

Conversation with Eva Bodnar

Patricia Grzonka

1. AIDA CAFÉ, KAISERSTRASSE, VIENNA

Eva: I have been wondering whether there is such a thing as an ideal catalogue text. In art, there are expectations, and there are those who have absolutely precise conceptions about painting, a young man came to me and said, "I like your work well enough, but I think that art should be dark." What should our text be like? Dark? Light?

Patricia: I don't believe that there is such a thing as an ideal text. But there are situations and moments when something good can happen. There is no longer any such thing as an abstract ideal thing.

E: In my catalogue text from 1986, I tried to say about painting only that which one really thinks about while painting. That is, I tried not to be more clever than the work demands. I succeeded only to clutch at mere platitudes, to a fatal degree.

P: find now what do you think?

E: I consider viewing to be important; I observe with interest, and I analyse the work of others. Over the course of time, I have become an observer, alongside the doing, I am interested in collecting and interpretation. fit the same time, I would like to remain fresh and keep a distance. If I were to be asked now what I would like to be when I grow up, I would say a beginner. I would like to be a legitimate beginner.

P: For the moment, I am engaged with the film of German director Lutz Dammbeck which deals with Rainer's repainting, *The Master Game* (Das Meisterspiel).

E: Why is this film so important?

P: Because it's well done. It's good and exciting. It refers less to the artistic event than to the new right-wing movement, which is extremely powerful in Austria. Now that so many voted for Haider in Carinthia, the film is especially overwhelming. It presents the segment of Austrian reality which could be called right-wing modern, or anti-modern.

E: Unfortunately, I am a bit disturbed. In such a film, where there are two evils and no good, I cannot find my bearings.

P: There is only evil in it. That's why the film is so oppressive. E: So we are the good, and they are the evil. P: Yes.

2. STUDIO, KAISERSTRASSE

P: How do you see your earlier works? Do you find them complete, or not?

E: My conception of conclusion is that the pictures remain open, and it is possible to endow them with a new significance retrospectively. *fill* that went before previously circulates in my mind and my senses, and from among these, I investigate before I am able to take a step forward. I am occupied not only with the present. My pictures have to hold up well for 10-20 years. If I cannot bear them after 10 years, then they do not represent good art.

P: Until now, I was not familiar with your earlier works, but I like them. They take a kind of figuralism as their starting point, but they are painted in an abstract way.

E: It does not depend whether the base of departure is figurative or not. The traces, which are left behind from any sort of material, have their own reality. As, for example, the blue painted line which originates from my hand, and which is directed by an idea. The canvas and the frame assist in making something of the whole, which is something like contemplation. They create a playground for rumination. I then try to lean upon a subject that everyone knows, and this subject is the key to the extent to which I think with timeliness, or not.

For me, the question is rather how I use the material of departure. Simply traces, short-winded symbols, not nicely and slowly considered, or assembled - only the first idea is important, as far as I am concerned.

P: It's with the TV drawings. But there, something happens in time. The starting point of these drawings is entirely different than in those pictures which arose when painting came back into fashion, find when there was a great demand for live, "wild" painting with grand gestures. I would not call your paintings explicitly wild, but certainly, basically expressive.

E: My archetypes have their roots in the medium of theatre; the dramatic, theatrical pictures lead to expressive painting. When I arrived to Austria, far ahead of the appearance of the new "savages" (transavantgarde), everything was very open, and thus, everything is possible. In the beginning of the eighties, every painterly act became an adventure. The individual gave

her/himself free reign physically and spiritually. This was joyful and pleasant, and shortly after I was represented by a gallery, and I had some important exhibitions; it seemed that this was the right way. A few years later, however, this painterly movement was exhausted, and I was compelled to find a new ground where my mentality and artistic tempo could be realised. Thus the dense "information-hungry" drawing was created. In this work, then, it must be able to change. Because it is not that my painting is just like me, but that my artistic conception is as my painting can be. If from tomorrow painting would mean the repainting of pumpkins, I would change immediately.

P: This means that your concept of painting is completely eclectic.

E: Let's put it like this: I do not create an autonomous aesthetical system; I do not follow official cultural content, and I would not like to be an artist who behaves with the political conscience of others. The part which interests me is the part that we call painting.

P: find what would that be?

E: A crazy kind of freedom. I observe that at the same time, the deeply insane do exactly the same thing.

P: That's a very childish approach, find meanwhile, entirely different questions are timely in painting, namely on the basis of determined plans and conceptions.

E: It's true that I am a submarine, but I know perfectly well where Alaska lies, and I am not going to accidentally rise to the surface in the Prater.

P: But I also do not believe that much emotion is concealed in your work.

E: It is true that neither my works nor I are *kitsch* romantics, nor naive optimists. We do not radiate hypocritical euphoria. I believe that one thing exists in all of my paintings and drawings: they do not seek to relay any significant message. My early paintings indicated that even a banal object, like a bicycle, should have its rightful place.

P: That implies that you relay banal things with pathetic tools. This gesture in painting is an old notion which must be questioned. It is not by chance that painters always speak of encroachment when they lift their brush, find it is the painters, naturally, who are actually the artists. It is for this reason that painting is the most pathetic medium, in my opinion.

E: Architecture, music, opera, big words... pathos everywhere, at the end of the 1980's, I (attempted to take the sting

out of painting, and I treated, for example, an oil painting as an aquarelle by putting it behind glass, and vice versa. I think it is not possible to paint everything. I always sought a theme that was "worth painting".

P: Then you are always interested in that which is feasible.

E: I paint what is of value to me, and what is resolvable. If the light, form and colour components are in tune, then for example, this yellow refrigerator is also worth painting.

P: Then you do not devise precisely your own way in the vision of things. I found a quote from Jean-Luc Godard, which I think precisely does not suit your works: "Which train should I take? fit which station should I get on? How can one find the activity which allows her/him to play a bit of music rather than always just accompanying the others?" It is exactly this which your work is not about, isn't it?

E: I do not see any contradiction here. My activity is translation, and meanwhile new connections are established.

P: How do you make your TV drawings?

E: I generally stand in front of the TV. I look at the screen, and meanwhile my hand blindly works on its own. The finished sheets of paper fall to the floor. Later I select the useful ones from among the unfinished ones.

P: That sounds like the automatic writing of the Surrealists. You, on the other hand, use the fast TV images, and you restrain them as if they were single shots, find thus you rend them from their contiguity. Many have completely relinquished painting and now do something entirely different. I am interested in how it is possible to preserve painting as a conception.

E: Many people show an interest in pointing and they believe in it. Pointing is a language for which there is an enormous library at its disposal, and it insures a high level of comprehension. Misunderstandings are minor.

P: You have also made

videos. E: find other

things, too.

3. UPHRTMENT, WBHRINGER GÜRTEL

P: I think that in fact, it is very difficult to say something against your pictures because they offer so many possibilities. They are open to everything. If someone does not like one or more of these 99 small-scale pictures, it is nevertheless

certain that s/he will find one or more with which s/he can be on friendly terms, find from this point of view it is true that you allow a lot of space. One might say an offer to the viewer. The fact that you do not restrict yourself enough could perhaps be considered as problematic.

E: For many it comes with difficulty to accept the most diverse ideas within an artwork; nevertheless, from my position, each has its own validity, but I just paint them until I am able to understand them.

P: Could you express this a bit more clearly? What does it mean, until you are able to understand the pictures?

E: I realised that I can do things that I cannot even understand. With superimposition, collages or by the means of other motifs, sometimes an excess of connections is established, but then I give up.

P: That means that you are able to say exactly what each picture is.

E: Yes.

P: The small pictures, which you arranged in a great quantity, correspond approximately to the dimensions of a face, H4. For me, this wall with 99 pictures rouses a completely merry impression.

E: I think the pictures possess a much greater power than we would think - so much so as warning signs. I try to restrain the impact of my pictures, find in any case I oppose the notion that art must be a battle and that there should be nothing light in it. I feel that lightness is extremely important. I have come to realise that trained eyes, professionals, like my pictures better than the uninitiated. Precisely due to the lack of artifice and the absence of a message.

P: But then you adapt consciously to technical maladroitness. In light of this, your pictures are rather consciously dilettante.

E: The immediate reaction is the essence, as well as how I can quickly accomplish it. Painterly economy is what is important.

P: That might imply that you do not like to meditate for too long on one thing.

E: Yes, it's possible that my thoughts are short-winded. On the other hand, I am continuously selecting.

P: Now you are acting as if you would have nothing to do with your works, ffs if they were products of your unconscious.

E: No, not unconscious, but they derive from my visible environment: the TV series, photographs, bookbindings, letters, etc.

P: It is inconceivable for me that you are merely a medium of the external world. I do not believe it. Certainly you have a direction, a conception, of what you ensue.

E: Painting and reality are two different things, because the translation does not function perfectly. Those sparkling stickers that are sold for children, for example, for them to indicate their surroundings. I make pictures from these stickers, and I investigate the effects of this Libro-world (Austrian chain of bookstores). That is, I experiment on myself to see what will happen, if in this way...

P: find what happens?

E: In fact, I play the role of the laboratory rabbit.

P: find what is the situation with the cats?

E: These three originate with Warhol, while this one is a children's game. But I myself would never have been able to "contrive" such a sharp-whiskered cat - that would hurt me.

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B

Bodnár Éva
Cím nélküli/Untitled 1997-98
lakk, vásion / varnish, canvas