

Painters: Marianne Kolb

About two years ago, merely by accident, I stumbled upon an online gallery where I discovered one particular painting that immediately drew my attention. As I found out, the painter in question was Marianne Kolb, who lives and works in California, and when I visited her own website, I was completely fascinated by the paintings I found there.

As often with art, it is difficult to describe those paintings with words (and probably unnecessary, since I firmly believe that a painting should stand for itself). This poses a dilemma, since words are the very medium by which I am trying to convey my impressions and feelings regarding the art of Marianne Kolb, but I will try my best to explain why I find Marianne Kolb's art so remarkable.

At the web site of one of her galleries, I read that Marianne Kolb was born in Switzerland in 1958. She grew up in an isolated Swiss farming village, where working on the farm was the main chore of the day. After moving to Bern, the capital of Switzerland, where she received some sort of business education, Marianne Kolb eventually came to Berkeley, California, where she got in contact with art through members of the East Bay art community. This finally resulted in an apprenticeship with a goldsmith, and after working as a goldsmith and jeweller herself, Marianne Kolb started to draw in 1987. After receiving an old easel and a paint box as a gift, she finally started painting.

One characteristic of Marianne Kolb's art is that her paintings are grouped into specific themes, instead of being merely a succession of more or less independent paintings. The general theme in her paintings is the solitary human figure: not recognizable persons, but with two exceptions (the W. Whitman series and the painting „In Memory of Stanley Tookie Williams" from the series "Crossing Every Boundary") anonymous, mostly apparently male figures. What makes those figures (and the paintings in general) so fascinating to me is their immense spiritual emanation. In fact, "Emanations" is the title of one particular series of paintings Marianne Kolb did in 2002.

Besides the theme, further characteristics in Marianne Kolb's paintings are the often somber colors, which give those paintings a vibrant, remarkable depth, all the more, as those colors contrast with very energetic ones (e. g. a bright, brownish red; see „Monk No. 37" for but one example), which heightens the deepness in the respective painting further, even energizes it.

One aspect I find very important is Marianne Kolb's masterful use of space, and although devoid of physical objects, this space is at no time "empty". Instead, it often seems to emanate a mysterious kind of energy. This is especially true of her "Marked" series.

"Energy", for one, is to me one of the essential terms to describe Marianne Kolb's paintings. Even the bodies of the figures seem at times to dissolve into

fields of vibrant energy. And the space in those paintings is not "our" physical world, but another dimension, seemingly made out of pure energy, occupied by beings, humanoid, but not always necessarily humans. Some of them could very well be alien beings from another planet, or another plane of existence.

Amazing despite the one general theme: the human figure is the variety which one encounters in the different series. Earnest, lonesome, questioning, contemplating, sometimes humorous („Monk No. 34"), even joyous. Interestingly, the heads of many of those figures are devoid of any hair (an exception being the „Standard Pack" series), as if hair was merely an unnecessary decoration, and through its absence the essence of the figure depicted becomes all the more obvious.

Currently, Marianne Kolb is planning to do an entire series dedicated to the work of poet, Paul Celan. She has already finished one 24 x 24 in. painting about Celan's poem, "To Stand", which was initially written in German, and has been translated into English by Pierre Joris.

To me, Marianne Kolb is one of the artists with an instantly recognizable style of her own. In addition, her art displays a depth one encounters rarely nowadays. In conclusion, one can only wish that Marianne Kolb gets the wider recognition she deserves.

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