

Kasia Lorenc in conversation with Lisa Klinger

Studio Lisa Klinger, Düsseldorf, September 2018

KL: *I'll begin with a very general question: how would you describe your works and working methods?*

LK: It's easy to see that my main medium is drawing. I started out with painting, but I realised after some time that the less I do with the works, the more I reduce the content, the stronger and more intense the work becomes. That also included the reduction from painting, which is colour, to drawing, which is greyscale. The finding of form and ideas mostly springs from bodies. From corporeal forms which are also so strongly reduced that only the essential forms remain. The remainder exists without a spirit, without a function, without anything keeping it alive. And yet it looks alive.

KL: *You were born in Offenbach am Main in 1988 and studied painting there at the Hochschule für Gestaltung. Since 2013 you have been here at the art academy in Düsseldorf. Why the decision to switch?*

LK: I visited several open days at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf and had a very good feeling about the place right from the beginning. The thing about the HfG Offenbach is that there is a clear and very strong emphasis on design and media. There is of course a faculty of visual art as well, but the external network is not as strong as it is for graphic- and media-designers. As my focus back then was on painting, I eventually decided to switch to an academy.

KL: *You study now with John Morgan, who interestingly leads the class for Entwurf (design), typography and book art...*

LK: One might think that I've returned to what I wanted to escape from. John is himself a typographer and book designer, but because he works intensively on projects with a variety of artists and curators he is extremely knowledgeable about art in general. For me he is a good mentor in many ways and I find it very easy to talk with him about my works. Perhaps one can see the graphic element of drawing as a link here. But I understand my work as being far away from graphic design or illustration. The other students of the class also work in very different media like sculpture and performance. It was important to me to end up in a class where many different approaches come together. Although I have strictly confined myself to pictorial media in my work, I must admit that sculpture has always had a strong influence on me. Many of my approaches begin with physicality, and so three-dimensional works are very interesting for me.

KL: *At the beginning of our conversation you spoke of reduction. Are there other conceptual, cerebral processes that play a role in the development of your work?*

LK: What has become ever more important to me is the exploration and sounding out of the medium that I work with, drawing. This year I have developed some works that are about breaking the clichés and limitations of drawing in different ways. Lead and graphite pencils are the instruments for drawing per se; the use of graphite in this form is however rather limited. That's why I tried to return the medium to its original structures and to work further with that. In one case (in the series *Subliminal*

*messages*, 2017), I used pure graphite powder that I dissolved in acrylic emulsion and thus produced a kind of acrylic paint. The conceptual work *Drawing of a mountain* (2018) is composed of a drawing (graphite on paper) and an installation (graphite in space): so the same material but on different supports and therefore either flat or three-dimensional. Both depictions show the schematisation of a mountain. But is it still drawing if one uses graphite, which from an artistic point of view is strictly limited to drawing, in a three-dimensional way, or does it become sculpture or a hybrid of both? I try to give this material, that's so strongly associated with drawing, another existence and to observe at which point the line between drawing and space dissolves.

*KL:* *Your works play with short- and long-range order. Some forms repeat, some relate only to the next or perhaps the next one after. A clear attribution of the depicted – whether human, animal or object – is almost impossible. Where does this fascination come from?*

*LK:* I am fascinated by things that are not easy to categorize. I like grey, I don't like black and white, I don't like to categorize. Intermediate states, such as the uncanny valley moment, are much more exciting. I like to convey this state in my pictures. The viewer should have the feeling of having something familiar in front of them and nevertheless not know exactly what it is.

*KL:* *And the repetition? Sometimes one has the feeling that one has already seen a particular shape, perhaps in another constellation. How to disappear (2018) for example is a drawing copied seven times.*

*LK:* That's right. And then this copy is copied again and the copy of it is again copied, and the more one copies, the less remains visible at the end.

*KL:* *How did this come about? I'm asking questions in this direction because I have the feeling that many artists feel the pressure to create something new. I like very much that you say you have particular motifs that you repeat and you are not afraid to do that.*

*LK:* Yes. It maybe sounds a little spiritual, but many of the motifs "just pour out of me". Much comes from certain fears or worries about isolation and loneliness and personal experiences with illness and physical limitation. Perhaps repetition itself is one of my fears, I don't know. The repetition of certain forms definitely results from a fascination with the body, organic forms simply recur.

*KL:* *Would you say that your works are an almost utopian search for the perfect form?*

*LK:* Yes, in a way. During one's career as an artist one pursues the perfect product, about which one can say: this is my masterpiece. At times I already had the feeling of being at a very good point but not yet 100% satisfied. Maybe that is a good explanation for the repetition: I think that I have to perfect certain forms, make them even better, work on them even more, so that they correspond to what I envision. And I don't even know yet what exactly that is.

*KL:* *The basis of your drawing is always oval, with or without an axis of symmetry. A rotund form, hardly any edges. How much geometry goes into your works? Do you think geometrically as they develop?*

*LK:* Partly yes, partly no. Again much of it has to do with the body, which isn't perfectly geometrical but structured geometrically in principle. I am simply very fascinated by bodies and medicine. Also by

what happens to a body when suddenly something grows out of it, something that doesn't belong there and that cancels out the geometry. A round form always has something more fleshy or corporeal about it than an angular form, which seems very mechanical and constructed.

*KL: The forms are characterized by a stillness, a certain contemplative weightlessness. They are elegant as well, they don't cry out for attention. At the same time they're also incredibly precise.*

*LK: They reflect me as a person. I myself am a very calm, reserved person, who at first sight doesn't give much away. You have to spend time with me to understand what kind of person I am and how I think. It's like that with my drawings. Because they mostly show things that are on their own in an undefined space, that have something free and weightless, but also isolated about them. Experiences of loneliness and isolation have shaped me very much as an individual. I am convinced that such life events are directly converted into art. Art is in the end nothing else than the direct translation of ideas and experience into material. So it's inevitable that my works are how they are, are how I am. How much personality and autobiography you are allowed to show in your art has become very contentious among young artists. I am convinced that it is impossible to completely separate artist from artwork because it's a fluent transition from the emergence of the idea in the brain to a material object.*

*KL: You also experiment with the closed form of the book. The book series The search for shapes (2018–) is an exploration of form. Is that a work or are they sketches? How did it come about?*

*LK: They are small clippings from magazines, which I drew over and of which I have left only abstracted forms. Once again the idea of a reduction of the body plays a role. They began as sketchbooks, but I quickly realised how fanatical I was becoming in finding these forms. I sat at it for several days on end. Altogether there are about 125 drawings that I have gathered in these books. I see the books now as a stand-alone work, which nevertheless is not yet finished. I want to continue working with the found forms and create drawings and other works out of them. There are already works that were inspired by them.*

*KL: What is the number of copies?*

*LK: It's just the four different sketchbooks, self-published so to speak, in which the drawn-on magazine cuttings are glued. There won't be any printed duplicates for now because the work would lose its effect. The problem with graphite is that it loses its shine and depth when printed, so I think that it would not be worth doing. I have scanned and duplicated all the parts for my website simply for reasons of documentation. But in my opinion the particular appeal of the work lies in the interplay of the shimmer of the graphite with the matt surface of the newspaper and form depicted on it. For that I would have to find a process with which I could print graphite on paper.*

*KL: Your smallest works are restricted to the size of a one-cent piece, the largest are called Totems (2017) and measure 230 x 196 cm. When thinking about the dimensions of your artworks: when do you get the idea of how large they are going to be?*

*LK: Everything begins with my sketchbooks. Most of the time I have a shape in mind or see a shape that I quickly sketch, and then I decide if and how I will continue working on it. This happens very intuitively. I decide which size I regard as appropriate when looking at the form. Sometimes it also depends on the statement I want to make with the piece, as with *Long Distance Relationship* (2018),*

that shows the same object in two drawings but from two different perspectives and in different sizes. Such play with dimensions is of course intentional. I showed *Totems* last year in the hallway during the open days at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. They were hanging right and left of a door to welcome the visitors like gatekeepers into a “holy hall of art”. The decision was quickly made that they had to be larger than life and oversized in order to give the impression of guards.

*KL: When do you draw?*

*LK: I usually work during the day, simply because I am tired at night. If I could I’d probably be drawing around the clock. When I have a day off and sit down to start drawing, it can last several hours. Once I have started I enjoy finishing it in one go. That isn’t possible with all the works, especially with the large pieces one needs more than a day. I like working on them and working on them for a long time. But I can say: whenever I have the time, I draw.*

*KL: Inspirations from other cultures, especially Japan, and the adoration of animals play a huge role in your work. Are there other sources of inspiration?*

*LK: Japan is very inspirational to me. I am fascinated by its cultural adoration of simplicity. The appreciation for the smallest things, which we in the West often take for granted. Japanese culture has great respect for the beauty of life and things per se. For the beauty of the body, the beauty of light. Reduction and precision too are always present in traditional Japanese art. Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s essay “In Praise of Shadows” explained a lot of it to me: Japanese aesthetics is strongly based on natural light and the play of shadows that is especially significant in architecture. Light and dark contrasts, as I use them in my work. This had a huge influence on me. In contemporary Japanese art and pop culture on the other hand it’s the bizarre, the undecipherable that inspires me. Similar to mythology with its many anthropomorphic creatures. These are all things that have always fascinated me and ultimately become part of what I do, yet in a much clearer and less fantastical form. But essentially I am interested in everything that is corporeal, also things that represent bodies or prosthesis, for example, which copy body parts and simulate their function. Medicine, medical technology, plastic surgery – all great inspirations for me. I love illustrations from old medical books. Then I might as well say natural sciences, biology, microbiology. Bacteria also possess a body but one so small and oddly shaped that it’s almost beyond our imagination. And again the question: Where does body begin, which form constitutes a living being?*

*KL: Your works are for me like small talismans, lucky charms, imaginary beings, surreal creatures... objects that one has discovered accidentally, partly mundane, partly banal.*

*LK: I always try to stay within this aforementioned intermediate state. Talisman is a beautiful word, I like it very much. I can immediately see my drawings in it. Indigenous people utilised animal body parts as talismans, rabbit feet for example. One can definitely see that in my works. The love for everyday things might be banal, but to see beauty in everyday life is important. That is also the beauty of art, it brings a lot of banalities into focus and something unexpectedly beautiful emerges from it.*

*Lisa Klinger* (born 1988 in Offenbach, Germany, lives and works in Düsseldorf) studied painting at Hochschule für Gestaltung Offenbach from 2008 to 2013 and is since enrolled for the Fine Art program at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, currently studying in the class of John Morgan. Exhibitions include Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf, BBK-Kunstforum Düsseldorf, Honda Gallery, Cologne, Lager3, Düsseldorf, Ölhalle, Offenbach and Fotografie Forum, Frankfurt. From 2010 to 2013, Lisa Klinger was a stipend of the Johannes-Mosbach-Foundation; in 2018 she was nominated for the Kunstpreis der NRW-Bank Münster.

<http://lisa-klinger.com/>

*Kasia Lorenc* (born 1984 in Renska Wies, Poland, lives and works in Essen and Düsseldorf) is a literary scholar and culture manager. Until recently she was the manager of Gregor Podnar Gallery in Berlin and currently works for the upcoming gallery Engelage & Lieder in Düsseldorf. As a freelancer she advises and consults artists for various projects. She co-founded the curatorial collective *Curated Affairs* which will take up its work in 2019.

<http://curated-affairs.de/>

*\_\_in conversation with\_\_* is a new exhibition format aiming at bringing people together through conversation and subsequent collaboration. Artists are invited to engage in dialogue with curators, authors, other artists, art historians, journalists or scientists and to develop an exhibition from it. The conversations are documented in writing, serving as text material accompanying the exhibition. They enable visitors to develop a deeper understanding of the artists' methods and of the artworks. *\_\_in conversation with\_\_* is based on the premise that it is the artists themselves who can best provide information about their works, their methods, their ideas and inspirations. One simply needs to ask.

*\_\_in conversation with\_\_* was initiated in early 2018 by Katharina Wendler in Berlin and is guest of various (project) spaces.

## *Exhibition*

Lisa Klinger

Pieces of

November 22–25, 2018

Opening: Thursday, November 22, 2018, 6–10 pm

Haus 1, Waterloo-Ufer, 10961 Berlin

<http://haus1-berlin.de/>