

FROM THE IDEA TO THE IMAGE

Paul Pretzer

Paul Pretzer interviewed by Esther Niebel, May 2025



Paul Pretzer, Sip, Smoke, Smile, 35 x 50 cm, oil on wood, 2024

Why do you paint? What motivates you? Why painting as a medium?

Because I have always enjoyed the process of painting. Every child paints... and I just never gave it up. Philosophically speaking, everyone wants to be loved. And at some point, I realised that other people liked my paintings. In primary school, I sold drawings to my classmates and used the money to buy sweets. That motivated me to continue. Painting is an exciting medium. It is aesthetic and intellectual at the same time, it is music for the eyes and has no linear temporal dimension.

When you paint, do you think about painting or about God and the world?

Ideally, I don't think about anything at all when I paint. I start an album and after an hour it's finished, and I've just been painting and haven't noticed how time has passed – that's the ideal case. But often I get stuck. I get bogged down in a painterly quagmire and then have to think about the dilemma of being stuck on the painting and how to get out of it. Sometimes it's better

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to stop. Some days seem downright cursed, and you just make everything worse. But I also believe in the redeeming (divine) kiss of the muses, which comes to you from somewhere and saves the painting or the day.

The studio is essentially a lonely place. What does it mean to you to show your paintings to the public once they are finished? What impact does that have?

I paint my pictures for an audience. You paint something and put it up for discussion. At some point, you leave your solitude behind and invite people in. It's important to me to get input and feedback. Peace and quiet is good, but every now and then, an outside perspective can be very enriching.

Your subjects are often still lifes or portraits, which is rather unusual nowadays. Why this classical framework?

Because there are well-established views on these subjects. You can play with these expectations and use them for your own purposes. You can confuse the viewer by delivering something different than expected.



Paul Pretzer, Kreismeister, 18,5 x 23 cm, Öl auf Holz, 2023

You break with the classical form through what you depict. Fish heads serve as flower vases, still lifes with cleaning products are arranged appetisingly, yet they would cause an agonising death if you took a big gulp from the plastic bottle. Your portraits often feature hybrid creatures, somewhere between human, animal and cuddly toy. Loving and malicious, bizarre

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and classic, delicious and yet stinking, your images attract and repel at the same time, only to come together on the level of humour. Metaphors for the ambivalence of life. How do you manage to create this tension in your images? How much intention and how much coincidence is behind it?

It takes constant deliberation to find that state of limbo. That takes a lot of time. One aspect of an idea may be interesting, but it may not be enough; then you need a counterpart, the other piece of the puzzle, which together creates that certain uncertainty. It takes time to arrange the cocktail in the right mixture.

There are objects and people that appear again and again in your pictures. Shells, martini glasses, an androgynous creature with a Prince Valiant hairstyle. Are these your temporary companions? Do you have an emotional relationship with your picture characters? Do you invite them in, or do they just come uninvited?

They impose themselves on me. They want to appear, wander between the pictures, sometimes disappear and then make a comeback. I often have an emotional relationship with the objects. I grew up in the Soviet Union, where oranges were a highly sought-after rarity. To this day, oranges have something exotic about them for me. Shells are also exotic. Symbols of the big wide world or simply references to art history. But some objects also have a very personal connection. The barracudas, for example, I caught, killed and used myself... and then painted.

You repeatedly portray human torsos without heads. Why?



I used to do that more often. They were more like comic figures. I create an extreme situation. This is a means of generating compassion. It's also exciting from a compositional point of view, because you can place the head somewhere else in the picture.

Do you prefer to exhibit alone or with other artists? What added value does each form offer, or what do you find lacking in each?

If I had to choose one, I would opt for a solo exhibition, as it is more complex and compact. However, dialogue with others is always stimulating, and you can create synergies with other positions that would otherwise be unthinkable.

Paul Pretzer, *Summen*, 59 x 59,5 cm, oil on wood, 2024