

# Pillars of Society

We enter the exhibition through the window, that is to say, through the paintings the artist calls “panes,” *Glass II* (2022), *Glass III* (2022/23), and *Glass V* (2023). The works illustrate Franziska Klotz’s artistic mastery: the almost photorealistic appearance of the glass, the casual abstraction, and the compositional skill in the colors and proportions. Klotz has been working on this motif for four years. It connects the exhibition at Galerie Kornfeld with her wider oeuvre.

The panes provoke our gaze. They speak to us, astonish us, and challenge us to look through them.<sup>1</sup> *Finestra aperta*. The image is an open window. But the reality it reveals lies on another level, in the realm of thought. We are dealing with social and philosophical questions and with ourselves. In the mirror (*Glass V*), we cannot see ourselves but are thrown back on our desire to be reflected. Where does this desire come from? Why do we want this? Do we always look for ourselves in images? Hermeneutic circles in shattering glass.<sup>2</sup>

Among the social and philosophical issues raised by the paintings is the question of how we view the suffering of others. The empty, overturned, piled-up chairs in the works *Pink Elephant* (2022), *Generation C 1* (2022), and *Generation C* (2023) reference the 1999 Columbine High School massacre and Michael Moore’s documentary on gun violence made in its aftermath (*Bowling for Columbine*, 2002). But they also refer to the power of images to represent and help us understand (our compassion for) the suffering of others.

Susan Sontag criticized war photography for commodifying the pain of others, for reducing it to a consumer item to satisfy the desire for empathy among sated urbanites (“People want to cry.”) or, at best, for provoking an unstable emotion that is never translated into action. That’s why she demanded that we turn the images into narratives.<sup>3</sup> Klotz, meanwhile, demonstrates the unbroken power of images,

not by showing suffering itself but its traces in incidental things like overturned tables and abandoned chairs – images, in other words, that show only a detail (like the famous pair of baby shoes from Hemingway’s short story that are sold without having been worn), challenging viewers to imagine the suffering behind it.

*No Stop, No Go* (2022) uses the motif of a traffic light to evoke the delicate interplay between freedom and order. As we know, there is no freedom without order (no rights without laws), but any order without freedom is worthless. Klotz’s traffic light, however, goes beyond this debate. It melts in the heat, raising the question of what causes this symbol of the balance of rights and duties to dissolve. What lies on the other side of the window? Is it our passions and drives, or is there only a will to power behind all orders and evaluations, a “play of forces and force-waves” that only masquerades as order, freedom, good, or evil?<sup>4</sup>

*Brighton Pier* (2023) can be read as an allegory of our society, which has often been compared to an amusement park because of its hedonism and the almost complete protection against all risks.<sup>5</sup> But what are the pillars of this society? Economic growth? Unlimited fuel and infinite storage for our waste? Freedom? Inventiveness? Critique? Democracy? Klotz doesn’t explicitly name the pillars that support our society – which are crucial for our comfort and for our disco balls to keep spinning – but similar to Ibsen and Grosz in their respective works, she shows that they’re rotten. Yet looking back at the exhibition from *Brighton Pier*, we can find clues to identify different pillars of society: our relationship with ourselves, compassion for others, and the balance between order and freedom.

Klotz’s works are windows into our world: they captivate our gaze with painterly magic, but through them, we see the things that really concern us.

1 Cf. Bernhard Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel. Modi ästhetischer Erfahrung*, Frankfurt/Main 2010.

2 Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013.

3 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2003.

4 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, vol. 11, *Nachgelassene Fragmente 1884-1885*, Giorgio Colli and Massimo Montinari eds., Munich, 1988.

5 Most recently and notably, for example, by Peter Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital: Towards a Philosophical Theory of Globalization*, Polity, Cambridge, 2013.

# Girls, Girls, Girls

The Girl Portraits of Berlin Painter Franziska Klotz

Franziska Klotz's paintings of girls all seem to pose the same question: "Who am I?" But the answer is not forthcoming. How can you explain, justify, or even express this mood that changes from elation to sadness in seconds? The mere mention of puberty or adolescence makes parents, teachers, and educators anxious, while others find it amusing and joke about it.

Yes, this phase of youth would be more enjoyable if it came later in life, as legendary silent film comedian Charlie Chaplin once observed. And, according to surrealist writer Jean Cocteau, in the behavior of young individuals, honesty is often mistaken for cruelty. Playwright Bernard Shaw approached the concept with a laconic counter-question: why do children experience this physical and emotional chaos at an age when they have absolutely nothing to gain from it?

Berlin painter Franziska Klotz has been exploring this phenomenon for years. She conveys her diverse observations through portraits of teenage girls in oil paint and colored ink. Her style might be defined as "restrained expressive." The portraits outwardly depict mood instability, reticence, withdrawal, and irritability, conveying the ambiguity and suffering experienced during the complex process of transitioning from childhood to womanhood.

It would be wonderful if girls' lives actually resembled Sailor's upbeat, catchy 1976 hit "Girls, Girls, Girls." The song inspires feelings of joy and carefree happiness as if it was created in a time when dreams could still come true. The girl with the fringe, Lindsay, is dressed in dark clothing, making her look older and striking. On her knees is a colorful bag that resembles a muff – a beautiful, old-fashioned accessory formerly used by stylish women to warm their hands when walking around town or in the country. She looks thoughtful, almost serious, ruminating away somewhere on a landing or a roof terrace. Her graceful chin rests in her right hand. In her left hand, the indispensable iPhone. It seems Lindsay is waiting for a call. We can only guess from whom. Who could dispel this almost invisible melancholy?

Klotz calls her latest series of paintings "girls." It continues a cycle from the Corona years titled "Lost Generation," which depicts young women isolated from their friends and social cliques due to the numerous lockdowns. These girls aimlessly and listlessly wander through a world that has become empty and distant. The painter gives the girls fashionable names, like Kim, Kate, Lucy, Lena, or Alice, to explore that elusive stage of life between childhood

and adulthood. This is especially pertinent now when the forced isolation caused by the Corona pandemic has long since been lifted, but carefree attitudes have not yet returned.

For over a year now, Europe has been experiencing war. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has changed everything. This has led to increased anxiety, particularly among children and adolescents, who were already struggling with the effects of the pandemic.

Lena is wearing a colorful cardigan. She's pretty beneath the self-bleached hair that falls purposely shaggy over her face. And yet she is lost, taking refuge, as it were, under her yellow-pink dyed hair, in clothes that are much too baggy. The cardigan pocket almost certainly contains her smartphone full of Snapchat and Instagram likes, which clearly don't make her feel any better. The bright tousled mop of hair does not reveal her face. A box containing a ready-made meal is on the table before her, hastily grabbed from the snack bar next door. There is no mother or grandmother to prepare meals, to bake pancakes when the child comes home from school and ask, "Do you want applesauce with that? Or stewed cherries?"

Kate and Lynn are sitting on the floor of a room. One is in a gymnastics or ballet dress and bare-foot, while the other is wearing something like roller skates. But they are not actively moving around like children their age typically do. Instead, they are glued to the floor, listless and aimless, while two other girls seem to be hiding in a toy sphere.

Some girls are wearing blindfolds, reminiscent of those worn at the carnival in Venice, confidently displaying themselves on the internet. Others are wearing mouth scarves like defiant disguises. Why are they doing this if there's no real enjoyment or carefreeness? The painter shows the young women in a phase when everything really begins, when the world is open and dreams can come true. But their dreams seem disturbed. In the motifs, dark is set against light, cold against warmth, form against color, realism against abstraction. And there are cracks in space: expressions of withdrawal into oneself, extreme listlessness, skipping school, persistent refusal to talk, an inarticulate rage directed at everyone and everything, but above all against oneself.

Sometimes, the paintings appear as though the artist put down the paintbrush and used her fingers to smudge the oil paint onto the canvas, creating vibrant patches of color. At times, the colors red, green, blue, and orange seem to have been inked into the dense purple structures – a melancholy mix of colors

that represents the undefinable changes in a teenager's body and mind. The colors blend, similar to a watercolor painting. Grids of colors and vertical patches run through the image, resembling oil rain or tears trickling down. All this raises the question: What is troubling these girls? What dreams do they have?

"I paint what I see, suspect, and feel," says Franziska Klotz. She extracts "contemporary historical images" from the visual flood of media images. In the afternoons, after school, she sees girls like these near her studio in Prenzlauer Berg. Her paintings are interior-exterior reflections. They contain no criticism of the often-invoked "affluent neglect" experienced by children, only painful ciphers of crisis in this transitional phase of life. Adolescence is defined by significant mental and social changes science calls "psychosocial puberty." The once cheerful and happy child becomes petulant, dismissive, or sensitive and may need love and attention at any moment. And beware if the parents do not react immediately!

It's as if the painter, with her colors and shapes, wanted to caress scores of lost hedgehogs. It's not easy to keep up with these fluctuating moods. Romantic enthusiasm, on the one hand, and churlishness and moral ignorance, on the other, a simultaneous appreciation of and ironic detachment towards beauty. These *Lolitas* want to understand the phenomena around them as well as their feelings. But they are ashamed of their feelings and no longer wish to be seen as "children." Two souls, alas, are dwelling in their breast.

When things aren't going so well – which tends to be the norm – the *Lolitas* find other ways to make parents and other family members sympathize, discarding their emotional waste on mothers, fathers, siblings, and teachers through grumbling and bitching. A challenge for everyone, especially the girls, who must learn to cope with many new situations and the emotional chaos within. Girls navigating various social media platforms. Each one separately, but all connected by the same fears, doubts, and insecurities. What connects them? The virtual sanctuaries where their relationship to their bodies is analogous to the social fabric – at once introverted and extroverted. According to the painter, social norms are being tested here.

Franziska Klotz's own girlhood occurred more than 30 years ago, in Dresden, amid the turmoil of the post-unification era. She observes the current age with curiosity and sympathy for girls whose days are aimless and listless. Who try to escape the pressures of school and parents. And the reproach: "What's wrong with you? Pull yourself together! You should count yourself lucky; you've got everything!"

The painter is interested in trajectories toward adulthood: the farewell to childhood, the pull of new friendships, the unfamiliar, inexperienced handling of confusing emotions, the defiant struggle against authority, and the tension between responsibility and irresponsibility.

Klotz's paintings evoke conflict. She does not show resolution, leaving it to the adult viewers to ponder the issues and even reflect on their own youth. She merely encourages us to understand what is happening in this deadlock between child and woman; and also what might be wrong if the girls are too adjusted, if they are obsessive or listless, leading to mental disorders.

Amid this conflictual situation, the painter has symbolically placed the painting of a traffic light: "No Stop No Go." You can only see the signaling mechanism from the side, not the actual colors. As if to say: adolescents often have the right feelings, just the wrong amount. Be patient and sensitive because objectivity, agency, and self-control only emerge in early adulthood.

Franziska Klotz tackles this subject with her art. Layered, interlocking color planes alternate and oscillate between surface and depth. Sometimes they dissolve into misty materiality. At times, you can still see the raw canvas. Everything seems undetermined. An in-between, without clarity. But full of vulnerability.

Melancholy? The painter depicts the emotional struggle of a generation – lost in choosing the right school and career path. Caught between not knowing what suits them and the ubiquitous pursuit of self-fulfillment. Ultimately also lost in impatience and the radical desire of the young to change the aspects of the adult world and lifestyle that they reject. The pictures do not tell coherent stories; they contain only allusions without a clear beginning or end.