



About exchanging a portrait

Gert Germeraad

abstract

This is a text concerning artistic processes. It has a starting point in a project where I am making a portrait of a colleague artist while he is making mine. During the making of this portrait and thereafter I question my ways of working in which I occasionally find myself confronted with artistic blocks. In a period of two and a half years I investigate and articulate my artistic process as it meanders and expends over the different attitudes and problems I encounter in my work. I give a critical analysis of my motives and working methods and try to extend the range of possible ways of working.

This text can be read as an extension of my previous text "Rationality, Intuition and Emotion, exploring an artistic process" that is published in the Journal for Artistic Research, JAR 3.

About exchanging a portrait

"Art is the immediate realization of intent."

John Dewey

Introduction

20130805

Tomorrow Börje Lindberg will come to my studio and I will start to make his portrait. We have been discussing this project for the last 3 or 4 years, but until now we have not come so far as actually doing it. I didn't prioritise it and procrastinated. I was reluctant—even though it was my idea from the start. On a hot summer day in Christinehof park I saw him working on a sculpture with a bare upper body. His characteristic head on top

of his naked torso inspired me and I asked him more or less spontaneously if I could do his portrait. He immediately said yes.

Börje Lindberg is an elderly, locally known and appreciated sculptor. Most often he works in wood, but also in bronze, steel and other materials. His style is impressionistic, pretty rough and sketchy, 20th Century classic, the human figure is always present in his work. Despite his age—Börje is 85—he is remarkably vital. He is still at work, he has a girlfriend, dances the Tango and enjoys life. When I called him yesterday to confirm our appointment, he told me he felt reborn, ready for something new, which I learned to find a typical comment for him.

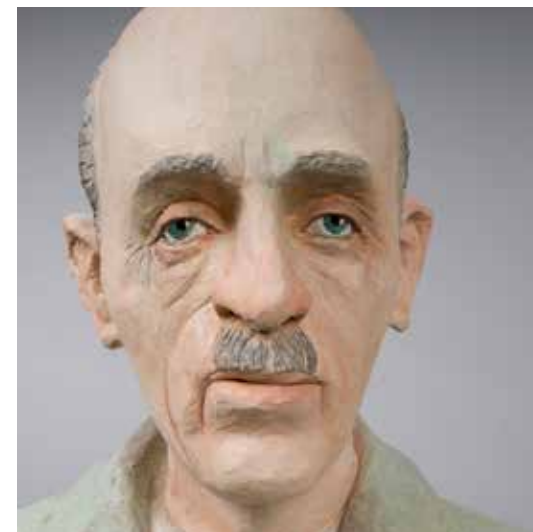
He took a remark of my wife to heart: she said that we should make each others portraits. At first I thought of doing his portrait, now he will do mine as well, and I think that is both challenging and fun! Börje told me it was a long time since he made a real portrait and he is thrilled to do it again. He also wondered whether he would work in wood or in my material, clay. That, I thought, was an interesting idea. What would happen if I were to do his portrait in wood? I have been curious about working in wood and I have more or less planned to try it once in my lifetime. I have never worked in wood before, but I have carved in stone and sand. If he makes my portrait in the material I typically work with and I make his portrait in his, this exchange project will get a dimension that I think is challenging. In addition, working with this other material will be placed in a context and it wouldn't be completely out of the blue.

Background

I work with series of portrait sculptures and abstract drawings. My series of sculptures are most often based on photographs from archives and deal with human vulnerability. For example, I have worked with series of portraits on immigrants who during the Second World War were arrested by the Gestapo in Vienna on the accusation of being "lazy" or having "illegal relations" (picture). Another series are portraits of Jewish children who were deported to the concentration camps, "French Children of the



Börje Lindberg, Bodals school, Lidingö, 1960



The Polish farmer **Felix Oginsky** was arrested at his work place in Velm (Niederösterreich) on suspicion of "Refusal to work" and was registered on June 27th, 1940 by the identification department of the Gestapo Vienna.
ceramics and pigment, 2008

Holocaust", life size portraits of children in a naturalistic style (picture). For these series of portraits I make use of pictures from archives, books or internet and over the years I have become seasoned with the method that I apply.

I have taught myself portraiture and I want to make portraits that are credible and naturalistic in their appearance. These portraits are not isolated portraits, portraits at their own right or portraits *an sich*, but rather actors on a stage in a story I want to tell. It is a narrative portraiture. I want the attention of the spectator to be drawn to the story behind these portraits, not to the actual portraits, nor to my interpretation of the portrayed, nor to the particular technical details of how these portraits came about, as the subject matter of these sculptures is not how they came about. Even though the process of making is without any doubt present and can be read as a separate content layer, the subject matter lay outside the actual physical portrait. Yet, technically I try to get close to the people I portray and I pay a lot of attention making them. This seems to be contradictory, but the perception of these sculptures is influenced by the credibility of my interpretation, by the degree in which they appear to be realistic. The more the spectator accepts the portraits as actors in a story, instead of as portraits *an sich*, the more credible this story is.

In '*Gender is Burning, questions of appropriation and subversion*', Judith Butler states that an artwork (in her text a performative act of drag) is successful only if it cannot be 'read'. This is, if the form, intention, content and execution are convincing to an extent that it is not questioned as a work of art, but "*appears to be a kind of transparent seeing.*" (Butler, 1993, p129). In other words, ***if an artwork is questioned as work of art, it fails.*** In that sense, I would like my portraits to be convincing, both as portraits *an sich*, in the way they came about (the technical details) and in the narrative they represent.

With my portraits I would like to evoke an experience of what Emmanuel Levinas calls "*the epiphany of the face*", the intangible being of man that goes beyond its outer appearance. We have a moral obligation: if we reduce the Other to his or her outer appearance, we are unjust. "*Ethics starts in resisting the temptation to diminish the Other to the image we have through our perception.*" (Guwy, 2008, p89-90) In my



From the series on ***Racial Biology*** ceramics and pigments, 2010



portraits I want to visualise the Other as a vulnerable human being, but as an artist/ creator I don't want to appear in between the portrait and spectator, since that would evoke questions on the coming about of these sculptures – which would cause the artwork to fail. If I can make a portrait that is not reduced to outer form but calls forth an experience of something intangible behind, I think I can rightfully say that I have brought this portrait to life. In this setting a realistic portrait is the beginning of a story of human vulnerability (picture).

Compared to my sculptures, I have both conceptual, formal and methodological a diametrically opposite approach to my drawings. The last years I have reestablished my relation to my drawings as a complement to my sculpture after many years of neglect. At one time I thought it was so problematic to contextualise my drawings that I stopped working with them. Now I realise that my sculptures refer to the outer world and my relation to the social context in that outer world and that my drawings are foremost introspective and contemplative by nature. Despite the fact that my drawings are non-figurative and abstract and hold a formal contrast to my sculptures, I feel that there is a strong connection on an emotional level between these two bodies of work. (picture)

My objectives with this project — how to renew my artistic proces.

Over the years I have developed a very specific way of working by making series of realistic portrait sculptures in ceramics, based upon pictures from archives that I appropriate to my needs. These series bring forth narratives on human vulnerability and are referring to anthropology, sociology, history, psychology and art.

I have worked for many years with these appropriated portrait pictures, using them for measuring the facial features of the portrayed and transferring these measurements to my sculptures, creating likening portraits through a working method that I learned to control in every detail. This method has functioned for me both conceptually and organisationally, since I feel the need for a structured working environment to sustain my mental stability.



From the series on ***Racial Biology***
ceramics and pigments, 2010



The downside of this structured environment is that I experience mental and artistic blocks that manifest themselves through reiteration and difficulties to let my work 'flow'. If I am in a negative state of mind, I perceive my process as habitual and entrenched. Furthermore, I feel a constant need for a conceptual framing of my work and find it hard to use a more intuitive approach. This conceptual framing has not only brought advantages like distinct and clearly defined bodies of works, but also a fear to let go, a fear that I cannot make valuable work outside my well defined box and consequently, a fear that I need to be able to justify every single step I make. Sometimes it is difficult to trust my own artistic guts.

Of course, the days of unarticulated, raw artistic beasts are over (if they ever existed) nowadays artists are expected to be able to verbalise their works, hence the rise of artistic research, doctorate programs in art and a much more verbal culture around art than I experienced a 25 years ago. I don't want to proclaim that one should not be verbal about one's work, or that conceptual framing kills an intuitive approach, but for me personally the downside of my controlled environment lies in a felt inability to loosen up this conceptualised method of working. It is as if I don't allow myself to let go.

Another problem of my conceptual framing, as I see it, lies in my desire to control the perception of my work. I present a work that is complex and multilayered, but I tend to give a clear prescription of how to read it. As it is now, these works can be read in an anthropological, sociological or historical context and has references to other artists and art, but I would like to diffuse the interpretation, as I sometimes feel that I try to make everything accountable. I am seeking a visual language that can stand for itself.

Summarised, my main objective for this project is that I am seeking artistic renewal: I want to open up my process, aim for more artistic flow, challenge myself, widen my visual language and make work that is open for a more diffuse interpretation, where the visual can stand for itself.



Drawing
charcoal on paper, 2013



From the series on **War against War!**
ceramics and pigments, 2011

Sometimes I long for the early days of my artistic explorations. I don't yearn for the actual works that I made—my work has become so much more advanced—but I long for the artistic attitude that I had, I long for the artistic curiosity, when everything was new, possible and exciting, when I explored every little sidetrack.

Text and method

I do not have a devised strategy for this project and text other than a will to be aware of my thoughts about my way of working.

I am not after a text in academic closed format, a text in which every element has a well defined place and structure, in which the author has a clear overview of what will come and offers a concise and elaborated piece of work. Instead, this text will follow my artistic process as well as being a part of its becoming, it is non-anticipatory: I have not formulated on forehand the what and how of this text. This writing gives shape to my thoughts. It is a text en taille directe: I will write and gradually it enfolds itself. That makes this text a part of my creative process and a reflection of it, it is both forming my thoughts about my work and reciprocally giving direction to my process. I will use free association as an instrument to create the possibility for unexpected content to surface. Mika Hannula says that it is not very productive to first make art and then use this art as an object for research. This would produce vague and introvert research. (Hannula: 2005, p58) In the method that I have in mind, I will deliberately enter a vague and introvert domain, being artist and researcher at the same time, trying to follow my process closely and describe as many aspects as I can come up with. I will not try to objectify, I want to get close to my thoughts.

Introspection as method is not common in academic research, neither is it in the field of artistic research. More common is to use research instrumentally, with an intend to have a clear outside perspective where the self is *excluded*, in an attempt to objectify and describe a problem or a "research question" that is *beyond* the personal. To me that feels awkward, impersonal and unproductive. I want to *include* the personal,

since I want to follow, understand and articulate the actual coming about of my artistic process and how I reflect on it, since this reciprocally influences my process. The main focus is on my process, not beyond. An outside perspective is even in traditional research impossible to reach, since the observer/researcher is always included in the set-up of the apparatus and therewith in the outcome of the research. I understand that instrumental use of research is striven after in academic research, but I would like art—and for Heaven's Sake artistic research—to be a free-zone where other methods and ways of thinking are possible, where there is a place for the unexpected.

These journals are a collection of almost two and a half years of writing. Just as it goes: sometimes I felt the need of writing, to clear my mind or to get going and there were periods where I didn't make any note at all. After a year of working with this text I lost my appetite for it. I had quit my second course Artistic Research, thinking that it was not for me after all. At the time I only made random notes for myself, some connected to this project, others had nothing to do with it. When I decided to continue with this project, I went through these notes, translated relevant parts that were written in my mother tongue—Dutch—and implemented them, but obviously, this text has taken a different course from what I thought from the start.

"The biggest problem right now is that you don't know what sort of fiction you are dealing with. You don't know the plot; the style is not set. The only thing you know is the main character's name. Nevertheless, this new fiction is reinventing who you are. Give it time, it'll take you under its wing, and you may very well catch a glimpse of a new world. But you are not there yet, which leaves you in a precarious position."
(Haruki Murakami, 2001: p 68-69)

Meetings with Börje Lindberg

At work

20130813

Börje and I have had two meetings. We drank coffee and talked. We have scanned and probed each other. We have been in the kitchen and in the studio and we have posed for each other twice, one hour each time, and we have worked with our portraits. We have agreed on meeting once a week in my studio and we made a vague agreement that this project should not continue endlessly. There is a limitation in time, but we have not set any deadline. As long it is fun, it's good.

I am making a sketch in clay that I will transfer to wood at a later stage. I have decided not to use pictures, but solely work with my sculpture when Börje is sitting in front of me. Last time I worked this way was with a portrait of Oane Postma in 2003 (picture). Most the other portraits depicting a living person I have used pictures combined with posing. An exception to this method is the portrait of Viveka Adelswärd for example, (picture) where I only used pictures and she did not pose at all. Since I do not use pictures to construct my sculpture of Börje, I cannot fall back on my rational system of comparative measurements and therefore I need to trust my bare eyes. Until now this worked quite well: at the end of two sessions I measured the width and length of Börjes head with a calliper and I was accurate within a centimeter.

Oane's portrait might be the best portraits I have made of a living person sitting in front of me. It appeals to me both on an emotional and artistic level while he is very recognisable as Oane Postma and it occurs to me that this may be due to the fact that I did not use a measurement system. Maybe my idea that I need a reliable and rational working method is an *idée fixe*, motivated by fear of losing myself, surpassing my borders and becoming mentally unstable. Can I change this system, my working method, without getting derailed? When I started this project I asked myself how to change my process, now I ask myself: can I change it at all?



Portrait of **Oane T. Postma**
ceramics and pigments, 2003



Portrait of **Viveka Adelswärd**
ceramics and pigments, 2012

Börje wears spectacles and that is a problem. It is a characteristic pair of spectacles, dominating his face: a relatively heavy, black frame with fairly strong magnifying glass (picture). Spectacles are ordinary attributes on living people—we are used to looking at people who wear them. A person's face and eyes are constantly moving and so is the angle at which you look at him or her: this influences the how and what you see of a face through the spectacles of the wearer. I think it is a fascinating view, but impossible to catch in a static sculpture. The glasses enlarge or diminish the eyes and sockets, and even if you could catch this deformation in a sculpture, then it would only be seen from one specific angle, like in a bas-relief. If you look from another angle the deformation is different. This gives an absurd situation which you could exploit artistically if your name is Picasso, who combined multiple perspectives in one painting (picture), but it is impossible if you want to create a representational three-dimensional portrait. An additional problem is that you cannot make the frame in clay and even if you tried it would look awkward since there is no lens. Giving a sculpture real spectacles is unacceptable. I have never seen a convincing solution for this problem, at its best it looks horrible. There might be a possible solution by making just a tiny bit of the frame, as for example in the sculpture of Theodore Roosevelt on Mount Rushmore, made under guidance of Gutzon Borglum (picture).

I have decided to skip Börje's glasses.

One of the most interesting aspects of working with a life model I think is that you can study your model unabashedly and at length. That which in daily life is considered to be blatant staring, awkward and most often not appreciated, is all of a sudden fully acceptable. You can scrutinise a picture, but it is never the same as studying a person sitting in front of you. A picture is and remains flat. The spatial form of a face can only be estimated approximately using a photograph. With a living model you can thoroughly and in great detail observe every facial curve, every wrinkle and crease in its three-dimensional form. This spatial form shows itself differently during every angle of observation. I take my time, concentrated and at length, to study my model's face from a distance, nearby and switching between proximity and distance. I use a piece of



Börje Lindberg
2013



Pablo Picasso - Dora Maar

laminated chipboard covered with canvas and a metal bar mounted on top on which I apply the clay. In the beginning I try to grasp the contours and main form of the head as quickly as possible. I study and compare my sculpture with my model and try to get the big picture. I do not work with details until a rough sketch is done. But I tend to work on the left hand side first since I am right-handed the model's left hand side is easier to reach.

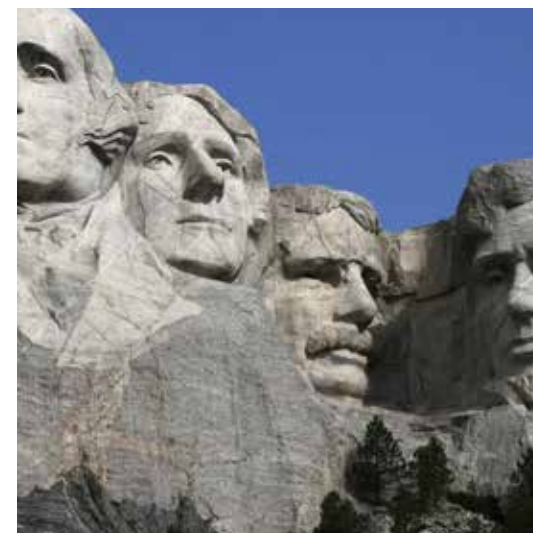
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Today we had a third session and I am practically done with my sketch. I have worked very fast. In the first hour I have made the rough form, in the second hour I worked on the jawbones, the eyes and ears and in the third I started to fill in the details. I have worked less than three hours on this sketch, but I should have stopped earlier. I could have worked longer as well, but it wouldn't have become better. After half an hour I noticed that I lost concentration and that I was sort of done with this sketch, a feeling that I ignored—as I more often ignore my gut feeling. Since my model sat in front of me, I obviously at least had to pretend that it took more time than it did to make this portrait. I was ashamed that I went so fast. At the same time it is apparent that a lot of things are not done yet, like the right eye, the eye sockets and the right part of the chin.

What I did afterwards did not benefit my sculpture. I lost my open attitude, became self-aware and lost flow. I started to botch up. The additions I made, led my piece away from what I had in mind: making a sketch. I started to fill in things that were meant to be rough and sketchy, added details and finish. As a matter of habit I proceeded to the next stage, I noticed it, hesitated, but went on anyway.

20130828

This week Börje is unable to come, next week we will continue. That gives me the opportunity to have a close look at my sketch and work on this text. I haven't been so frequently in my studio the last half year. I worked on various projects concerning house and garden that consumed a lot of time. Biggest project of the year was casting a new concrete floor in a part of the studio that we call summer studio. Besides that we



***Portrait of Theodore Roosevelt on
Mount Rushmore, Gutzon Borglum,
1927-1941***



***Börje Lindberg
2013***

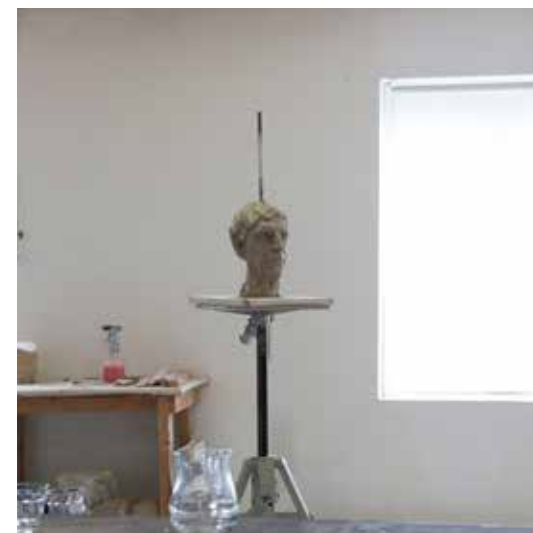
had a lot of guests and I worked part-time as a photographer. All in all, not much has happened in the studio and that makes me nervous: What is going on? Why am I not here? Do I try to escape? Is my artistic practice over?

How is my sculpture? What is the difference between a '*finished*' portrait and this '*sketch*'?

I haven't seen my piece in a week and I want to be as receptive to it as possible. I don't look at it while unwrapping. I let it be. It is there, but I turn my back on it. I want to confront myself, as if I am seeing it for the first time. This is what I sometimes do, even while working: I'll turn my back on my sculpture, walk away and do something else, I don't look before I have some mental distance and then I cast a glance. I want to catch its *gestalt*, its *epiphany*. Once I have seen it passingly, I scrutinise my piece. When I study the details, I see what is not finished. It's unrefined condition doesn't disturb me as long as I keep distance. If I get closer, I want to change things. Especially the right side of the chin, the eye sockets and right eye need to be reworked, hair ought to be more specified. But I am actually quite pleased with how much I have done in a very short time. It is fairly good, if you consider mimesis as a legitimate principle. Despite my long absence from the studio, modelling is still in my fingers.

As I mentioned in the introduction, in my portrait series I don't want to position myself in between my sculptures and the spectator by adding a specific personal touch or style that draws attention to itself, like some sculptors who leave their fingerprints on their wax models as a prove of their artistry. But I don't want to make impersonal works either, I just want the focus on the content matter, on the story behind and not on the formal aspects, nor on its expressionistic qualities—even though I realise that these formal aspects dictate how the works are read.

With this portrait of Börje Lindberg however—as in all '*real*' portraits—I don't have an underlying story. It is a portrait *an sich*, separated from the narrative portraits that I



Börjes portrait seen from a distance



overview



Sketch after one session of an hour



Sketch after two sessions of an hour



Sketch after three sessions of an hour



am used to making and for that reason I ought to have some chance for freestyle and experiment, to loosen up in a way I do not permit myself otherwise.

I call this sculpture a sketch since it will not be a final product but an intermediate for a sculpture in wood. But what is the difference between this 'sketch' and the sculptures I am used to making?

I rarely sketch, I don't use sketches for idea development or finding form for my sculptures, just occasionally I use sketches to see if an idea holds. My idea development takes place on a more linguistic level and is based on an interest, an intuition or an emotion that is evoked by a certain theme and often triggered by a picture or a text or a combination of the latter two that I find catching. I twist and turn this idea in my head, until I'm convinced that it holds, after which I carry it out. *This makes my sculptural work conceptual by nature.* In comparison my drawings come about in a more intuitive knowing of what has to happen next. Both methods share way that the knowing of what I want comes to me in an instance.

At art school I learned a working method of seeking form and a gradual development of this form through sketching in justifiable steps, a method that in my opinion belongs to design more than to art. Even though I know one can design a sculpture, to me it feels awkward, as if the work is detached from an inner vision and lacks deeper grounds, as if form rules over content. I realise that this idea is one of my idiosyncrasies, but this method has never appealed to me. I don't care about form for forms sake, even though form is very significant, it is subordinate to content matter.

As I see around me in presentations of contemporary art, I think it has become fashionable to make work that is objectified and 'designed', to make work that seems to be accountable and can be articulated in spoken language. These works often feel to me like a distant kind of works, works that can be read rationally, but are detached from the things that I seek in art: the personal, the emotional and the intuition. I have always thought that art has to come from within, that it is something you cannot design or think out, that art is given.

Art is a natural given instance that reveals itself.

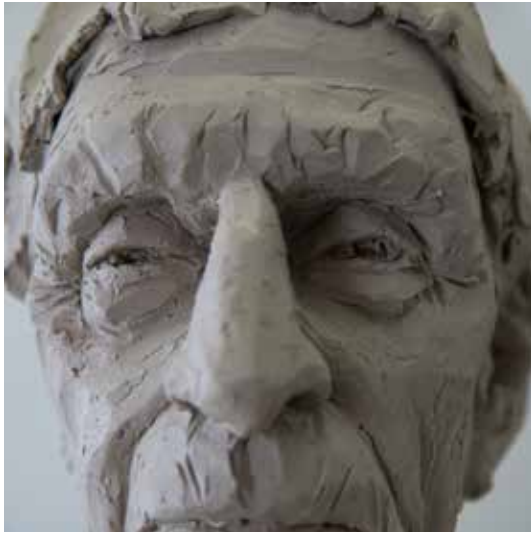
Art has to come from inspiration, says Agnes Martin, "*I don't have any ideas myself, I have a vacant mind, in order to do exactly what the inspiration calls for.*" (Agnes Martin in an interview with Chuck Smith and Sono Kuwayama) And this is exactly how I feel it: inspiration comes and goes, you can invite it, but not force it to come in—and moreover, you can't design it.

The closest I get to making what one could call a sketch is when I permit myself more freedom in interpreting my source material. But even then I don't sketch to find form, since I know where to go: I want to get close to the pictures I work with. In sculpture my artistic strategy is conceptual, my tactic is mimesis.

So what is the sketchiness of the sketch I make? I believe it lays in the details, in the unfinished form, in ragged edges, scruffy details and swabs of clay that are not yet in place. Compare with Georg Baselitz, he works on ragged edges, that's his specialty. For example his "*Woman of Dresden*", a series from 1990, the huge heads are coarsely cut with a chainsaw out of big logs of wood and painted in monochrome yellow (picture). Baselitz seems to be self-confident in what he does. Look at the eyes: they are positioned with only a few gestures. Expression is for him of greater importance than form, he doesn't care about details and that is effective: his sculptures are very present. In these works Baselitz shows that he is a man who doesn't hesitate handling the most masculine of all saws, the chainsaw. He is a *show-off*. I am more cautious and careful. I work extensively with the details and I want to finish the form as I find it difficult to let go. But I am not embellishing my work. I am more interested in work that is slightly unsettling than in idealising human existence—I don't make work to please. It would be interesting to see what happens if I pass over this finishing. In this sketch I will change elements that are not correct, but I will try to leave it in a crude stage. More Baselitz, less prudent.



Georg Baselitz: Dresdner Frauen



The right eye has not yet a good round form and is closed too much. The eyebrows and sockets need to be more specified, as the pockets under the eyes. Good is that the eyes seem to see, despite that their lack of detail



There is no clear distinction between the eye brows, the underlying sockets and wrinkles in the skin.



It is unclear how the wrinkles envelope the mouth, which gives an appearance of a fantasised mouth rather than a real.



Sketch after four sessions of an hour



The freedom I give myself in my work usually lies in the choice for a specific way of executing my piece, in the freedom of a more or less strict interpretation of my source material and in the degree of realism that I apply. However, in deviating from realism I never go as far as Baselitz; I don't experience that as free choice, but attributable to character.

20130903

Today we had our fourth session. During posing for Börje I thought of a way to change my strategy temporarily: I could make a series of introspective (self)-portraits. Portraits not based on mimesis with one or more pictures as a starting point, but made by heart.

This time I would like to focus on a form which is like a Buddha, restrained in its expression, with a focus directed inwards, as expression of the introspective phase that I feel I have entered, with this text and in my work.

I am interested in a working method as I have had with my drawings, where the possible outcome is more open and the interpretation more diffuse.

Of course I am not at all finished with the renewal of my process after only four sessions with Börje. I am not even sure what to expect of this renewal. Will I recognise it when it comes?

20130927

I am completing my portrait and I take away some of the ragged edges, so that the face appears to be more finished. But I am only taking away what disturbs me; I want to maintain its sketchiness. Börje has also finished his portrait so we are ready for the next phase. The way I am used to working with clay is so much incorporated in my system, that I find it very hard to leave my sketch in this unrefined and unfinished stage. Börje has toiled and sweated, he has overcome his fear and he felt more and more positive about his portrait. If I compare our works, I can say that I am stricter in my conception about form and mimesis as Börje put more emphasis on his inner vision.



Finished sketch of **Börje Lindberg**
ceramics, 2013



Börjes sketch after three sessions of an hour



Börjes sketch after four sessions of an hour



Intermezzo

20131112

I will make a self-portrait. Since I want to renew my artistic process, I will try to make a self-portrait without knowing where to land. I want it to be an 'inner' self-portrait—as *how I perceive myself*—more that creating a likeness. But I want to recognise myself in it. I took some pictures of myself, just as a scan, but I will not use them for measuring purposes. I look tired and worn out, (picture) I think it shows that I have carried a slight depression these last months, I experience myself as fairly fresh though, in contrast to how I look. This portrait is meant as supplement to this text.

I don't know where to start. I am thinking of Lehmbruch, Modigliani and at the works of Hans Josephsohn. (picture) But actually I want to work as I do in my drawings: simply start and see where I end up. Maybe this is the way to go, since as long as I continue with mimesis, I will always relate to these references.

It is interesting that I immediately come to the works I did at the EKWC. I start where I left off: a sort of rough sketchy form without too many details. Unmistakably a face, but that is easy: if you take a potato and punch two holes in it, you also have a face. But I consider the 'inner self-portraits' of 12 years ago no longer as 'inner'. Roughly they were based upon pictures that I interpreted in a very loose way, but merely the fact that I didn't make any details doesn't bring introspection into these portraits.

20131113

I am actually quite depressed. I didn't only make myself to thinking that I have an artistic block, I am also depressed because I lose people's interest in my work. The latter is directly caused by the lack of interest I find for my series "*French Children of the Holocaust*", a series in which I was very engaged and had a lot of confidence. (pictures) Despite trying hard to interest diverse institutions in this series, in Sweden and abroad, I have not succeeded at all. That I feel that I am stuck in my process,



Selfportrait
2013



Wilhelm Lehmbruch



Hélène Jaroslaw was born on July 27, 1927, in Warsaw. She had just turned 15 when she was deported on August 3, 1942, on convoy 14. She lived at 25 rue Robespierre in Montreuil, outside of Paris.
ceramics and pigment, 2012, life-size.



Jacques Jakubowicz was born on April 15, 1931, in Nancy (Meurthe-et-Moselle). Arrested in the UGIF Lamarck-Secrétan children's center, he was deported on July 31, 1944, on convoy 77.
ceramics and pigment, 2012, life-size.



Jacques Wisznia was born on October 15, 1937, in Paris, where he lived at 108 rue de la Folie-Méricourt (11th arr.). He was deported on February 9, 1943, on convoy 46.
ceramics and pigment, 2012, life-size.

might have its origin in the highly specific and narrowly defined working method I have engaged myself in. I can dwell in my technical skills and I can evoke an emotional response, both in myself and my audience—which is truly wonderful—but I feel that I am blocked. Some years ago I felt a lot of space in my process, I could find new angles all the time. Now it only feels as a limitation that I have specialised myself so very much and this might also limit me in making other people interested in it.

20131114

I have worked for two days with my self-portrait. What irritates me is that I am constantly checking if the form is anatomically correct, while I am not aiming for that. This is deeply rooted in my system.

I feel that I am failing in what I actually want: to make a self portrait that has an introspective emotional presence. But I am probably expecting too much too soon. As I am doing now, I could rather focus on a realistic self-portrait, since I seem not to be ripe for making a portrait that is about an inner life instead of outer appearance.

I can't do what I want and I don't want to do what I can.

20131115

Is this project only successful if the outcome is positive? If I succeed in the renewal of my process? What will I do if I can't? If in the end I have to conclude that I am still stuck in my way of working and that I did not succeed in liberating myself from my limitations? And, how do I actually know that I have succeeded? The main assumption of this text is that I feel limited because I work in the specific way. In that sense the only positive outcome can be that I feel free to make a portrait in a different way, or that I start to make another type of work.

Maybe I am looking in the wrong direction searching for the renewal of my process, maybe I should recontextualize my art instead.



Rosa Farber was born on September 18, 1932, in Paris (6th arr.). Exactly ten years later, she was deported on convoy 34 of September 18, 1942. Her mother had been deported earlier. The family lived at 12 rue des Bernardins in Paris (5th arr.).
ceramics and pigment, 2012, life-size.



Anny-Yolande Horowitz was born on June 2, 1933 in Strasbourg. Interned in Lalande camp near Tours and then transferred to Drancy, she was deported on convoy 31 of September 11, 1942, with her mother, Frieda, and her sister Paulette, age 7.
ceramics and pigment, 2012, life-size.



Félix Buttler, age 17, born in Paris (4th arr.), was deported on convoy 73 of May 15, 1944, which took him to his death in Tallin (Estonia) or Kaunas (Lithuania). He lived in Grenoble (Isère), 1 avenue Guynemer.
ceramics and pigment, 2012, life-size.

What is important for me in art?

20131209

I want art to make an emotional claim on me.

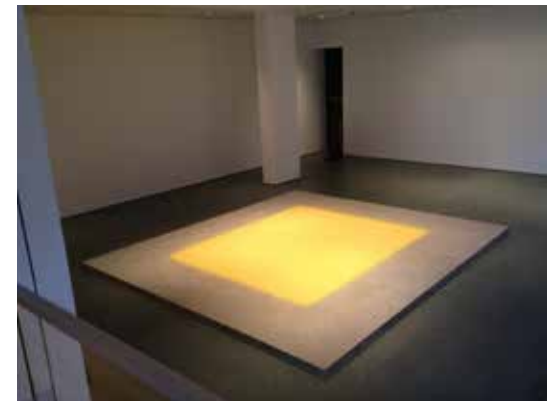
Art that is foremost concept and detached from an emotional content, art that has its focus in a merely intellectual story telling and is presented in a form that keeps a distance to the audience, even if it is well performed, doesn't really interest me. I take notice of it, but I don't care for it. I take it for granted. Art that is taken for granted fails. For example Alexander Gutke's exhibition at Malmö Konsthall in 2012: well conceived and flawlessly performed, this exhibition had a fascinating conceptual clarity and a beautiful visual form, but was mainly referring to this form. It was art about the act of looking, art for arts sake. Which made me I ask myself: "Can art be free of any value? Can it 'just' be the art of looking?" Obviously it can, as this exhibition proved. It was an interesting show, yet for me it was interesting at best. I want to meet art that deals with real life topics, art that touches me on deeper grounds. I can enjoy art that is utmost form or concept—like I enjoyed Gutke's exhibition—but that I seek is art that touches me on an emotional level.

This also is my feeling about the works of Olafur Eliasson, often well conceived and sometimes spectacular in it's performance, but to me no more then a showcase of natural phenomenon, a physicians trick box, emotionally flat. (picture) How different is the work of Wolfgang Laib: with the simple display of natural materials like beeswax, milk or rapeseed pollen he evokes a very sensitive, ephemeral and emotional awareness, triggering a contemplative mindset. (picture)

Art that has made deep impact on me often focusses on a psychological experience and, now that I think of, it is often made by female artists. In 1996 I saw an exhibition of the Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz in Copenhagen, especially her colossal, almost abstract bodies and body parts had a staggering impact on me that lasted for days. (picture)



Olafur Eliasson at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2016.



Wolfgang Laib

At the Venice Biennale 2013, Belgian artist Berlinde De Bruyckere also made an overwhelming impact on me with a work called "*Cripplewood*". It kept me for hours in the Belgian pavilion. To me this work communicated strongly on a physical and atmospheric level; it was neither a gimmick as some of the other works at the Biennale, nor was it conceived-invented-conceptualised-intellectual, nor was it about its formal form (i.e. technique, form or color), on the contrary, it was providing an experience that surpasses all superficial experiences and brought me (at least me) in a state of highly physical consciousness, where I found myself intuitively connected to the work.

It was a immense work, covering almost the entire Belgian pavilion: casts in wax of a huge tree trunk and branches, made in a way that the attention was led away from its formal aspects. In the main hall of the Belgian pavilion lay a gigantic ***corpus mutilum***, a racked corporeal presence, pulled forth from its cave where it had been mutilated and humiliated, for information purposes only it was displayed to the public, beheaded and limbless. Its flesh and blood was represented by twigs and branches. There was not one single way to escape this work emotionally. The branches served as arms and hair dragged behind the torso, blood staunched from wounds that were bound with dirty cloth, this body was patched up.

The room was darkened—when you entered it, it took some time for the eyes to adjust. The walls were smudged, the only (roof) window veiled. Light was reduced to an extent that only dark brownish and greenish greys were visible. Thereby the whole room referred to the paintings of the Reichsdag of Anselm Kiefer with its dripping walls. Once you got close to this *corpus mutilum* you could see faint blueish and reddish veins shimmer under a pale skin.

I have not worshiped this installation, nor was I paralysed by it, but I have contemplated it for hours, scrutinised every detail, perceived it emotionally and I was enlightened by it as *I felt that this installation had recalibrated my value system for art*. If I could only get a little bit closer to this experience in my own work...! What do I need to change so that I can reach a deeper ground that is more emotional, intuitive and physical? I wish I could reach the same the emotional depths as Berlinde De Bruyckere. To me this was the ultimate art experience, worth every penny of my trip to Venice.



Berlinde De Bruyckere, Cripplewood
Venice Biennale, 2013



I realise that art made as or in the context of Artistic Research, often has a remote appearance, detached from the raw intuitive approach that I seek in art. Which makes me doubt if Artistic Research is something for me in the first place. I got hooked on writing in my previous project and I think it is interesting to contemplate and articulate my process, but that is something one hardly can call Artistic Research. Although it appears to me that *I use this writing instrumentally to gain knowledge about my process!*

Intermezzo II

20140110

As I want to do something else, I start with a new series of drawings.

If I don't work with mimesis—like in these drawings—I end up at a very elementary level. The only thing that remains is a sort of intuitive color fields (pictures). It helps me that I don't have to take notice of any form of representation, so I don't get stressed because I think I can't draw. Anyhow, I feel that I can transcribe my sensibility to the paper, giving me an emotional relief *through the act of drawing*. This can be an almost spiritual experience and creates in me a feeling of longing for drawing as a physical activity, more than I ever experience with sculpture.

It is a very restricted format that I work in: a drawing 24 x 15 cm, divided by a horizontal line in two color fields (picture). I let the color emerge and build it up by layer upon layer of soft pastels. I don't work according to a color theory. It is purely what my intuition brings to me. For now I want saturated colors. Sometimes I try to make the color field even, sometimes I don't.

I see a connection with work from the early 1990s: aquarelles with very saturated colors. (picture) I realise that I have not come any further since then. But what to expect? I have not worked with colors in 20 years, I have to start where I left off. I don't know if that is good or bad. *This is where I find myself now.*



Drawing
soft pastels on paper, 2013



Aquarel
1993

I think of Jem Southam, the English landscape photographer who visits and revisits specific sites for years in a row, building a multilayered narrative photographic oeuvre that comes about in a very slow and meditative process, creating time for reflection on the process itself and its outcome. I find this a highly interesting approach. *“Regarding my strategy, well that’s simple. Once fixed on a site, I revisit it regularly, and gradually assemble a body of work that is a response to a slow absorption of the site, through the making of photographs, as well as through discussions that I have with those who live nearby, the examination of maps and other documents that relate to it, and so on.”* (Seesaw Magazine, 2005)

20140113

A new drawing with a low horizon and shifting colors (picture). I think of color shifts in a clear sky, just before the sun rises: from very light to dark ultramarine. (picture) I keep a watch out for changes in the sky and the light it brings us and I have started to take pictures, as reference and inspiration just as I did when I was drawing clouds and smoke in 2012-2013 (picture).

If I work from introspection rather than mimesis, these very elementary color fields remain. Is this the very core of my art and is all the figurative work I have done over the years just a distraction from this core? From me?

It is a contemplative work that brings me in a corresponding state of mind that I highly appreciate. It is slow, introvert and attentive and fits me just fine.

The Horizon

As Prospect

As Mental Space

As Meditative Place

What is the emotional impact on me if I make these drawings?



Drawing
soft pastels on paper, 2014



Photograph
before sunrise, looking east, 2013

20140122

I have made a few drawings with an aspect ratio of 24 x 15 cm, which is about the so called Golden Ratio. I have divided this drawing into a square of 15 x 15 on top of a field of 9 x 15 cm.

A new aspect ratio I want to try: 22.5 x 15, with a square of 15 x 15 on top and half a square 7.5 x 15 at the bottom. I'll give some calculations:

$$15 \times 15 = 225$$

$$22.5 = 15 + 15 / 2$$

$$22.5 / 1.5 = 15$$

$$3 \times 7.5 \text{ (height)} + 2 \times 7.5 \text{ (width)}$$

Numerically a good fit and I like the looks of it too.

Interesting: as I do not use external references, like a form of mimesis as in my sculpture, I seem to need an external grip, a framework, it is difficult to just start. But of course, I need to start with something. There has to be a decision of some kind.

22.5 x 15, the difference with 24 x 15 is minimal, but 22.5 x 15 feels just a little better than 24 x 15, which I now find too long.

20140126

I've just decided that 22,5 x 15 is a better aspect ratio than 24 x 15 and I will adjust all the drawings from this year accordingly. Some of these drawings I cut for the second time.

These drawings have not a striking presence, on the contrary, they have a very low profile. They are like small scale finger exercises to make myself acquainted with soft pastels, a material I have hardly ever used before. The drawings work just fine as they are.



Drawing
charcoal on paper, 2013



Photograph
after sunset, looking east, 2013



Drawings
soft pastels on paper, 2014

I think of the work of Antonio Calderara (1903-1978). One of the first works of art that I purchased, was a screen print of him (picture). His later work is so minimalistic, ephemeral and subtle that it nearly vanishes from this world.

22,5 x 15 and two color fields. I have defined where to divide the paper. It works like a horizon. The color scheme is subtle. For now I am trying to get as subtle as it can be. The color doesn't have to be evenly distributed over the paper. I am after the color shifts in a cloudless sky. But I will also make drawings with color fields that are even. I use my hands to distribute the pastel pigments on the paper. I start with white and built up a nuanced color by applying additional layers of pigments. After each layer I will chose a new color, until I am pleased with the result.

It interests me that my drawings are so radically different from my sculpture: while in my sculpture I want to be realistic as I can, in my drawings I am heading into nothingness. The similarity between these two bodies of work lay in my tendency to be precise in my performance.

20140130

I do feel very *privileged* for having the possibilities to be an artist, being able to do the things I want to do and not having to do the things other people tell me to do. Just the very fact that I am waking up in the morning, thinking about a next project, about the next drawings I await to make, longing for it, makes me an artist. My artistic practice is not over yet.

20140206

I can find mental peace through these drawings. This is a contemplative work in which I can dwell. I have to be cautious and attentive and build up the colors layer by layer. To choose the next color is often obvious, the drawings seem to ask for it as it has to match the color tone that is already achieved and adding a specific nuance, making the color more rich in its appearance, more saturated, more complex.



Agnes Martin



Antonio Calderara
Tempo Spazio Luce, 1973

20140408

I am basically working on two different series of drawings. One series that is a clear rendering of the horizon and sky at the sea, so it is landscape (or seascape if you wish), the other series is similar in appearance, but the horizon is half-way up the paper instead of at 1/3, this makes the latter series more abstract since it could as well be a line up of two fields and nothing more, this is emphasised by a different color scheme.

Similar works are done by other artists, like Günther Förg, Ellsworth Kelly, Agnes Martin and many more, but it seems to be relevant for me at this time, so I plan to continue for now.

20140606

Could I—without further explanation—juxtapose abstract drawings with figurative sculpture at an exhibition? I tend to explain and contextualise my work, while at the same time I think that the visuals ought to be enough and text is 'just' an addition. I sometimes feel that my inclination to explain limits me in making intuitive and visual choices. I have a compulsion to rationalise and articulate—sometimes beforehand, when thinking of a concept for a new body of work, sometimes afterward when I want to connect one body of work to others. Sometimes this compulsion contravenes what I actually can think of articulating, simply because I don't have the words—yet. In addition, as I long for making work that has an emotional impact on me instead of that it appeals to my logical mind, I ought to leave my compulsion to articulate and trust more on my artistic intuition.

Compare Grayson Perry in an interview with Sarah Thornton: *"It is a really bad idea for an artist to have an idea first and then illustrate it. It is much better to make the work you fancied and think up what it is about later, or if you're lucky, you have an academic brewing up brilliant 'compare fixed' insights into it, you can just bring them on... post-rationalisation... Works!"* (Tate Modern Channel)



Drawing
soft pastels on paper, 2014

One of the most difficult assignments in art school I found was to 'make a work about the relation between the wall and the floor.' After months of pondering and doubting, I came with an abstract ready-made sculpture that was standing on the floor and a framed black drawing hanging on the wall, (picture) not a very satisfying result (a classmate put some hinges at the plint, which was a much more elegant solution) but now I recognise it as a harbinger for the relation between my sculpture and drawings today: different kinds of works that fulfil various functions in a composite work with a wider reach than its components.

My question is: Why do I put so much effort into articulating my work?

I think it suits me as the thinking person that I am, I want to be able to understand my work, but it is also induced by *fear*. I fear that I *ought* to be able to articulate my work, to make it more credible for myself and for others.

One of the reasons why I discontinued my abstract works a long time ago was that I could not articulate the content matter. Some of the works were too private, others simply '*just*' visual. I couldn't find the words to justify them and it became too much connected to shame and fear.

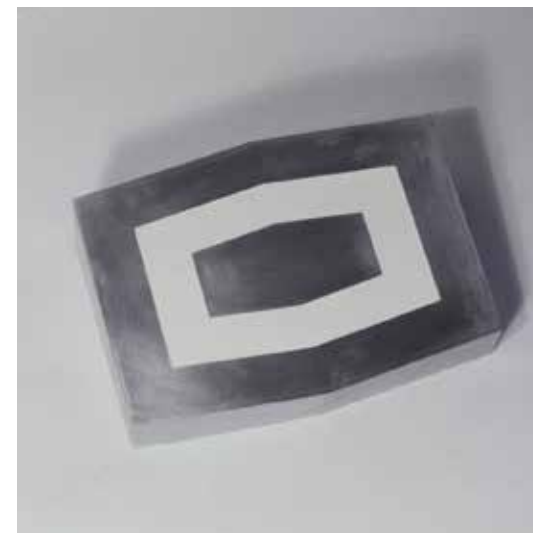
It is in my person and in my taste for natural sciences that I want to explain and clarify my work, but I sometimes feel that the rational explanatory model that I use is a weak point, not because it is difficult to articulate, which it is, but because *I lock myself into* a specific working method, away from a more intuitive seeing. Concepts take over and prohibit other ways of seeing.

So, how do I connect my work to a more intuitive seeing? How do I deploy a strategy so that my work can be more diffuse? How do I free myself from my compulsion to justify my method?

I know I have to take a step, but I don't know in which direction. Years ago I went from working with metal and plaster (picture) and drawings (picture) to working with



Wall-Floor-Relation
1998



No Title
zinc and plaster, 1998

clay. I wanted to give my work a more physical, bodily presence, away from the constructivism that I used and in which I felt locked. Now I have to do the same and make a new next step. But I don't know in what direction. It is a fear to let go.

I have a small poster from a dance company: Virpi Pahkinen & Fredrik Quiñones and this embodies what this is about: dance as physical and intuitive activity. I want my intuition to play a bigger role in my work, instead of giving in to compulsive explanatorily control. I seek wordlessness, and a more diffuse content matter. Likewise, I want to work more like a composer, we don't expect them to justify every single note they write down. I have to put more trust in my intuitive seeing.

20140617

I use art to create my own free zone. Being in my studio offers me the opportunity to create such a place; it is obvious that I feel a strong need for it. Andrea Fraser says it like this: "*For me, being an artist is about having a relative free space where I can engage, reflect and investigate things that I'm really concerned about.*" (Thornton, 33 artist in 3 acts, p 298)

20150119

I want to get away from a (work) setting where I provide a given interpretation for my work.

20150122

I am making a sky. Subtle color shifts from blue to white-pinkish. (picture) I don't know whether it is good or not, if it holds in the end, but I want to make it.

20150316

My horizon drawings are explicitly minimalistic.



Horizon

soft pastels on board, 2014



Self Portrait

wet clay, 2014

I have discarded my self portrait. (picture) It was pathetically large (42 cm), I have waited too long, I had a haircut, and during the process I decided to change course—which in itself is OK, but I sort of lost interest in what I was doing. And, instead of making an introvert self portrait, I got stuck on the outside. It is better to start all over. Sometimes this happens: I can't get going with the work I want to make, or I lose interest and all that is left is a dead end road.

Back to My Project

20150506

Finally back to work with this project, after more than a year working with drawings and commissioned portraits for Trelleborgs Museum. This might have created some emotional and conceptual distance which I hope will have its benefits.

I will change direction.

I am working at a solo exhibition at Trelleborgs Museum where I plan to show large drawings and some large sculptures. Some of the drawings are akin to the drawings I have described earlier in this text, but transferred to a much larger scale. For the sculptures I plan a different technique. I have been thinking how to circumvent my habitual way of working—pictures as a basis for sculptures in clay—and came up with the option to work at a much larger scale. This automatically will bring another material into focus. With ceramics I am bound to the size of a kiln to fire my work; at home I have a kiln of 60 cm in height, for larger works I have to go to a specialised studio. But these large ceramic sculptures bring complexities handling them and they are very heavy in weight. So, I have been thinking of using papier-mâché and metal netting, which will allow me to work on a much larger scale without the problems I encounter using clay. Hopefully this method will bring other opportunities as well.

The sculptures will refer to human vulnerability and as before I will use pictures from victims of war. (picture) For this new series I will refer to French soldiers from WWI who



From the series ***War against War!***
ceramics and pigments, 2011, life-size



Sketch in wet clay
2015

where severely wounded in their faces but survived - "*Gueules Cassées*" or "*Broken Faces*". However, I will try to move away from a concrete and direct translation from my reference material. Instead I want to make large scale, more or less abstract 'heads' and I will try to mimic burned flesh with mixed techniques using textiles, plaster, papier-mâché, stearine and wax, inspired by Berlinde de Bruyckere and Magdalena Abakanowicz.

I will start with small-scale sketches to investigate this new approach.

I find it extremely difficult to let go of the way of working I am so accustomed to. Working with a small sketch I should just put down some rough lines and go to the next sketch, but my urge to detail is very strong and hard to resist. (picture) The next sketch will be more abstract.

Making small scale sculptures brings forth working with detail; I tend to go for these details and make it a sculpture in its own right, but this sketch should be no more of a hint of where to go. Yet, I simply love detailing these small sculptures. Details bring such an intimacy.

20150507

Working with a new and abstract sketch, I enter immediately a realm of fear: How to proceed? Can I do this? Can it be interesting in any way? As a result I am postponing my work, procrastinating, trying to find ways out, surfing the internet, writing.

I took a picture of a shrub (common juniper) since it reminded me of the form I want my abstract sculpture to become (picture) and I am mounting small pieces of clay onto stones so they can stand upwards, (picture) pointing me in the direction I want to go. I will try different options: more or less away from an actual head. It will be a form that is not a head but is referring to one, a form that is balancing and vulnerable, it can fall—and fail.

Keywords: Battered, Stabbing, Mutilating, Patching up—this piece has a relation to "*Self-portrait battered*" from 2011.



Sketch in wet clay
2015



Tandpärlemannen
ceramics and pigment, 2014, life-size.
Collection Trelleborgs Museum.

20150508

I realise that this abstract stone-like sculpture is not what I want. It should be more distinct. My piece can be abstract or distorted, but I think I want a more face-like appearance. I don't want it to become nonfigurative.

20150511

Let's face it: I am using a method of finding form. I might continue to develop the abstract form another time.

20150512

Once again I am into making sculptures of war victims, "Broken Faces" or 'gueules cassées'. (picture) These man are gravely wounded in what can be seen as the most visual, vital and basic part of their identity, in the area where this identity displays itself most clearly to the outer world, the part that is most difficult to hide: the face. Their outer appearance is severely distorted, sometimes obliterated; these wounds reach so deep that we no longer can get a clear image of the identity of its bearer, these wounds have thereby changed their identity. (Or do we have to speak of their former identity?) We do not longer perceive a persons face, but his wounds. *This person has become raw flesh*. Flesh that inexorably visualises and reminds us of our own vulnerability and death. Something we don't want to bear witness to. We turn our gaze, leave the wounded self with its suffering and continue with our own lives. (Van Eecke, 2007).

My main question is: Why am I once again involved in this type of content matter? What is my fascination with these wounded men? It both fascinates and intimidates me, it confronts me with my own fear. Susan Sontag says that we are fascinated by these images because it reminds us of how brutal reality can be, while at the same time we are relieved because we realise that it is not us who is the victim, but the Other, we are only spectators paralysed by this drama. "*So far as we feel sympathy (...with the victims...), we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence.*" (Sontag, p 91) *How can I translate this into sculpture?*



Common Juniper



Abstract sculpture
dry clay, 2015

20150513

A new attempt, after the sketch that didn't become abstract at all. I start sort of rough, with the intention to make a piece that becomes more abstract. But where I find it no problem to make an abstract drawing, I find it extremely difficult to make a sculpture that is abstract. This is my third attempt of a portrait of a guy who lost his lower jaw, using pictures of different stages in the surgical reconstruction of his face. Until now I used the picture where the reconstruction is completed, but for this new piece I will use the picture where the wound is fresh and one is looking at a gaping bloody hole in place where used to be a jaw. This offers me the opportunity to work very detailed with specific parts of the face and make *undefined meat* on other parts. It will heighten the contrast between normal, undamaged parts of the face and parts that are obliterated. (picture) By doing this, I create a figurative sculpture with a part that has an abstract notion in it, both formally and metaphorically. My '*abstraction*' needs to have a function. I find it hard to make it just for the sake of it.



From the series **War against War!**
ceramics and pigments, 2011, life-size

20150518

So, after a week of sketching I have decided to use a sculpture I have made in 2011 as a basis for my first BIG HEAD. A portrait from "War against War!" ("Krieg dem Kriege!"). This too is a portrait of a man who has lost his lower jaw, but they have 'restored' his face with the knowledge of plastic surgery from the early 19th Century. This face doesn't look devastated at first glance, but is clearly mutilated if you take a second look. It is not as abstract as I thought I would go, but I consider this to be my best option. Let's see where I land.

20150519

I woke up last night in fear that I would not be able to fulfil this project. My daughter came in and woke me up and immediately I started to think about all the possible difficulties with this project and that I cannot deliver an exhibition in four months. I feel pressed to produce a good and interesting show. Now that I am awake, it is not as bad as I thought, but it gives an indication that I am getting nervous for my show. Do I have enough time? Can I deliver? Will the chosen technique hold?



From the series
Broken Faces | Gueules Casées
ceramics and pigments, 2015, life size

I plan to make a sculpture using a framework of metal netting on which I will mount paper mass with the help of cloth. I came to think of paper mass since I saw my colleague sculptor Jone Kvie using this material to produce sculptures that are both thin and light-weight. (picture) I will make a paper mass of toilet paper and wallpaper glue and add plaster into this mixture. After some experiments and working with a small scale commission for Trelleborgs museum, (picture) I know that I can add up to 50% of plaster into my paper mass. The result is a papier mâché that dries faster, is much stronger so you can carve in it and has an almost white surface, which makes it is easy to paint.

I make a rough form in metal netting which I enforce with steal wire. (picture) On top of this metal I mount a glass fiber mat with smaller holes than the metal netting to make the paper mass stay in place. (picture) For this purpose I also use jute cloth.

20150601

I have started to cover my piece with jute cloth. (picture) Until now I have used jute to mount the paper mass on my sculpture, but now I want see how far I can go applying just jute cloth on my piece and seal it later with stearine.

I kind of like the expression. It looks freer and more remote from what I usually do. (picture) I noticed that I started to mimic clay with my paper mass, but that was not my intention—with jute I don't stand a chance of coming even close to the expression of clay and that is the whole objective for this project. As a result of working with jute this face looks 'patched up', and that is what I was after.

20150605

I have worked much faster than I thought I would, partly due to working with jute cloth instead of paper mass; I am nearly finished and that is fantastic and comforting. I means that I will have time for a second BIG HEAD and all the rest.



Jone Kvie



Woman from the Bronze Age
paper mass, metal wire, plaster,
pigments, 2014
Collection Trelleborgs Museum



The making of **BIG HEAD**



20150715

Back in the studio.

I have finished my BIG HEAD, went on a holiday, made "**Monolith**", a fully abstract sculpture that is referring to a head that I will show at my exhibition in Trelleborg—and now I am ready for a new piece, another BIG HEAD.

I am very pleased with the first BIG HEAD, it really changed my way of working/ thinking and this change happened unexpectedly, unannounced and in the blink of an eye. I tried to speed up the process of making my sculpture and applied jute with only glue—no paper mass—and suddenly I saw the possibilities for a change. This time I listened to my guts and continued working with jute instead of the intended method, with a surprising result. I like the expression of this sculpture very much: It holds a feeling of vulnerability while the size makes it impressive and massive. (picture)

For the new BIG HEAD II will roughly sketch in clay to determine the form. No detailed eyes, ears or noses. But for some reason it is easier to let go of all these details, they don't matter anymore since I cannot make any details with jute cloth and glue. The detailing of these sculptures takes place on another level where the individual threads play a role and the materiality of jute cloth comes with it's own expression.

- **Sidetrack** -

"Monolith - The Fundamental Internal Imbalances That Come with Making a Choice"

Its previous title was: "*How to Squeeze a Circle Into a Square*" - a theme that I sometimes use in my photographic work and in my drawings. It stands for a self that is forced into a situation where it doesn't really fit. This self, this person, feels out of place, alienated—and out of balance.

It is a work that I have carried with me a long time and is related to one of the first drawings that I made with the intent of creating art. Recently, I worked again with the



BIG HEAD
size and detail



theme under the title "*Pondus*", where the form stands for a seemingly powerful entity that appears to be self-contained and self-secure. Alas neither 'Pondus' nor 'Monolith' are self-secure. It has also references to the abstract 'stone' sculpture as described above.

As the title suggests, this is a work about Balance, or rather imbalance. It tries to find a stable ground, but needs support to keep up straight.

This balancing materialised during the making of this form: I wanted the curvature—the tonus—to be *just right*. Working with this form I thought of making a perfect curve—but that would make the process complicated beyond repair: does a perfect curve even exist? Maybe in a mathematical, Platonic world, but hardly in the reality of my studio where I make this form by hand and Jesmonite (a water-based composite material comparable to plaster) is applied by hand-tools and not by a machine. The desired horizon of perfection is projected further and further away as work proceeds and the form improves; but it is a perfection that never can be reached.

So where and when do I stop? Should I even strive after perfection? Art is not an exercise in Gymnastics where you get 10 points for a perfect Maltese and 9.2 points if you happen to curl your toes. It is up to the artist to decide what is right and wrong in the artwork before the judges come. Art is about convincing the spectator—perfection is subordinate, if it even matters at all.

This form is a monolith, a "lonely stone" (Greek: monos - μόνος = alone, lonely and lithos - λίθος = stone). You think of it as a big rock, but it can also be a head, or, if you want: an egg, or an egghead. It is an introvert, seclusive, solitaire and maybe passive form, but it thinks it has potential. It is here that thinking and above all doubting takes place. It is a work about my personal vulnerability.

In a perfect Platonic world no doubt would exist, right and wrong would be clear—the extremist, the one who doesn't doubt, is born.



Pondus
charcoal on paper, 2012



Monolith - The Fundamental Internal Imbalances That Come with Making a Choice
Jesmonite, styrofoam, 2015, 300 x 200 cm

20150729

Can I make such a simple conclusion as this: due to traumatic experiences with psychoses as adolescent, I am inclined to work with artistic themes involving human vulnerability, as a form of recuperation, with the intention of healing myself. These wounded men stand for wounded souls and more specifically, my wounded soul. Due to my psychoses *I have to* make these kinds of works to heal myself. I work in my studio *to keep in balance*.

Louise Bourgeois states: "*I have been to hell and back. And let me tell you, it was wonderful.*" (Bourgeois, 1996) I think this is a deeply cynical and disgraceful remark, yet I think it is interesting since Bourgeois implicitly claims that her work is of a very personal nature.

But even before my psychoses, my work had an autobiographical touch. Formally it was abstract and dealt with contrasts: open-closed; dense-loose; introvert-extravert; convergent-divergent—oppositions that still play a role up to this day, at least in my abstract works. Nevertheless, despite their formal appearance, my early works were linked to how I felt during my adolescence and early adulthood: socially uncomfortable, inhibited and insecure. These early pre-psychotic works are, just as my later works, personal and have autobiographical elements; they were exploring my psyche and sexuality. Subjects that I found too difficult and shameful to articulate in spoken language became accessible working with visual art, through a non-verbal form. Now, after 30 years of working with visual arts, I can articulate these contents in spoken language. Art has made me grow as a person.

20151102

I realise that I cannot finish this project if I don't make a sculpture in wood, as first intended. As it is now, without a decent conclusion, this project is watering down, from a concentrated and focussed start to a text diverging into various elements and topics. Although this mirrors the way I work, I need to scrutinise it and refocus. I have achieved my goal—working in a different way and in a new material and this text follows and



Louise Bourgeois

articulates this process—but I do think it is more satisfying to complete the circle and finish my project as I intended from the start.

20151125

Carving in wood is new to me. I have carved in stone and in sand (picture) but never in wood. I started yesterday and already destroyed one chisel by striking a hidden nail. In a way cutting in wood is similar to carving in sand. In both techniques you initiate the work by building up a volume in which you start to carve. With sand sculpture you compress sand in a mould, making a block in which you can carve. With wood you glue together bits and pieces until you have a block of a desirable size. Stone is more predetermined, you have to take as it is—or choose another block.

I have started cutting and I think it is going very slowly. I have to work my way in. Clay is much more flexible and receptive. This slow process might become interesting!

It actually never comes into my mind to make art that is not object based. I love the handmade artefact. I think that the non-material based works of Tino Sehgal—social interventions with an art public (for example *These Associations*, performed at Tate Modern)—can be very interesting, since they are so radically different from object-based arts, but I could never make works like that. It is simply out of my reach. I find myself belonging to a generation of artists who are concerned with the object in whatever kind of form. I realise that I belong to a group who is criticised by a new generation of artists. *I am* a white middle class male artist sitting in my enclosed studio, staring at my belly button, looking for new ways in my process and I realise that if at rare occasion a new insight reveals itself, *it is a small change*, maybe relevant for me, locally, but irrelevant in a bigger international art context. Nevertheless, I seem to be able to make work that is appreciated and can touch people on an emotional level and for me that is very relevant and enough reason to continue with my object-based work.

Just as it is with sand sculpture and stone: you have to dare to go in, make progress inwards. Penetrate. Now that I have gotten to know my tools, I experience this carving, cutting, infiltrating, invading and penetrating work to be cathartic. It triggers some kind



Sand Sculpture
ca 1997



Working in wood

of relief. When I worked in stone many years ago, I had the same experience. I thought that it was the physical work that made me have this feeling, but maybe it was the act of penetrating and invading (this new territory) that induces this feeling. Interesting. I compare it to my drawing, where the actual physical work at its best transcribes an emotional condition that takes form as drawing, as if the act of drawing releases an emotional energy that transfigures into my drawing, transcendentally visualising this energy.

20151127

For some reason I think it is difficult to work my way into this sculpture. I use my clay model (picture) which I am basically copying to my block of wood. On my model I see where all the facial features are, where the nose starts and ends, how wide it has to be and the exact location in relation to the eyes, eyebrows and mouth. So when I transfer these points to my block of wood, I know exactly where to cut, but, for one reason or another I am still at the surface and hesitate to go in. I think it has to do with the fact that there is no return if you make a wrong cut, which makes me cautious. Clay is much more flexible and easy to correct.

20151130

What, for Heaven's Sake am I doing? I am cutting in wood, but every fifth minute or so I'm drawn to the computer. The computer that I am hooked to, that takes a far too big a space in my daily activity. This is modern life: if I only have contact with my Facebook and Instagram accounts and if I can read my newspaper, I feel save. I long for deepening my work, I long for being in the studio, having time for reflection and contemplation—but instead I fritter away my days in a Facebook-incubator, checking my status all the time. That is what my sad days are about. I am sick and tired of it. My lack of concentration is certainly increased by the slow process of cutting in wood, which takes even more time since I run away from it. I am procrastinating and postponing. I seem not to be too interested in cutting this portrait in wood. But I am also insecure about how to proceed: will I cut away too much? Will I be able to make a good sculpture at all? This is my first piece in wood. Will I allow myself to fail?



What I actually want to do in my studio is: ***sit, focus, think, draw and write!*** Instead I am doing this painfully slow handicraft of cutting in wood. What is interesting is that I am doing sort of the opposite to what I long for... but that's nothing new to me. Frustrating.

If I want to finish this project with Börje Lindberg, as well as the accompanying text, I need to make this piece in wood—or decide to quit for a reason. Nevertheless, mechanically copying an existing sculpture doesn't come near to the artistic renewal that I had in mind. I will try to see it as a study, as an expansion of my artistic repertoire, while reflecting on it in this text. Maybe then this woodcarving becomes meaningful, because up till now I am only struggling with a new technique.

20151201

I feel serious about quitting this sculpture. I have put a lot of energy in it and I think it is frustrating that it never will be good. It will remain clumsy and amateurish. I know that I cannot expect too much from working in a new technique for the very first time and I don't think that I ought to produce a masterpiece right away, but while woodcarving in itself might be interesting, I certainly cannot find new perspectives in copying a sculpted head that I first made in clay. This might be a wrong path. I can persist, convincing myself that I have to finish a project that I have started—just for the sake of it—but that's a waste of energy and a conservative attitude. I would rather focus on things I want to do. Progress can come from an insight that a chosen path is wrong.

This doesn't mean that I will stop working in wood altogether. I feel triggered by cutting in wood and I just got the beginning of a feeling for the tools, but I think that copying an existing sculpture is not the right way to go. If I want to work in wood, it might be better to have a proper block of wood and cut it en taille direct, just as it comes and see where it leads me, just as I do with some of my drawings. That could open up new perspectives.

So I come to the perfect solution for a failed wood sculpture: put it in the fire!



Conclusion

This text describes the course of my artistic process over a period of nearly two and a half years. It started with that I invited the Swedish artist Börje Lindberg to make his portrait and became a project that I framed as artistic research as I took my second course Artistic Research at Konstfack in Stockholm. In the beginning I had quite a clear vision of this project and text but soon it started to meander, becoming more and more complex as time past by and other projects appeared, thence forming a comprehensive overview of my artistic process.

My main objective for this project became a question of how to renew my process and to find new artistic paths. For years I have used a working method of referential appropriation combined with mimesis, as I used photographs from archives as a basis for making conceptual narrative sculpture, contextualised in various settings and themes. As the contextualisation of my series changed, my method of appropriation did not. So, even if my series have a wide scope of different attitudes and topics, resorting under the common denominator of human vulnerability, these series came about through appropriation of the works of others, i.e. foremost photographs of unknown photographers from archives. My intention to make a wooden sculpture based on a clay model, as I did last month, can be seen as a metaphor for how I have perceived my work in the last years: making sculpture on a given theme, based on pictures and mimesis as working method, transforming one material (photographs) into another (sculpture). But I am doing myself an injustice if I narrow it down to this extent, since my method of referential appropriation and contextual framing enabled me to make conceptually clear bodies of works which I consider to hold onto for years. Meanwhile I could refine my technical skills and maintain my mental stability. The downside however is a hint of a habitual and entrenched working process that I reiterate to feel safe. Through this reiteration I experience artistic blocks and I would like to challenge myself to release them.

During my working with Börje Lindberg I pondered over the application of sketching as

a method and later in this project I worked more elaborately with sketches in order to decide in which direction I should turn for making BIG HEAD. I discussed the meaning of sketching in my work and found that if I start with a preconceived idea and try to work 'freestyle', the chance for something radically new is quite small. Preconceived ideas call forth a mindset that is very difficult to get around. Only if I can dismiss them is there a possibility for something new to happen. Hence, I cannot force myself into new ways of working and neither can I anticipate it—the break-through with BIG HEAD was unanticipated—I can only create space for things to happen and be on my guard for signs of ignoring my artistic intuition.

Appropriation is like mimesis an artistic strategy used by many artists.

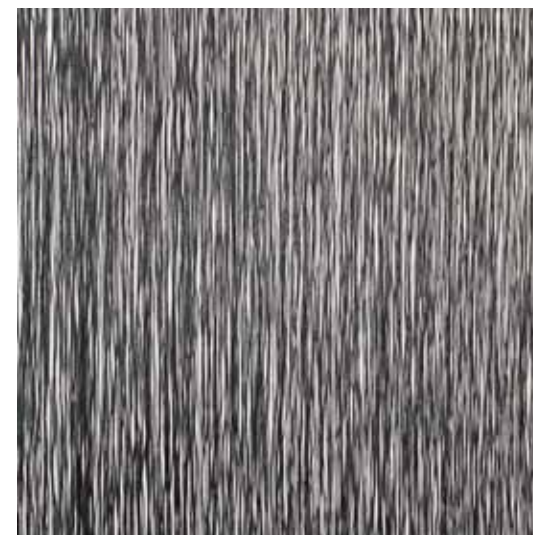
My sculptures come about through appropriation and mimesis, and are thereby referential to an outer world. In contrast, my drawings are introspective and non-referential, they come about through meditation and an intuitive internal seeing. In my text "Rationality, Intuition and Emotion, exploring an artistic process", that is published in the Journal for Artistic Research (JAR3), I have articulated the relations between my drawings and sculptures. I would like these two worlds to meet, which could be a topic for further exploration.

A major part of this text goes to my drawings, which come about through an intuitive internal seeing. In this I feel inspired by and a kinship to Agnes Martin who says that she has turned her back to the world. I don't always go as far as Martin in my drawings, as they at times have a clear reference to the horizon and sky for example, while others are non-referential to a visual outer world. An example of this kind of non-referential drawing that I have in mind can be seen in a series that I call "*Människans dagar*". ("*The Life of Mortals ... is Like Grass*" — Psalm 103:15) (pictures) These drawings are diffused in their content through deliberate and explicit minimalism.

As I suspect that the conceptual framing that I use for my sculptures provokes artistic blocks and gives rise to a specific reading of my work. Therefor I would like to diffuse the attitude that I have towards my sculpture, using a more intuitive seeing to replace strict mimesis. A new way for committing sculpture could be to make portraits by heart,



Människans Dagar
charcoal on board, 2014
overview and detail



as I did for my commission for Trelleborgs Museum (picture) in order to find new ways of artistic articulation. This too could be a topic for further exploration.

Even though I had an artistic break-through during this project by making BIG HEAD, a sculpture in a different technique and expression, a new working method is far from consolidated. Furthermore, I have to learn to accept *and appreciate* that changes in my process come very slowly.

At first I framed this project as artistic research (or research with artistic means), but during its course, I realised that for me the core lies in a writing that offers a complementary articulation of my work, in addition to my drawing and sculpture. Through my involvement with this project, writing has shown to be an additional channel in which I express myself artistically, *while I gain knowledge about my process.*

This text ends up being a condensed. As I started condensed, it expanded and meandered over my process *whilst forming it.* As I use intuitive internal seeing for my drawings, I used introspection to conceive this text, resulting in a very slow process that reached over years, creating new paths and loose threads of which some are discarded, while others have lead to new beginnings. At some point I considered discarding this whole project as I was loosing focus, but I gathered enough energy to continue, to push my journals beyond this point and developed this text into a complete essay.

This project has started with a longing for something new, it carried me through different attitudes and methods, making me realise that I fear to let go, to lose track and derail. I want to reach for a new breath, a renewal of my process that has a breath of my own. Moving away from my method of appropriation might be a good first step to unleashing my artistic blocks.

"Is it ultimately a question of self-image that determining idea one has made for oneself of what has to be accomplished and experienced so that one can approve the life one has lived?" (Amadeu de Prado in Night Train to Lisbon)



Man from the Stone Age
ceramic and pigment, 2014, life-size
Collection Trelleborgs Museum

Gert Germeraad

Januari, 2016

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