

It's Nice That



Katja Seib, *The Slutmachine*, 2015, oil on hessian, 135 × 135.5 × 2.5 cm / 53 1/8 × 53 3/8 × 1 in

© Katja Seib, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London, photographer:
Robert Glowacki

Artist Katja Seib's surreal ongoing project is to paint the never-ending story in her head

Words by Ruby Boddington, Monday 15 April 2019

While some stumble into their creative careers by accident, painter Katja Seib carved out her path early on. Working with oil on canvas, hessian or fabric, Katja paints in an instinctive and natural way, turning thoughts and meditations from her daily life into images with resonance.

Interestingly, it was her hometown of Düsseldorf, and not a family member or specific exhibition, that inspired her proclivity for the arts. The city “is very artistic due to the Kunstakademie (fine art academy) and all the well-known artists living there,” she explains, “the area really connects people to art.” Around the age of 11, she began visiting the fine art academy, attending the annual *Rundgang* where students exhibit their work. “By then,” she says, “I already knew I wanted to study there one day.”

Katja's paintings combine dark, surreal motifs with nods to culture and commerce that ground them in reality. In one scene, a figure leans against a wall in the background of the image, staring down the viewer while an all-too recognisable logo hangs above him. In other scenes, body parts and sexual favours are up for grabs in a sinister twist on the fruit machine.

The figures, Katja tells us, are based on models and friends who she takes photos of, forming the basis of each painting. Some elements may be added or removed along the way, but this central figure(s) always remains the same. “All of my ideas are borne from mental images that I plan over long periods of time,” she adds. “They are so clear and instinctual that there's no need to write or draw to fix an idea in my head – I already know how the piece should be.”

In this sense, “You could say my actual and ongoing project is to paint all the ideas I have in my head – there are hundreds that I want to paint,” Katja remarks. In turn, her paintings are not defined by specific series but, instead, act as a “never-ending story”. “I try to walk through the world open-minded and with eyes wide open, which makes me find surprising things. Remaining open and receptive, rather than explicitly searching for inspiration, allows new ideas to form,” she continues.

There's a distinctive quality to Katja's works, despite their ranging subject matter. “People say that one of my signatures is the way I paint skin and faces – especially eyes – which I think gives my work a certain emotional accessibility: without necessarily understanding the whole message, the subjects feel easy to empathise with,” the artist offers on what this distinction is. However, she concludes: “That said, an explicit message isn't something I'm aiming for – for me, the work is a success if it elicits a response from the audience, accessible via any number of routes and open to various interpretations.