

# Dagmar Baumann

## Studio-talk around the painting „untitled, hey love 2014“ and art praxis

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H Th. (Heyer Thurnheer)

**In my perception we nowadays tend to relate to the idea of a flourishing art-industry and successfully conducted exhibition and marketing circumstances, which, in reality, is exclusively true just for very few artists of let's say not more than 5 % of the players in the field of art. The majority of thousands and thousands of artist's reality appears probably to be different. My suggestion according to this situation is to invest in exchange, which means to aim for a discourse as it reveals itself as an apparent part of the artist's practice anyway. The dictate of the time is not to fall behind in that matter but to jump forward in form of initiatives and taking the procedure of art-perception and presentation as far as possible in ones own hands. The Open-Studio@Borgerstraat-Magazine, which we are working on, is such an opportunity.**

D.B. (Dagmar Baumann)

I appreciate this kind of conversation a lot because it offers the possibility of something emerging in the dialogue that otherwise wouldn't have come up. There are often lots of these stories about and during the working process and postulations of attitude that accompany the artistic production.

**H. Th. : For me the reason for this talk is pure interest, I am interested in your painting, in particular that latest big sized work with the gesture of writing and brushstroke, which is printed in this magazine. I would like to take that specifically as a subject of our conversation - in the first place to mention the somehow essential quality and the dynamics in the neighbourhood of the gesture of the handwritten word - could you say something about your forthcoming as a painter?**

D. B. : Actually my development through the years is something I'm becoming more aware of recently. Referring to the postulation of attitude which I'm actually figuring out. One of the constantly apparent points is, that I always wanted to be free of preconceived ideas where my art practice should lead me to, the unwillingness to adapt to this conflict of the artist to produce something relevant on the one hand and the ambition to follow the own intentions and bearings and clarify and exploit those. I tend to the conviction that the individual attempt should be visible and of recognizable quality that prevents the work from being exchangeable or just some other product of popular ideas. For that reason I distrust 'ideas' as a narrative, because they are limited and depend on what you already know or already figured out.

**H. Th. : If I think of this kind of content I get the feeling - why would I exhibit this, everybody knows this anyway. Anyone can think what I can think about the state of the art, politics, conflicts, and social issues....**

D. B. : ...Yes, why would that be a subject of painting? Why would I paint about the horrors of war for example? I am just not interested in doing that. I am interested in my adaption and dealing with all the influences: How to be in the world, how to be part of all this? That is how an image can make sense. It is about the attitude towards the facts and experiences. Attitude is the filter for perception anyway. You don't see what you don't know, you have to build the possibility to perceive from the inside, knowledge, wisdom have to become somehow part of the body first before you can express something authentic about perception and experience with

reality. Whilst my search for a form to express this vision as pure and simple as possible I discovered my own handwriting as a tool. It is this gesture of writing something down to make a mark to remember what I experienced. The image is the adequate to the gesture. This is something different than for example abstract expressionism of the 50s. My gestures are not so much about passion or spontaneity but more about consciousness and presence of mind. It is like a summary, I don't even feel that it is me who is acting in the moment of the gesture. The question in my painting is what is the world and how am I present in it. This is the root of my work. My painting praxis started actually very early when I was working on my finals for the design school in Aachen. I realized then that I was not really interested in Design and I chose to make a painted installation. It was titled "The River" and it was a figuration and a narrative about immersing into the river as a metaphor for immersing into paint. Everything looks really fluid including boats, fishes, etc. etc..

**H. TH. : When was that approximately?**

D. B. : It was 1984 in Aachen, where I studied design in connection with architecture. But I tried to find some essence there already. I wanted to get through to the core of what I needed to do and what is basically true, the good old quest for truth - a bizarre ambition of course and that could be anything at that time, whether it's painting or cooking or speech or cleaning, whatever, the necessity for attitude is in everything. This way of thinking led to a period of performances, which I did for some time exclusively. That brought me to the moment itself as an ingredient of expression, witnessing the action, the quality of the instant. I was giving slightly poetic speeches in which I expected the image to pop up in the mind of the audience. It was a kind of flow of observations I collected and performed in some kind of looping rhythm.

**H. Th. : Was that talking out of the moment or.....**

D. B. : .....No, I had written it down but talked then more or less freely. But with the aesthetics of a speech to give, but as I mentioned carefully composed in advance.

**H. Th. : So, the text as a part of the work was created before the staging. There were two steps - the creation of the text and the performance itself. Working in chronologically separated segments of time is also apparent in your present painterly practice. What about the content? Where were your texts anchoring at that time? In questions concerning the spectator or the origin of the image?**

D. B. : The question focussed on the origination of the image. Where and how does it develop and what do we need it for. Yes, the necessity was an important question as well. Although I do not really know anymore what exactly I meant by that. Later on I then moved to Holland and was really impacted by the Dutch Masters. This incredible capacity of observation! The deeply visual dimension of pure observation of the surface of water, to take an example, touched me and had quite an influence. I loved the attention for the detail and through that the aspect of time seemed to be absent as well in the perception of the painting as in the making. I then wanted to have this tension in my work. The time issue was present as well, but different in performance art. It is a moment in time and space and when it's over it's over. In painting it is different. It is the incorporation of utter attention for the image. It is the extended moment as a kind of expansion of time into the image in contrast to a restricted perception of the moment by speed. And again later, after all that, I wanted to disconnect my work from ideas, but if that leads to an absence of content it occurs to me that there is nothing to relate to any more. It is the topic of between something and nothing... which is always present in my painting and the reflection about it.

**H. Th. : There is this phrase in literature: I realize what I'm thinking by writing. It seems that this statement matches with your painting and your way of thinking. You seem to realize what you are thinking by your work as a painter...**

**D. B. :** ....and by doing so, I want to embrace all the manifestations of painting, such as transparency, brushstrokes, lightness, complexity, which are all part of the development of form.

**H. Th. : In how far is impulse part of your work? And, are there studies in advance involved? Or reflections afterwards? How does your work evolve?**

**D. B. :** Well, actually it's a mingling of preparation in studies and performance-like impulse; of concept and action. To get back to 'untitled - hey love' as an example: underneath the readable surface is another text, which turned out too lyrical. But I didn't want a lyrical text, but a text that has the quality to cause an image in the viewer's perception. And furthermore I choose a big canvas to make the image accessible by suggesting by traces in the background a space behind the surface that can be entered by the viewer...

**H. Th. : ....and that impression of history comes forward, that seems to go further than the time limit of the making of the work?.....**

**D. B. :** .... this impression was obtained by repeating the process of priming after the first layer of the painting was already put down with oil. It shines through the white of the second priming. The image becomes the background and provides the possibility for a new foreground - in this case I captured the spaciousness of the whole format in one single brushstroke, which is not set just for the swing or the bravery but to create a handle for the viewer to enter the image. The gesture is not so much a manifestation of the self but an anticipation of a dialogue with the viewer, whom I am myself as well in the first place.

Everything that is stated is a renewed opportunity to reply and say something else about the matter and according to this preamble I lay one decisive statement over the other. The goal or expectation is that the layers complement each other by the disturbance or juxtaposing they undergo. In that sense aesthetics and content are in a dense connection of presupposing.

**H. Th. : Painting as a dialogic situation? Interesting that it involves a whole cosmic space where gravitational and centrifugal forces take part in the emergence of the image. If you make one of those serpentines, is that a spontaneous impulse? Or how?**

**D. B. :** Most of the movements with the brush that you see are carefully rehearsed in advance. You can see that on all the papers that are lying around or are taped to the wall. When I'm secure with the sequence of motion I conduct the brushstroke, but not in one go, because I have to reload paint in between. But it appears as one continuous serpentine.

**H. Th. : I think it is interesting that it looks so spontaneously but in fact requires precise preparation. Some sort of gained lightness that leans towards content and by doing so includes some concept that opposes the lightness of a spontaneous gesture.**

**D. B. :** To make it look so natural is the toughest part.

**H. Th. : Something Zen-like oscillates in this statement as well as in the images themselves.**

**D. B. :** Maybe the attitude is similar to the martial arts; it requires a physical presence, lifelines and discipline. It is a matter of concentration, generous and precise.

Like I said before, the form-elements to be found in the image are often developed in previous images, I take them with me into the new image, so to say. In that sense my paintings are often a combination of unique structures, spontaneous coincidence in the beginning - it happens that I do something completely irrational - and reuse of already existing form and colour vocabulary. Often I take a lot of time to decide whether a painting is finished or needs change or something more. Sometimes you just know for sure and other times you have to approach and try out in an endless follow up of try-outs.

**H. Th. : How is the ratio between preparing works and the final work on the canvas as it appears in front of the eyes of the public?**

**D. B. :** I would say 90:10.

**H. Th. : I do ask because the enormous essentiality strikes me in your paintings, that origins in the gesture of putting the colour on the canvas and the setting of the form. How do you decide about the texts?**

**D. B. :** To begin with, I have to admit that the question using text is still a bit unsolved. I've been showing the word-images at last years open studio for the first time. I was curious how people would react. What kind of resonance they cause. Often I use fragments out of pop-songs that I listen to while I paint, fragments that strike me in a way. I listen to music while I paint quite a lot.

**H. Th. : That involves a choice already. How does that work?**

**D. B. :** They are pieces of music I like and maybe something occurs, a sentence clutches to the memory. Or I repeat some special passage again and again, as I suppose we all do. The choosing and preferences include subjectivity and biography, sure, but I am not interested in telling those stories in my work, but the own experience is the basis of anything we dedicate ourselves to and that creates a field of knowledge.

**H. Th. : Do you read a lot?**

**D. B. :** Yes. I collect fragments of texts and for example headlines from newspaper-articles. That has a great poetic power. I look upon the texts in my paintings as some kind of headline as well. I do also write own texts but I rarely use them in my work, it's usually a fragment of expressions of others. The text is at the same time a visual word-formation, as reminiscence to the phenomena of the written word as such. The written word is connected with the sign as a trace, alike drawing.

**H. Th. : In my perception originating in drawing and going back to drawing is strongly apparent in this work. That refers to the moment in history when in the genesis of how language developed into text as written word, the sign came forth out of drawing, signification in order to fulfil the need to record, found and communicate knowledge. And colour? How do you decide about colour?**

**D. B. :** Well, do I know this? What I do is to try to prevent a palette of preferable colours. But I developed it anyway through the years and I might reach back to proven recipes, at least in the beginning phase of a painting.

**H. Th. : That leads to a kind of linking between the canvases. It occurs to me as an installation. The paintings are individuals but reach over the edges of the paintings like unmistakably recognizable siblings, which happens especially through the colour.**

**D. B. :** The spectator makes comparisons and that could be an invitation to invest some thinking. I look upon my work as a suggestion for an attitude how to read the image.

**H. Th. : The sizes?**

**D. B. :** Preferably horizontal because that leans itself to support the gesture of writing, but at the same time I do a lot of recycling, use the frames of older paintings for new ones and well, because I want to connect the viewer with the painting physically - they need a certain extended surface.