

re-inventions

Margaret Hunter
Sculptures, Paintings and Drawings

aquabitArt, Auguststrasse 35, 10119 Berlin

1- 22 November 2014

Interview with Margaret Hunter
Moderator: Irina Ilieva, aquabitArt gallery



Photo: Ishka Michocka



Photo: Gerhard Neumann

II The name of this exhibition is "re-inventions", Margaret's second solo exhibition in this gallery. The first one took place in 2011 and was called "re-STATEMENT".

Why is this one so called? What was reinvented this time?

MH The idea began because I wanted to do something new for this exhibition. When I was staying in Mallorca I attended a workshop, which was an introduction to the technique of Raku ceramic. This technique was new to me and I have decided to continue working with it. Using Raku I wanted to transform important motifs that I have used in previous works.

II Margaret, in the past you have worked a lot with wood. What for you are the differences between working with wood and ceramic? What are the similarities?

MH Yes, I have been working with wood since 1990. At that time I sculpted from huge blocks of wood with a chainsaw, rather rough work. For me, line has always been very important. It is the connection between my charcoal drawings and the scratched marks that I sometimes make into the thick paint of my pictures. On the surface of my wood figures I often emphasized the lines and marks made with the chainsaw.

Many of these wooden sculptures were human size and it was very physical work. Thereby I had to cut away much of the wood sometimes from beautiful oak or chestnut.

In contrast, the ceramic has to do with building up, which was very innovative for me. In the Raku process I also discovered another way to deal with line. In Raku, random small cracks (crackle) occur on the surface during firing. Before firing I could deliberately scratch into the surface of the clay, resulting in a different deeper line. The similarity between wood and Raku lies for me in the unpredictability. Wood is a living material and cracks often appear after my work is finished. In Raku the result during the whole process is unpredictable.

II What was it about Raku technique that so fascinated you?

MH Raku originated in the 17th century in Japan and was taken up later in the West. The most important thing for me in Raku is the crackle effect, but also the whole process itself. There is earth (clay) involved, fire and water. The objects are fired in the kiln and then placed, red hot, into combustible material (eg wood chips). You never know what will result: the object may crack or break, the colour is uncontrollable, anything can happen. When I was able to make my own series of small works with a master of ceramic in Mallorca, I was very excited and apprehensive. On the evening before they were fired in the kiln, he sent me an email: "Margaret, do not forget, they are all our daughters". Therefore I was shocked and asked myself, what do I do if not one of them is successful? It's like alchemy, like painting with eyes closed.

II: Since we are now talking about your "daughters", when we take a look at the titles of the Raku sculptures we discover some of them sound very specific: Montuiri, Santanyi, Andratx, Muro, Tramuntana, Cabrera, Deia. Where did this inspiration come from?

MH Yes, they come from Mallorca, of course (laughs), these are the names of cities and towns there.



Andratx

2014 / 29 x 30 x 13 / crackle glaze, silver glaze

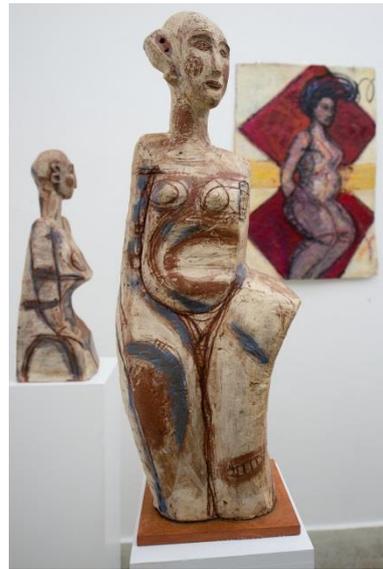
II In your work there are often certain elements that appear over and over again. There are not only the lines shown on drawings, the Raku work and previous clay and wood work, but also such elements as, for example, one protruding ear (here in the "Glindow" figures) or the hair coils, as in *Andratx*. Has there been a particular model?

MH: Yes, that was Ceara, an art student in Edinburgh, but she has two ears (she laughs). She studied yoga, had a presence and radiated a lot of energy. Ceara wore her hair tied up in two coils. Anyway, the spiral for me was always an important symbol, and it finds new meaning in paintings or sculptures. This is "re-invention" per se. I use geometric shapes in my repertoire, and the meaning is often changing. For example, the triangle becomes a funnel or an arrow, the spiral becomes a ball.



Network

2012 / 93 x 32 x 31 / wood and copper
Photo: Gerhard Neumann



Glindow Frau

2003 / 80 x 32 x 23 / ceramic
Photo: Gerhard Neumann

II For example, in the sculpture "Network" from 2012, what does the funnel symbolise?

MH: In this case I was thinking of the "Nürnberger Funnel" (the Nürnberger Trichter). This is the amusing idea that students could be taught by having knowledge instilled by mechanical means.

II I'm shortly coming to the two sculptures made from bricks, I speak about *Glindow Figure*, and *Glindow Frau*. Where does the name "Glindow" come from?

MH Glindow is a place near Berlin, where there is a historical brick museum. I took part in a workshop there and also learned a lot from experienced ceramists. We were given raw, unfired bricks. Here I used a special building up technique.



Heads Together

2014 / 102 x 68 / acrylic on handmade paper
Photo: Margaret Hunter



Still Moving II

2014 / 102 x 68 / acrylic on handmade paper
Photo: Margaret Hunter

II Included among the more recent works that have been prepared specifically for this exhibition are the paintings *Heads Together* and *Still Moving II*. They have a special aura, very strong colours and a specific vividness. How did this come about? What inspired you?

MH I was very surprised that these two images have much stronger colours, than for example the three paintings on the right (*Whiling Time*, *Nerja* and *Whereabouts*), from 2008. At that time I thought they were very intense.

I would say that it has very much to do with the particular texture of the thick, almost cardboard-like, handmade paper, which I used as a new base. I often paint one layer over another. This particular texture enables one to see through the various colours. It gives a depth to the surface, which is very lively and expressive. In this case, the "re-invention" was to interpret my favourite composition using new materials and technique. In the beginning I wanted to paint something completely different (she laughs).



Algaida

2014 / 35 x 15 x 13 / raku: crackle glaze, silver glaze
Photo: Margaret Hunter

II The theme of two heads or faces has engaged you long before this exhibition. In some works the two heads are replaced by masks (*Algaida*) or present a face and a mask.

MH In the past the masks were to do with inside and outside. Here (*Algaida*) the two heads are mask-like; this comes perhaps from the surface of the material, the smooth glaze. In *Heads Together* the faces themselves have a presence; they are more personal and human.



re:STATEMENT / aquabitArt Gallery 2011
Peer Kugler



Joint Venture, 2014 / East Side Gallery
Gerhard Neumann

II Looking back, we find the same subject in this picture of *Joint Venture* on the former Berlin Wall at the East Side Gallery. Also in the gallery version of the painting that we presented in the last exhibition called *re:STATEMENT*.

I mention the original image, which Margaret was invited to paint on the Wall in 1990 because of current events, that is the present 25 Year anniversary of the Fall of the Wall. These days there are numerous guided tours along the East Side Gallery.

Margaret, what meaning did you give to the two heads at that time?

MH: The wall surface and the format determined the technique and composition of the image. I therefore painted two large heads lying on their side. At that moment I thought immediately of the English expression "Strange Bedfellows" which suggests two former opponents, coming suddenly very closely together. This is how I viewed the two parts of Germany, East and West in this moment, but ideally they are connected by flowing lines, which suggest "exchange".

That was the time when everyone spoke of "joint venture", but already there was also some dissatisfaction. Therefore, on the left and right of the two heads I painted the "reality" as I saw it and depicted small, individual figures. They particularly represent the people of the former GDR, who had to bend and stretch themselves to adapt to a totally new system.

It was a euphoric, dramatic time. Unbelievable that I could paint on this historic wall remembering that only months earlier a boy had died trying to come to the West. I never thought that the painting would survive and believed that the Wall would soon be dismantled.

Today, this longest remaining part of the Wall is protected as a listed memorial. But we will see how long it lasts. Recently some of the remaining parts were demolished because they hinder a new building development behind it. The artworks are often painted over with new

graffiti though I sometimes find that interesting. Several times over the years I cleaned off the graffiti, but once I noticed an interesting addition, which fitted my concept very well. I decided to incorporate it into the huge 1:1 gallery version painting repeated from my Wall mural, which was the centerpiece of the exhibition *re-STATEMENT*.

In the first presentation of the painting in Potsdam I invited visitors to inscribe their comments on it, like the graffiti on the Wall, a continuing dialogue. First, people were self-conscious and no one wanted to do it! But I stood by and encouraged them. This was indeed a re-invention!

II Thanks for the interview, Margaret.

An article is published today in the HERALD SCOTLAND, about the events of that time with a picture displayed of Margaret painting at the Wall; reference was also made to our exhibition: <http://www.heraldscotland.com/arts-ents/visual/berlin-based-artists-inspired-by-citys-off-the-wall-energy>.

The exhibition runs until 22 November 2014.

Photos: Ishka Michocka, Gerhard Neumann, Margaret Hunter