

# STEPHANIE RAINER: INSATIABLE LONGING FOR MOVEMENT

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Galerie Ernst Hilger, Dorotheergasse 5, 1010 Wien

Stephanie Rainer was born in Vienna in 1984. At the age of 24, she suffered a severe riding accident, which resulted in arduous physiotherapy that continues to this day. The act of constantly having to work on her body led to an acute interest in physicality and a desire for movement, which are the guiding themes in Rainer's artistic oeuvre. The desire for movement is a permanent companion in her everyday life, but Rainer also knows that this longing can never be fulfilled; it is insatiable.

Nevertheless, she manages to use art as an outlet for her longing by means of great physical self-discipline, which is consequently also an underlying motif in her fifth solo exhibition "Insatiable Longing for Movement".

The exhibition consists of two series, the figurative *Flying Figures* series and the *Abstract Movements*, which, although visually different, are nevertheless connected.

The *Flying Figures* depict a group of small figures in various acrobatic movements. The viewer can detect motions from various sport disciplines such as cliff jumping, dancing, swimming, as well as winter sports such as skiing, ice skating and snowboarding. Even though each figure performs its movement on its own, a closer look reveals fine pencil lines on the canvas, which on the one hand continue the movements of the figures, and on the other hand connect them with each other. This creates an effect of fluidity and dynamism, but at the same time team spirit and solidarity. The pencil lines can also be seen as a nod to Rainer's earlier works, which tend to have a graphic quality. The element of solidarity is reinforced in those groups of figures that as a whole represent a geometric form. The viewer might be reminded of synchronised swimmers.

The theme of self-discipline is obvious through the reference to sport, but it can also be seen in the theme of solidarity, as working together as a group equally requires discipline. The arrangement of the figures into a geometric form adds an abstract dimension to the *Flying Figures*, making it clear that Rainer is interested in the interplay between abstraction and figuration. Thematically, the figures are reminiscent of the works of photographers Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey, who at the end of the 19th century were interested in capturing motion through photographs. This interest was then further explored by Marcel Duchamp in his 1912 painting "Nude, Descending a Staircase No 2". In the *Flying Figures*, Rainer is able to live out her longing for movement, as she can partially experience the depicted movement through the paint application.

The *Abstract Movements* also show pencil lines on which acrylic paint has been applied in quick motions. Here, movement is expressed through the artist's brushwork. In this respect, one can say that the *Abstract Movements* are evidence of physical motion, reminiscent of the works of the Abstract Expressionists / Informel artists, such as Hans Staudacher. In this series too, the pencil lines bring a graphic element, as well as lightness, to the works.

Rainer does not consider there to be a rivalry between abstraction and figurative art. Instead, she sees both as parts of herself and strives to give herself room to express both. Both series require different forms of self-discipline and body control on the part of the artist. The *Abstract Movements* are unplanned and allow her to work quickly, which is more in keeping with her habitual working rhythm. However, they are physically extraordinarily strenuous.

The *Flying Figures* differ inasmuch as they are highly planned and require enormous concentration;



each brushstroke needing to be executed precisely. The different forms of exertion have caused Rainer to work on both series simultaneously to act as a counterbalance.

Rainer explains the choice of using a linen canvas due to the down-to-earth quality of linen. Here too, is a reference to the physical body, as linen can also be worn as clothing. The colour spectrum of green, blue, yellow and red appears exceptionally vibrant on the linen. In relation to the colour scheme of the *Flying Figures*, Rainer mentions an interest in harlequins. The harlequin is an archetype figure whose emergence can be dated as far back as the Middle Ages, but whose main attributes were standardised in the 16th century in the *Commedia dell'arte*. The harlequin is a jester figure, he usually wears a patched costume of red, yellow, green and blue and is a crowd pleaser who impresses with acrobatic feats and jokes. His acrobatic accomplishments, achieved through extreme self-discipline, illustrate his ability to live outside the standardised rules of society. In this respect, one can also make a reference to self-discipline in the colour choice of the *Flying Figures*.

In conclusion, the themes of the exhibition might just be the insatiable longing for something unattainable and the refusal to give up, individuality versus solidarity among members of a group, as well as the fact that discipline and spontaneity, like abstraction and figurative art, can very well both be present in a person.

Stephanie Rainer cites Martha Jungwirth and Maria Lassnig in particular as artistic role models. She appreciates the latter for her pioneering role in how women deal with physicality and their feelings in art. Martha Jungwirth's abstract pictorial language also has a strong connection to physicality and the representation of movement. "Insatiable Longing for Movement" can be seen until March 5<sup>th</sup> at Galerie Ernst Hilger.

Text by: Magdalena Polak