



Astrid Nobel  
The best kept secrets are hidden in plain sight, 2009 | Ink on paper; text | 210 x 145 cm.

With Astrid Nobel

HC

The show as a quick start: artists who use language or text as their tool or raw material. This makes it possible to have an elastic platform and invite a heterogeneous family of artists, in the sense that art can be a space to receive difference. This conversation is part of the development of the show... I need to get closer to all of you and have a sense of what would make more sense to show and how to show it... So I want to ask you to tell me more about your early works and how text started to appear... Did you study painting?

AN

Yes, I studied painting. During the time in the Academy I mainly made paintings of distorted faces and figures, in which I occasionally incorporated text; fragments from my diary, notes and dreams I had written down.

HC

So was the text something that added an interior or psychological quality to the image...

AN

Yes, they were always pieces of text that I felt belonged to the image.

HC

Is it possible to see it as detachment of yourself, like looking at you again from a distance? I mean I was writing about the show and one thing that I come up with was the idea that text in painting comes from a will to otherness, a certain detachment of yourself - because it becomes an object (outside the subject) and also because painting a text is somehow a suspended act of painting (you don't think of painting while writing or depicting text..)

AN

I'm not sure... In these early paintings I did everything based on intuition. It didn't feel like a detachment, more like bringing themes together in different means of expression to actually get more close to myself.

HC

Yes you're right. Did it happen later? Did text also become a force in itself?

AN

In my later work text functions completely differently. It became a starting point more often. Most of the time I collect and write texts around an abstract theme and from there it becomes a force of itself because it starts and supports the process that ends up with a work.

HC

I was looking and looking again to your website... Do you have more work and you edit/made a selection or you are a priori selective?

AN

You mean for the website? I did more works in those years, but not many more, destroyed a few, rejected a few.

HC

It seems that you choose one of many but we could also believe that you are selective, that you don't let things happen or that you reduce the possibilities to those who have something new.

AN

In the beginning there are many, but in the end there's always one. The ideas are developed in different phases, so in the phase of defining the idea there are different sketch versions of one work. I adapt and combine these until I feel like I've figured it all out and know how to fit everything in one shape or image. Then, still, things are adapted while making it.

HC

It's the case of the *That one wee drop...* or were there any other attempts?

AN

No, many sketches, but no other versions. It was only that one and actually I wasn't satisfied with it at first. It was hanging in my studio and I got slowly attached to it.

HC

That work was sort of a magic moment for me...

AN

I probably got attached to it while I got detached from the creating and was able to look at it from a distance.



Ref. Image: Astrid Nobel's "That one wee drop", 2010.  
Gesso and oil on wood | 52,5 x 42,5 x 4,5 cm.

HC

It had such a great impression when I saw it on the wall opposite the tin of ashes of works from Pieter Laurens Mol... I liked its imminence, radiating new meaning over the other works, the whole room, the whole show<sup>1</sup>. Later when I was preparing this show I thought of it, and mostly since I was dealing with text this work came as a special place, a work that has no written or depicted text and still contains the whole book (Moby Dick). In my perspective, this seem more productive than other works which use text and present text, since there's a sort of expressionist factor within the work: the book lay inside of you and it was processed (through the work or was the work a crystal clear idea?)

AN

Basically it came forth from one sentence from the book (it was also written on the back of the painting, but you couldn't see that), it was about something really small being of importance in something immensely big (a tear in the ocean). Very positive in that way. Getting the image together went quite easy and natural. I found a piece of wood that was shaped by the sea into a drop, I knew I wanted to do something with the sentence "That one wee drop..."; from there it was crystal clear.

HC

Oh that's nice - the event of finding the piece of wood shaped by the sea. Another work of yours relates to Franz Kafka. You are somehow attached to a certain sort of writers. Did you read Lowry's *Under the volcano*? I ask this to know if there's a possible triangle between the 3 of them (Melville - Kafka - Lowry) I found *Under the volcano* very close to Melville's but above all to Camus and Kafka...

AN

No I haven't read Lowry... Kafka was a huge influence on me when I was in high school. Other authors that are important to me are Blanchot, Slauerhoff and Majakovsky.

HC

... could you explain me more about the work on Kafka? There's a picture (ink on paper?) and the first thing I get is this F K on the tree. Later I discovered the erased two people (painted in black)...

AN

Oh yes, well it all started with a photo.

HC

A found photo?

AN

Of Kafka's mother and sister in a forest.

HC

Did it have the FK there or you made it?

AN

Yes, I found it printed, really small in an extensive photo book on a page, I don't know, somewhere in the middle. And it's also in one biography (Hayman). It had the FK, which in itself is beautiful, but next to the FK there's another mark, just the letter K, which is the name of the protagonist in several of his stories.

HC

I found it amazing how a small vestige grants a sort of wholeness to the picture. We don't need the mother and the sister, we don't need people there.

Is the image solved in you or it keeps a sort of quality to be alive, able to receive more and more projections?



Detail from the image of the previous page.

AN

I think it's beautiful that these two, the writer and his work are equally represented in a very modest and simple way. That's why I made the drawing, to show what I saw there, the simple beauty of these carvings. In that way I've tried to keep it alive, so it can be seen for the first time over and over. It should be able to receive more projections. Here it's not about the portrayed people or Kafka himself even. The letters are important as background information, they contain all that is known about these carvings and they are also about the difference between symbolic and scientific value.

HC

And from that is it possible to trigger some kind influence in the way one sees "Almost there" (the fake wood in B&W pushes me to those trees again...) is it more me, or this work also opens to the Decomposition? It seems formal at first but the works seem to maintain formal qualities that bring some content of the past works.

AN

I don't know about this. To me their content is very different, but they have a repetition in details and treatment of material in common. Structures are important in all works. The trees have patterns on the outside, like the wood has on the inside. Drawing over the wood structures for 'Almost There', made me understand the layers and directions of a piece of wood. There are knots where lines come together. In reverse I did this in 'Decomposition'. I cut the story letter by letter, and ordered it by alphabet and punctuation. Until the structure, the story, anything it told, was dissolved.

1- Porta Nigra, curated by Mark Kremer at Hidde Van Seggelen Gallery, London, UK. 2012



Pedro Diniz Reis

Waiting for..., 2009 | iPod, speakers | Variable dimensions | 1/3 +1 AP