

LE SALON

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JOURNAL

VISITS

INSERTS

REARVIEW

EVENTS

About

Artists

Audrey Cottin

Vincent Geyskens

Gabriel Kuri

Julien Meert

Sophie Nys

SOPHIE NYS

Studio visit by Devrim Bayar

Devrim Bayar In general, your artistic practice is based on extensive research in history, art history, and philosophy, and it often focuses more particularly on figures of power, be they political (Adolf Hitler), social (the pillory) or intellectual (Martin Heidegger). In this quite rigorous and generally male-dominated conceptual field, you take a new approach, often tinged with humor. Do you think your work can be considered as feminist?

Sophie Nys Maybe – next to many other things, I hope –, although I think it is difficult to define ‘feminist art’ in the first place. Is there such a thing as “women’s art” or “feminist art”? I do think and like to discuss about the place of women in contemporary art (like we know, for example, that today at least 60 per cent of art students are female. Why then is it that over the 27 years of the Turner prize only 4 winners have been women? Same story with architectural students. Why is it, then, that the architectural profession remains dominated by men? If a group exhibition features only men, it passes without comment. If it features only women it is immediately described as “a women’s show”, etc...) but I wouldn’t say that it is the main subject of my work or research – although I think you are absolutely right that there is a consistency of ‘virility’ in my work and that I often don’t mind to erode this base with some elements of humor.

DB Traveling seems to play an important role for you. I am thinking here not only about your trips abroad, such as those in Brazil which inspired a new publication and a film project that you intend to realize in January 2012, but also of the 3000 km you drove around Belgium to photograph all the pillories in our country, and of your film “Voyage autour de la mer Noire”. How do you envision your travels? What part does the unknown play in your expeditions?

SN One of my favorite substantives in relation with making art is the “unfamiliar”. I think the unfamiliar contains an important difference with the “unknown”. This difference might be mainly sensorily but it incloses also a relation with the “unexpected”. This brings me to the neurotransmitter dopamine. There are indications that finding or encountering a new piece of information releases dopamine in our brains. Dopamine causes pleasure and is crucial for the functioning of the brains but it also lays at the base of addictions. I think traveling in an unfamiliar setting



releases a lot of dopamine in my brain (laughs) but it puts me as well in such a focused state that it often leads me to new material to work with. Hereby I think you can indeed state that traveling is a main element in my work process.

DB Under the name “Grotto,” you produce with Richard Venlet publications related to your respective artistic practice. Do you want to expand this publishing project to other artists, by publishing their personal projects, or do you consider that Grotto should remain linked to your own practice only?

SN Because we both regularly use printed matter as an important medium in our work we decided to start working together under a general heading. Most publications presented by Grotto are related to exhibitions we made individually, but discussed or layed-out in close collaboration. We indeed will work together soon with other artists and preferably if the production can be seen as a collaborative process. I don’t want to exclude the possibility, but it seems less interesting if an artist would propose a finalized and ready to print project to Grotto.

DB You told me that you prefer black and white photographs, because the bichromy identifies these images as reproductions and suppresses any claim to illusionism. Recently, however, you’ve been interested in the meaning of colors, mainly primary, which you have started exploring through the medium of painting. What brought you to this late pictorial practice?

SN Some research for a show around the history of law brought me to an engraving by Frans Hogenberg made in 1558 about Flemish proverbs translated into images and text. It appeared that the only existing print in the world is conserved here in Brussels! I got the permission to have a close look at it and understood that the subject of the etching is situated around a blue cloak that a woman hands over to her husband - which apparently indicates that the wife is cheating on her man. I remembered then that Pieter Bruegel the Elder had also painted a collection of twelve proverbs including the one with the blue mantle. The painting is on display in the Mayer Van Den Bergh museum in Antwerp and consists of twelve dinner plates covered with red paint on the upper sides. It's hard to believe that red plates were common at the time of Bruegel – as is claimed in the museum catalog – but intriguing enough to explore a bit on the matter.

DB As a professor at the Sint Lukas School of Visual Arts in Brussels, what are the essential ideas that you try to convey to your students?

SN Maximizing dopamine release!

www.grotto.be



