

Johan September

Maen Florin - Beaufort 2021

Benjamin sits deeply pensive, huddled together. With his knees drawn up, frowning eyebrows and outstretched hands, one noticeably larger than the other, he seems to be waiting deep inside himself. The spectator, too, is waiting. His gaze scans Maen Florin's sculpture, but the latter in turn does not allow him a second look. This brings - as in Maen Florin's other sculptures - a lot of discomfort. As sculptures, her fairy-tale puppets are situated between puppet and human: we find it hard to get a grip on them.

Benjamin's donkey ears, in particular, raise questions. In the last century, children were sometimes adorned with donkey ears after misbehaviour. Is Benjamin sitting on punishment and waiting for redemption? Is he playing the stubborn donkey or is he strong and wise, meek and affectionate like a donkey? In the sight of the boy embodying loneliness for the sake of being different, there is a game of guilt versus innocence that partly explains our unease. This play is often also contained in fairy tales - another hint at the donkey ears. 'Unheimlichkeit' emerged in the old German folk fairy tales: an alienating feeling that we, as human beings, cannot quite pinpoint. But fairy tales are at the same time a welcome distraction. In De Haan's soaparium, for instance, 'fairy nights' were also organised for sick children during which singers or actors performed and made sure the sick children did not feel 'different' for a while.

With her hybrid sculpture, Florin asks us not to shy away from our discomfort towards the Other, but to face it. Doesn't that Other only mirror what we dare not recognise in ourselves? Perhaps Benjamin is mainly waiting for this recognition.

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