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"Artist Interview – Lighting Darkness: A Conversation with Daniela Schleuter"

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LIGHTING DARKNESS

A CONVERSATION WITH ARTIST
DANIELA SCHLÜTER

INTERVIEW BY ANDRIKO LOZOWY
AND ELENA SIEMENS

The War in Bosnia and Herzegovina took place between March 1992 and December 1995. At the time Daniela Schlüter was a teenager struck in a deeply visceral way by the conflict and the un-deniable suffering taking place. She had already been introduced to fine arts and painting—but her humanitarian actions during the War gave her pause to meditate on the effectiveness of art as a medium for change. Since 2003 Daniela has been awarded on numerous occasions for her prints, mixed media on paper, video and book works. Daniela's

work invites the viewer to immerse themselves in a fragmentary dialogue between artist and viewer—mediated by the mixed media and paper assemblages. There is a timelessness in Daniela's work as she creates balance between disparate ages, in particular in the series shown in this issue. Symbols, like trees, ladders and chromosomes collude to produce a chorus unhinged from space and time. In early 2013 Elena Siemens and Andriko Lozowy met with Daniela to discuss her work in the context of this special issue—*Scandals of Horror*.



Q: When looking at your work, for instance *Cassandra's promise*, which hangs at nearly six feet (182cm) by four feet (121cm)—it is easy to get lost in a kind of meditative state where the eye dwells on certain elements, pauses and moves on.

A: This is deliberate, your experience as a viewer is an extension of my work as the artist. For me there is no methodological starting point, no beginning or an end in the journey that one may take. When I am working to create a piece my efforts are directed all over the plain of art—as a kind of nomadic process. Foreground and background are discarded as rules and instead my effort is concentrated on generating dialogue between elements across the plain of art.

Q: Given the notion of a plain of art, where does the motivation, the inspiration to place elements into dialogue come from?

A: Intuition follows meticulous research involving broad and deep reading of all manner of text, classic's, myths and legends. Reading is followed by writing, reflection and rumination upon the ideas conveyed. The impetus to mark the canvas or other medium comes from direct contact with content through research. This direct contact is my articulation of the liveliness – as though through a kind of fermentation process – the ingredients must be added first, the research, then the reflective writing – then the bubbles emerge as the gasses are released and before long – the nomadic plodding upon the canvas as a general form can begin. Each element of



the work I create has a specific meaning – the ordering – the composition emerges from the reflection. Mirrors are the most obvious point of reflection, but windows as well—they prefigure the looking. In some cases the figures in the painting emerge as passages, as ways of being looked upon as the viewer.

Q: As an artist eschewing the classic tradition of foreground and background in hopes of offering the viewer, the wider socius, something other—why painting?

A: My question in response is how much can we express through (oral/written) language? For some time now I have been guided by the French *malaise* and in German *Unbehagen* to refer to *unease, discomfort* – as a means to remind myself that there is a world of the *un-said*. In this regard I am looking

to disrupt the silence of written text and take notice of that which resides, permeates and intersects between the lines. *Malaise* can also be thought of as unknowing, in other words, the dark side of unease. On the other hand, knowing means safety—whereas, not knowing may mean something more mysterious and darker. For me, music and visual art attend to the registers beyond written or spoken text.

Q: Observing your work there seems to be a tendency towards darkness, bold color, a refined palate and an overall aura of intrigue.

A: In terms of darkness, in this collection for instance I had the good fortune to work with the University of Toronto scientist Paul Cassar, who is focused on stem cells. I became keenly interested in chromosomes as contemporary symbols for humanity. Chromosomes represent



genetic code, origination of humanity. Peering through a microscope can offer views into a level of knowing our own being that was previously unimaginable. At once there is a tremendous power to this magnified looking, into, upon and with ones own self. Scientific advancement has given us the tools to look deeply at ourselves as individuals and as a species—our field of vision has grown beyond holding merely the manifestly material representations of vitality and life, such as a tree, or a fish, as symbols for life. Visually, chromosomes have come to appear in my own work and their symbolic nature is represented alongside the tree, the fish and others as a means of aligning and juxtaposing

symbols of significance for humans.

Modern science has revealed representations through magnification. For instance—blood is translated into code on paper. Even with an entire code, a chromosome written, as a line-by-line expression of an individual, revealing the genetic code—I am struck by what it misses, or cannot explain about an entire being. The *what is missing*, is the *between the lines*.

In order to amplify my potential at self-explication I have maintained that I must work with my own chromosomes rather than another persons. By working on my own self, a magnified and coded version,

① Photo Photos
② Waffle
③ POND
④ ARTIFICIAL 1, 2, 3, 4
⑤ PUNKY



So viel ist die...
die...
die...
die...



SMA
SOMERONE
SMA
SMA

Photos
Photos



THE...
THE...

I sense there is resonance—there is a set of symbols that at once connect and disconnect, and I can access the vital power by engaging in a dialogues with a stratified-and magnified representation of self.

Q: In the biography you have provided for us here we have learned that you spent your childhood on a farm in Sudlohn, Germany. What events and encounters in your formative years have contributed to the development of your own humanistic perspective?

A: When I was 17 a group of friends and I founded a humanitarian-aid organization. It was 1992 three weeks before Christmas when we began. Almost immediately people overwhelmed us with their generosity—two 40-tonne containers of food, medicine, blankets and clothes were collected. As dangerous as it was, a group of young men drove the relief items to Slovenia and by the time they came back—between Christmas and new years the accounts and the containers were full again, so we just couldn't stop. For two years we would go down to the refugee camp. Once the border to Bosnia, a patchwork zone patrolled by young men with guns opened, we were able to get the relief to more people. Because we had led the humanitarian aid effort organizations like Amnesty and others would send more and more goods with us. For two years the cycle of collecting donations

I developed over the years after the war I found that a return to art came to represent a true offering. My humanist perspective nurtured by my experiences has propelled me to work towards manifesting creative works that aim to dislodge the primacy of text and enfold the viewer into an ongoing dialogue where attention and focus is paid to a creative meaning making effort where subjectivity is cultivated as a shared, meaning all of us, experience.

For me, hope is the ability to experience the darkness of humanity and respond through art.

Dr. Andriko Lozowy, is a photographer-researcher based in Canada. Andriko is interested in living in relation to oil, collaborative research, visual methods and post-disciplinary practices.

Dr Andriko Lozowy est un chercheur et photographe basé au Canada. Ils s'intéresse aux mode de vie liés au pétrole, à la recherche collaborative, aux méthodes d'investigation visuelles, et aux sphères post-disciplinaires.

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