

JANA VOJNÁROVÁ

EXCLUSIVE CONFIDENCE

CURATOR: VIKTOR ČECH

A painted picture can be many things, but it is always above all a scene in which colours, shapes and hints of the material world play out their stories in front of us. Within the confines of the four edges of a traditional rectangular painting, each such element is actually given infinite freedom, even if it is also their prisoner. The same is true of the figures that form the basis of Jana Vojnárová's simultaneously figurative and abstract work. The world of female figures gently playing out their physicality in the intimate spaces of her paintings is at the same time a delicate dance between personal spaces and their revelation to the viewer.

The fabric rustled and the crinoline creaked slightly as its wearer made her way through the crowd. The width of her skirt had already driven the surrounding passers-by to a respectful distance. It was as if she carried with her at least a little of her private space even in the middle of the busiest street. This semi-spherical zone of her intimacy was as poetic in its fairy-tale silhouette as it was pragmatic in its technical design. Like all the other passing vessels of female intimacy heading for their moorings, she was in some ways a birdcage, but in other ways an aura of dignity and a bubble of inaccessible personal zone.

What more could an honest lady on the street ask for, right?

Although the French newspapers have already carried a number of scandalous reports about this fashionable novelty, from fanciful accidents to its use by unscrupulous elements to smuggle commodities hidden under skirts. But what could one also expect of such writers, overwhelmingly men who did not have to fear for their safety and dignity in public, as any lady did. Impractical and artful, sometimes dignified, sometimes grotesque. In its play of opposites, the crinoline was actually the most appropriate possible manifestation of the flamboyant Queen of Fashion.

The Leaves like Women interchange

Exclusive Confidence —

Somewhat of nods and somewhat

Portentous inference.

The Parties in both cases

Enjoining secrecy —

Inviolable compact

To notoriety

These verses were written by the American poet Emily Dickinson, who lived her youth at the exact time of the advent of this fashionable invention. Although over the years she fell more and more into the isolation of her household, she was very sensitive to those social games, defining as much the role of flamboyant crinolines and the transformation of the fashionable silhouette as by similar aspects of a defined female world lying at that time on the border

between the traditional bonds of the past and a sometimes flamboyantly public, sometimes self-contained and intimate expression-seeking, emancipation. The public intimacy of women's dialogue, the spinning of novelties, rumours, gossip and banalities, was always obscured from the extrovert power of patriarchy by an impenetrable wall of veils, fans and skirts. At the same time, both were simultaneously given ostentatious outward appearances, but at the same time, outside of the gendered and self-identified chosen players, they were similarly inaccessible as the masculine world of power, politics and public office for women.

The modern woman of the 19th century, moving freely through the public space even in the broad crinoline much more than in the past, became the perfect embodiment of this tension between the constraints and privileges of the female role in the society of the time. We can see this most clearly in painting at the time, where even in the work of the then pioneering Impressionist women painters we can trace that ambivalent opposition between defining a specific female insight into her own world of familial intimacy and revealing it to a dominant male audience in public exhibitions.

The protected and subtly intimate family universe, the civil and poetically banal physical acts, positions and arrangements of these female painters, seem to be a kind of model for the contemporary analogically intimate and physically and colourfully delicate paintings of Jana Vojnářová. Like them, however, her work is free from the danger of kitsch and banality that naturally threatens here. Her ability to express the so mundane and yet irreplaceable language of the subtle bodily performatives of female privacy is a play on the contemporary possibilities of figurative painting, standing constantly on the border between the linearity defined by physicality and the abstract expression of often almost pastel fragile colours. The pictorial space into which the viewer peers does not reveal everything; on the contrary, it remains a very private and protected place for each of the figures.

The subtlety of the allowed insight is as delicate and warm as the slight lift of the swaying crinoline once was. It is not a coincidence that the archetypally feminine motif of the skirt appears so often in Jana Vojnářová's paintings, and her actresses often evoke similar situations with their fleeting movements and undefined hints. One of the problematic points of modernist painting, which it inherited from its classical models, was precisely the question of the power of the viewer's gaze - usually male - to which the artist exposed his female subjects. However, it is in front of the paintings of Jana Vojnářová that the question of whether the viewer becomes a voyeur, disturbing the intimacy of the depicted, becomes irrelevant. Everything is permeated by a sophisticatedly delicate exchange of hints, mirroring emotions and communicating the unspoken. The subtle play of characters who only seemingly do not communicate with the viewer, expressed in an essentially painterly manner, seems to make both the viewers and the viewed pleased in the end.

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