

Bernd Zimmer. The Trees...

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It is considered a symbol of life, knowledge and wisdom: the tree. The cultural meanings attributed to it are as varied as its diverse species and manifestations. With its skyward, upright stature, the tree embodies growth, strength and stability, while its changing foliage with the seasons symbolises the cycle of life. Development and change, growth and decay affect both tree and human.

Their close relationship is particularly evident in Bernd Zimmer's "Mann im Baum (Man in a Tree)" from 1982: the nude figure and tree trunk are intertwined and create a visual unity. Depicted in blue and black, the central motif contrasts with the bright, sunny background. Is it a grateful embrace or a hopeful clinging in which the tree functions as a lifeline? Is there even a hint of a new beginning, and does the artist represent himself here?

It seems remarkable that – unlike Zimmer's other works – "Mann im Baum (Man in a Tree)" shows a human figure, since the artist's focus is otherwise primarily on landscape and nature. Trees have been a recurring motif in his oeuvre since the late 1970s: from apple and cherry trees to almond and olive trees to mixed or spruce forests. Details such as tree trunk, stump, pruning or branch can be found in Zimmer's paintings, as can different environments and weather conditions, ranging from fog to snow. Apart from that ambivalent titles such as "Entwurzelt (Uprooted)" or "Banyan. Baum der Weisen (Tree of the Wise)" allow for ambiguous interpretations.

Bernd Zimmer understands trees as alter egos: similar to the canvas, they are not only literally his counterpart; their painterly reinterpretation goes beyond their physical appearance and can equally reflect personal developments, feelings and life circumstances. In the course of his artistic career, Bernd Zimmer has captured a wide variety of trees in different forms of painting, as the works shown in the exhibition from 1979 to 2023 demonstrate. Style, degree of abstraction and colour design refer to different work phases and provide an insight into Zimmer's artistic development.

His paintings reveal a deep connection with nature and are greatly influenced by the diverse landscapes he has experienced during his countless journeys around the world. Bernd Zimmer approaches his subjects in large series, which include sea, sky, dune and desert paintings: Following principles of construction and de-construction, the works are created in multi-layered overpaintings. Perception, colour, visual space and spatial experience are decisive parameters in his art. The depicted motif may sometimes take a back seat to painterly questions; however, it never loses itself in pure abstraction. There is always a concrete trace of the seen landscape.

Zimmer's colour field paintings, which continues to develop landscape painting with its art historical tradition, not only open up new spaces of experience, but at the same time refer to the metaphysical and transcendental. Bernd Zimmer, who began his large "Cosmos" cycle in 1998, understands them as part of a whole: "The idea, the tree, we humans and the universe, it all belongs together [...]" (Zimmer as cited in Schleif 2018: 52).

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From the more detailed tree pictures to highly abstracted colour explosions to the sparse branches of current works: Just as the trees change their faces, Bernd Zimmer's artistic universe remains in motion.

Bernd Zimmer (born 1948 in Planegg, lives and works in Polling) is one of the most important representatives of the Neue Wilde. In 1977, together with Rainer Fetting, Helmut Middendorf and Salomé, he founded the Galerie am Moritzplatz in Berlin, which set a new direction in art with its so-called Heftige Malerei (Fierce Painting). Bernd Zimmer has received various awards and scholarships, e.g. from the Karl Schmidt Rottluff Foundation and the Villa Massimo in Rome. He is also the initiator of STOA169 in Polling/Bavaria, a columned hall designed by international artists in the midst of nature. In addition to numerous exhibition activities, his work is represented in significant collections: Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Cambridge; Modern Art Museum, Vancouver; Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris; Berlinische Galerie, Berlin; Buchheim Museum der Phantasie, Bernried; Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen; Kunsthalle Bremen, Bremen; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus as well as Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich and many more.

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