

Between Destruction and Renewal: The Human in the Liminal Zone

In “What constitutes humanity?”, Sabine Kühner acts not only as a painter but primarily as a visionary and seismograph. She captures the emotional and psychological weight of crises and wars. They are understood as a rupture in the fabric of civilization. We look at a canvas on which the human condition is negotiated not as a static state, but as a fragile, constant becoming and passing away.

The composition resembles a liminal zone. On the left side, a monumental presence rises. This figure, whose head resembles a blood-red poppy—a universal symbol of sleep, solace, but also remembrance of the fallen—stretches its arm protectively or defensively across the picture plane. The forms here appear unstructured, organic, or almost creaturely, giving them a profoundly biomorphic quality. On the right side, chaos invades in the form of a jagged, dark, and aggressive structure. It is war made visual, destruction colliding with fragile existence.

In the middle of the canvas, a luminous ray of rainbow colors breaks through the scene. This chromatic intensity not only separates the spheres but acts as a catalyst. It marks the point where new utopias and unimagined forms of hope can emerge from devastation and dystopia.

The Entanglement of Life and Death

Particularly touching is the small, pink figure on the bottom right—a fetus or infant lying unprotected amidst the rubble. Here, the central motif of the painting reveals itself: the interplay between destruction and renewal. How do life and death speak to each other here? The visual language is semi-abstract and oscillates between a connection to reality and emotional abstraction. The gestural, sweeping application of paint makes the artist’s emotional upheaval physically tangible.

Conclusion: The Artwork as a Holding Space

Kühner’s work confronts us with a harsh reality. It is intended to both unsettle and comfort the viewer. The chaos of war is not glossed over, yet at the same time, the painting opens up a protective resonance space—a “holding space”—that offers the viewer the opportunity to build emotional connections, reflect on their own memories, and experience healing. The answer to the titular question (“What constitutes humanity?”) lies in precisely this multidimensional superposition: in our ability to preserve the seed of renewal even in the face of the deepest abysses. The work is an emotional and philosophical response to a world in crisis and a meditation on our responsibility to envision its transformation.

Note from the artists: Through our *Pigment to Pixel* transformation we are again crossing the threshold from physical canvas to the digital realm. However, in this project the video created in collaboration with AI does not add new perspectives to the analog source code. Instead it provides a portal through which the viewer can immerse herself even more deeply in this intense work.