I imagine his canvases, in their elongated horizontal format, suspended high above viewers' heads.

At first glance, Babi's and Benedikt's practices seem to inhabit entirely different registers: one grapples with an increasingly flat and surface-oriented painting, distancing itself from the raw physicality of previous works; the other embraces figuration, for abstraction, she insists, cannot adequately reckon with the horror of war, crisis, and oppression. Yet, through the exhibition's constructed constellation of their works, I wonder if a shared reality might flicker into being. Which reality, precisely? That remains in the eye of the beholder.

Their paintings may have emerged from an intimate, solitary dialogue between artist and canvas. But in working through material, in confronting its weight and resistance, something emerges that a third party might also uncover. Reading a stranger's letters, much like experiencing your exhibition, does not lay bare the innermost workings of those who write or paint. Instead, it is through our encounter—through looking, reading, lingering—that a subject takes form, shaped by feeling, summoned into the visible. Ultimately, a painting, like a piece of music, a poem, or indeed a letter, resists total disclosure. It retains an enigmatic life of its own, beckoning the viewer towards further inquiry.

Write me a few lines—tell me what you think, what you do in the end.

With warm regards to all of you,

Asta