

Interview with Candice Breitz, artist

Interviewer : Carole Haensler, 22.08.2013

Each summer in the art world is punctuated by biennials, living arts festivals and other pop-up events, among which the Summer academies all over the world, being a kind of parallel educational programme dedicated to practice and workshops with famous and less famous artists and art critics. In this panorama, the Sommerakademie im Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern is a kind of alien, being the only one offering the opportunity to a group of international participants (artists, curators and writers) the chance to concentrate on fundamental theoretical questions and on ideas challenging their profession.

This year's Academy (August 21st to August 31st) is lead by South African artist Sue Williamson and a rich programme of events offers the opportunity to the public to meet with internationally renowned artists and curators, such as Candice Breitz or Okwui Enwezor, who took over the direction of the Haus der Kunst in Munich after Chris Dercon has left for Tate and this happens just around the corner, in Bern, not in New York or Berlin !

For me, it was an opportunity not to be missed to discuss with artist Candice Breitz, an artist whose practice seeks to capture and observe the nuanced ways in which individuals relate to and are determined by the dense social constellations in which they exist.

Sue Williamson invited you as a speaker and contributor to this year's Sommerakademie im Zentrum Paul Klee, entitled "You are HERE. Here is wherever I lay my head": what does this specific theme means to you?

Candice Breitz - More and more, artists have become translators of the world, as their practice carries them from city to city, such that at a certain point all cities (including cities of origin) come to seem foreign. The nomadic movement of contemporary artists mimics the movement of global capital across international borders. In fact, it seems that there is an almost inevitable chronology: as a country gains global acceptance in economic and/or political terms, artists from that country are increasingly likely to be invited to show their work internationally, and may indeed encounter favourable reception within the art world for a season or two (witness the unprecedented fashionability of South African artists in the post-apartheid moment or the fresh respectability of Russian artists after the dissipation of the cold war).

One way in which artists can resist being reduced to mere shadows of capital is to embrace the act of translating as they move from culture to culture. They can acknowledge the borders that they cross and straddle in the course of their practice, rather than simply assuming, like the grey-suited businessmen alongside whom they commute from country to country, that there are no borders in effect. If the work of the global business commuter is to spread the myth of global connectivity, then the work of the artist (who somehow exists in parasitic relationship to the wealth that global capital creates), is to counter this and similar myths. In this respect, the non-official translations that artists can provide, in whatever form that they might choose to present these translations, might offer alternatives to the stifling language with which global capital maps the world.

I think that the theme that Sue Williamson has chosen for this year's Sommerakademie invites reflection on just how abstract the notion of 'home' can be, and on how crucial it is to constantly re-evaluate what it means to be in a particular place at a particular time.

and what do you expect from this experience?

Stimulating presentations, engaging conversations, inspiring exposure to a diverse range of young artists, several swims in the Aare.

The question of identity construction is central to your work: how did your own works change your perception of yourself, your perception of your own subjectivity?

I prefer not to speak about myself in public forums. I don't see myself as a public figure, nor do I wish to be. I prefer for the focus to remain on the work, rather than on my selfhood.

You are a "slow artist", each of your work requiring a long editing period (for Him + Her the editing quarantine lasted for three years), what about the conception phase, before you actually start to work: what are your sources and what does it need for an idea to become a real intention and in the end an artwork?

This is an impossibly general question to answer. Each work evolves gradually, over time, in response to a series of different stimuli that are typically unpredictable and often immeasurable in retrospect. There are many ideas that simply remain ideas. The decision to try and find an appropriate form for an idea comes about when one develops a strong enough attachment to an idea, a strong enough desire to want to spend time with it.

This is perhaps not only a question to the artist but to the art historian too: Art and Pop culture are mixing since the 1960s, what has changed in their relationship from then to now?

Elitist disdain regarding pop culture has gradually been superseded by blind acceptance of the logic and rhythm of popular culture as a model for art practice and for the circulation of the art object. Neither the former nor the latter positions produce a very compelling discourse. The former assumes clean and easy distinctions between high and low. The latter too easily surrenders those forms of experience that art can offer outside of the logic of the market.

You once declared : "An interview is expected to portray its subject without artifice, without contrivance, which is really not possible. (...) for each of us — depending on the particular constraints of the context in which we enact individuality — there may be some conscious shaping of our roles, the role that any self plays is to a large extent shaped by forces that we cannot steer, and to a large extent unfolds unconsciously". I feel like asking you at the end of this interview, can you tell me what role(s) did you play – or get the impression to have been playing – in replying to these questions?

Yes. No. Maybe. No. Perhaps. Maybe. Yes. Yes. Yes. No. Maybe. Yes. No.

Short Questionnaire:

- **What is your biggest vice?** *None of your business.*
- **What scares you?** *Fear.*
- **Is living in the 21st Century, easier or more difficult than before?** *Before what?*

- Facebook or Twitter? *Equally asinine.*
- What is the most valuable quality your parents have passed on to you? *Life.*
- What would be the soundtrack to your life? *An album that has yet to be written.*
- Where do you see yourself in 10 years? *In Mumbai or Shanghai.*

Many thanks to Candice for her time and for sharing with us her critical reading of our globalised world.

- Carole Haensler Huguet



Candice Breitz, *Nine Jacks* (2001)

(Photo Candice Breitz by Jim Rakete)