



MY STORIES IN FELT

- MIEKE WERNERS

DURING MY STUDIES AT THE RIETVELD ACADEMY IN AMSTERDAM (FINAL EXAM 1966), I HAD TWO IMPORTANT TEACHERS; I STILL FEEL THEIR INFLUENCE IN THE MAKING OF MY TEXTILE WORKS. FROM GRETHE NETER-KÄHLER (BAUHAUS STUDENT FROM 1928 TO 1932), I INHERITED THE PLEASURE OF EXPERIMENTING. FROM THE PAINTER MELLE JOHANNES OLDEBOERRIGTER (1908-1976) I LEARNED THE LOVE OF DETAIL. THESE TEACHERS WERE AN INSPIRATION TO ME.

TECHNIQUE

My work can be divided into two different stages: the period before and the time after I discovered felt. From the start, my first sculptures were made of textile, mostly sewn, either covering a construction or hanging free. The scale of my work was getting bigger, and I started experimenting with all kinds of hardeners. At the end of 1998, I discovered FELTING. Now I no longer needed textile hardeners, and the soft and tactile properties of the material were preserved. Textile is soft; it has to do with the skin and I think you should feel its softness.

I learned the technique of felting from a simple booklet, and later, I followed courses with various artists. From 2001, the possibilities became more diverse when I discovered dry felting. With the felting needle, I work spatially, and with the punch machine (embellisher), I mix all kinds of transparent fabrics with wool.

I use both techniques interchangeably. For me, it is both painting and modelling at the same time. I feel like an adventurer, and will always experiment with the materials.

DECAY

Textiles offer many possibilities: the processed fibres together create a texture that represents what I want to express with my images. It gives me the opportunity to remain an explorer.

Through the application of fraying, cracks and holes, my work has the appearance of transience, of decay. My pieces often seem damaged. Decay is part of life, and it's one of my sources of inspiration.

PROJECTS

I like to work in projects because this method allows you to develop a subject further. On my website, all projects are listed, and there

is some more information about other work. At the beginning of 2000, I started making fish. For some time, I was looking for a technique to make my work as open as possible. 'Perishable' is the key word. Holes had to be made; my fish had to look 'damaged'. This work could be seen all over the Netherlands in various installations. (Image 1 De dagen duren) DAYS ON END (from 2000).

In my experiments, I saw that I could make beautiful skins with felt. With the punch machine, I can mix large (printed) rags with wool. During a visit to the Museum of Bags in Amsterdam, I saw crocodile and lizard skin bags. Inspired, I started making 'animal' skins, and used them to make bags and scarves. I also made sculptures as if they were skins. Starting off with small works, I began to make a large-scale installation which became a fox and a life-sized cow. The heads and legs of the animals were made with the felting needle, but rather than using prepared skins, my



animals are made of wool. After the death of my parents, I realised that I had never seen them naked until they were old and in need of more care. This became my project, "Of Old People.....". In this work, I want to show the beauty of old age. The beauty of lines in a face and the traces that time has left behind. This project consists of different works: portraits; panels depicting naked, old people; a spatial work (GRANNY) and a video on YouTube. (Image 2 Detail EERBETOON).

A newspaper covering a protest by artists also published a war picture of a child. This became the reason for my project, "SCREAM". This is my scream, because of everything that is done to children. (Image 3 Schreeuw) SCREAM (from 2014).

I worked on this project for four years, and came up with the name "A Girl Always", for a woman over 50 years old, sparkling and vibrant, where one recognises the girl in the old woman. I created 4 portraits for "A Girl Always", and then went in search of the women whom I had portrayed from my imagination. For this purpose, I handed out postcards asking women to participate in my project. They might win one of these portraits!

(Image 4 Meisjeblijffe) A GIRL ALWAYS (from

2014)

In 2016 I started my "PRAISE" project, because I wanted to pay homage to the hand. Hands are the creators of beautiful work. As a visual artist, I noticed that handicraft is considered to be old-fashioned. It seemed as if I was not taken as a serious artist, but recent years, I have noticed that this is fortunately changing in the art world. There is currently a lot of work by textile artists on display in galleries and museums. I made about 30 hands out of felt, and these can be seen in various installations. (Image 5 KEEP DISTANCE).

This is the project I'm working on right now. The work can be viewed from both the front and the back, each showing a different image. I will make two installations: one of fish, and the other of trees.

EXHIBITIONS

Each year, I try to have at least two exhibitions, for which I always create fresh work. It is the best occasion for trying out a new technique. The works with the fish is a good example of this; the shape of a fish is graceful and the simplicity of the fish shape lends itself perfectly to experimenting with new materials. With the experience gained from this, I make new works.

In principle, I am often present during an exhibition so that I can meet the visitors, which is important to me. I can see their reactions and talk to them about the content and, in this way, I also hear their stories. For instance, their experiences of getting older, or stories about their youth. It is also a great opportunity to meet fellow artists. I like to exchange ideas and give suggestions. I have no secrets about my way of working. After all, every felt artist works differently, which makes felting so special. At first glance, my images seem fairy tale, partly due to the pastel shades, but they also show the dark side that is also present in a fairy tale. I not only want to make beautiful work, but also tell my story and share experiences.

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