

Artist Talk with Reinhold Ponesch and Gabriele Baumgartner  
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***Your largescale work „Vitam Victima“ is originated in the former church Ardagger (Lower Austria) in 2018. Why there?***

Many years ago I was with the association of Vorarlberger – I was born and raised in Bregenz – on an excursion in Ardagger. The ‘Margaretenfenster’ (approx. 1225 – 1250) in the church fascinated me so much that I thought I have to come back and create something here. At this point in time I didn’t know what I would create, but I had an idea. After the parish Ardagger agreed I was able to implement the project and started in the church between the ‘Margaretenfenster’ and the cross, in the centre of the altar to paint for one week. At the beginning it was difficult to have the representational around me to transform into the abstraction. At first I kept painting the window on and on, but that wasn’t what I wanted.

Since interpersonal communication is important to me, it was fascinating for me when people came into the church asking me what I was doing. I didn’t explain everything, I also wanted to reach them on a level where they were able to understand themselves. Art for myself is at the beginning always an encounter with myself and secondly an encounter with other humans. Of course I had visitors who didn’t understand and only looked at my colour dabs and strokes. But I explained that I paint what I see in the window and cross. In my own abstraction as I understand it.

***The dispute with other people is very important to you for the understanding of your art.***

I had two very touching experiences: 2011 I had an exhibition in Münchendorf and an acquaintance came especially for the opening. He said, he doesn’t understand much about abstraction but I showed him the exhibition and told him a short story to every painting. At the end he said: “Mr. Ponesch, I believe you have just shown me a world which I can now understand more.”

2006 I also had a touching experience. My departed adopted nephew Christian who back then was suffering from muscular dystrophy and could only move with the help of a wheelchair. I rented a large studio and we had a painting session together. Large canvases were laid out on the floor and I installed different sizes of brushes to his wheelchair. I was applying the colour and he was driving with his wheelchair over the canvas. Three beautiful large paintings were created. A friend of mine was taking pictures of us during the whole session and the non-verbal communication between Christian and myself. Back then my friend loved the artist Liebermann and his art and he didn’t have any idea about abstraction and contemporary art. At the end of the day he told me: “With this project you have changed my point of view regarding to abstract painting completely. This was so rewarding to me and gripping once people get involved with this art.”

***In your paintings one can find again and again texts which are not decipherable.***

The writings are moving – like the paintings – between the border of figurative and abstraction. Sometimes I’m informal, but sometimes you can find also something figurative. The beauty is when it’s in the scope between informal and figurative. That’s me. When it gets to real, I will work over it in order not to become too bold. I still want to see the dynamic in my work and leave it to the spectator what he sees. It is gripping to me what others interpreting into my paintings. Sometimes I say: “No, that wasn’t what I meant, but it’s great that you can see that.”

***Marshall McLuhans approach was: The medium is the message. In your work you also always use different materials and capturing elements.***

Sometimes I’m using a mirror on purpose, another time my gut feeling is deciding, I incorporate it

into my art and later I think that it was the right decision. By being so spontaneous and intuitive shapes are created which can't be planned. This happens to me for example when I use clipping, I take a material and later on I think that it fits. Chance plays a big role in my work. This also means everything we control is completely under control and doesn't have the dynamic I wanted. One should take the freedom to let it happen. At the end there is a story. Hence I ask myself: Which method and technic I can use in order to get the painting I want. Of course it is necessary to have the technical craftsmanship and so the combination of both is necessary and crucial.

***The spectator often thinks of music when looking at your paintings. Is the rhythm for you important?***

I'm always listening to music when I work on a canvas. My head and thoughts are dissolving because of it. It is a tool. Some texts of some musicians are also giving me the courage to try things which I didn't dare to do before.

***You are also mentioning in your titles the place where they were created. Is the rhythm of the city also inspiring for you?***

The surrounding is shaping me and influences me very much. The city itself but also the people who are working there. During my stay in Leipzig there were many studios and artists and they inspired me to use other materials. Many objects and installations were created in Leipzig, but only five paintings. They are different for example to the ones I paint in Vienna.

***That brings me to my question if there are artists who inspire you in your work apart from the technic?***

I don't want to talk of role models, but there are a few artists that inspire me. I got to know the art of Albert Oehlen in New York. His imagery inspires me. Josef Mikl is also always an inspiration as well as Sam Francis. I find Jonathan Meese because of his courage and authenticity fascinating.

***How was your start becoming an artist? Was it a long process of becoming it?***

No, that was different: I decided it, I will become an artist. In 2000 I visited an exhibition of a friend of my brother in Vorarlberg. I was so fascinated that I decided I want to do the same. It then took another year till I started to paint in 2001. Maybe I was already influenced subconsciously when I was a child because my father also painted. But the trigger was this exhibition. To learn the craft I studied a lot about it, because who masters the craft can create creativity.

Before I decided to become a professional artist. I also tried acting. I took acting and vocal lessons and tried to find out if acting was the right thing for me. But painting was prevailing.

But I'm still fond of the theatre. Therefore I work together with my wife Nicole on performances. In the area of performances you have to create tension and the desired message has to be clear. That is the most important in theatre. For me it is always challenging to try something new. Hence besides the painting also the writing of lyrical texts is important to me to my argument with the question of life.

One of the most important experiences in life to grow was and is my long working stays in New York. The city is changing you, it opens you holds up a mirror and asks you who really are. To find an answer to this question I also wrote texts in New York. So I went off to new shores and let the constantly pulsating city inspire me.

For example the Korean artist Hyon Gyon, who is living in New York, inspired me to use different materials like wool and fabrics and also to paint on garments. Designing garments and shoes are now a constant repertoire of mine. This is the reason how I found design fabric I now sometimes use as image carrier for my paintings.

There is a place I'm always happy: When I'm painting with paint and a brush in my studio – then I really feel AT HOME.