

INTERVIEW MET PETRA DE JONG

VOOR MIMESIA GALLERY, DEN HAAG

Petra de Jong's work mesmerises as soon as it is viewed. Large swathes of meandering "rivers" are overlain on a bed of Turkish Geometric, repetitive tile patterns. The inner tension of which, she carefully balances out with a delicate touch. It's so much like her character: she combines a background of not only living in the Netherlands, but also in the United Kingdom and Turkey, an impressive track record, and yet retained the restrained politeness.

Thank you for your time in speaking with us, your exhibition here has already drawn many compliments and people standing almost transfixed in front of your work. We would like to offer our readers some additional information, to enjoy your work. Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

I studied at the Royal Academy of Art, here in The Hague between 1965 and 1970. That was my own doing by the way, my parents did not support me in that at all, and they actually forced me to leave home. As a result I was very much dependent on scholarships and odd jobs to survive. My determination and my personal drive helped me succeed in this.

After my graduation in fine art and specifically monumental art, I wanted to broaden and deepen my knowledge, so in 1970 I attended the Technical University in Delft and studied, among others, city planning under Professor Niek de Boer.

What were defining moments in your life and career? And how did they influence your work?

A defining moment, I'm not sure whether it influenced my work by the way, was in 1970, when I had graduated. Some of my work was shown during a commission meeting in the Gemeentemuseum of The Hague. Their curator, Enno Develing, saw it and was enthusiastic about it. Right at that moment Sol LeWitt was about to have an exhibition. One of the components was a huge mural, and Enno asked me to execute that and find a crew who could do that. So yeah, that was a defining moment.

Soll LeWitt and I became friends, and we cooperated on several of his murals in Holland and abroad. Working with him made me much more aware of the architectural aspects of my own visual language.

Can you tell us a little bit about the style of your work?

One could say its abstract poetic art. The basic elements of my works are transparency, movement, overlapping and rhythm. I am trying to achieve a simultaneity of movement and change in form and colour that continues beyond the borders of the canvas.

Where do you draw your inspiration from?

I'm inspired by landscapes, and dynamism in the galaxy. For instance a flowing river, or the effects of light reflecting upon it. Also I have been inspired by the rhythm of tile patterns that I found in Istanbul. These can be found all over the city in the most unlikely places, bathhouses, fountains, bazars, mosques. It's a beautiful visual language, which made me realise that in the west we have no comparable visual language like that. So I wanted to use and play with this abstract tile-geometry, break it up and overlap these repetitive patterns by flowing curving movements (rivers).

What message are you trying to convey through your art?

Recently I have started to use the basis of patterns in a more free way. Hence also the title of my recent work "Flying out of a pattern". Still I use the geometric pattern, but lately I started to use this as a much more free flowing form. My desire in that is that the spectator takes part in the work by continuing with the forms and movements in his or her imagination.

Who were your biggest influences and favorite artists?

Of course, at the Royal Academy we were very much educated in modernism, and that influenced me, but I was much more drawn to Russian Suprematism. There I discovered a lot of movement, which stayed with me and my work since then. Frantisek Kupka is one of the obvious ones, but even Piero della Francesca. His delicate handling and the transparency in his fresco's and paintings I always admired. Also Sol LeWitt's work, especially his wall-drawings, using walls as a whole surface, appeals to me. Robert Irwin also needs to be mentioned here as an influence.

Obviously, with such a distinguished career, people have talked and written about you. If someone were to research you, where would you want them to look?

Well, I had an exhibition in Istanbul, in the Milli Reasürans Gallery. Cultural Anthropologist Maruška Svašek wrote in their catalogue about my work. And the curator of the European Patent Office in The Hague, Barbara Rollmann has also written about my work in the catalogue of their collection. Further Jeroen Dijkstra interviewed me when Sol LeWitt and I had an exhibition together in his gallery. Also an interview in a magazine of the Belastingdienst (Dutch Tax-Office) about a wildlife garden I designed and carried out together with Grondmij around their tax-office in Groningen.

Well, thank you for this interview, it was very enlightening and doing it here among your works has certainly given it an added dimension.

René Bekker