

DIANNA FRID: WORDS FROM OBITUARIES

JUNE 14 – JULY 19, 2014

Language for the Visual Arts functions quite often as a mediator, external to the works, as a tool that paves the way in support of dialogue towards unraveling the pieces on show.

But if language itself is material, as in poetry or if it becomes part of an artwork as in the case of Dianna Frid's current work, then the mediatory role described just now is of no use. If we were to approach the works on view as language's naked scaffolding tool, then we wouldn't grasp anything in the least, despite the reverberation of words.

Dianna Frid shows two work cycles here at Alpineum Produzentengalerie: "Words from Obituaries" (as is the title of the show) and "And Death does Not Destroy (After Lucretius)", which she especially made for the exhibition here in Switzerland.

An obituary is a way of commemorating the life of a recently deceased person. In 2002 Dianna started collecting obituaries from *The New York Times*, which she noticed were written in a consistent style across the board, regardless of the author. The paper employs an entire staff to write about public figures, some who are household names, some less so. People, whose lives were somewhat strange or eccentric, sometimes remarkable and moving and other times dark and terrifying.

Out of this continuing interest for this form of eulogy she gradually began to archive them according to a typology of professions and grouped each category under a different color.

So for example there are the people whose lives were dedicated to language - poets, novelists, publishers or linguists: those received the color pink. Scientists like astronauts and physicists are green, artists, designers and dancers, musicians and architects would be represented in orange and so on.

This seemingly strict concept does not remain in the coolness of its own system - on the contrary. From each of the obituaries Dianna chose a fragment - three or four words, a sentence maybe.

With delicate and exquisite craftsmanship - and that's exactly the point where language starts to leave its cold frame - she combines canvas, paper, graphite and thread to make the pieces presented here. They are half object and half picture in the way they feel, they are warm, they were born out of the making. With great

care the words are sewn into the dark and nobly shining surface of the graphite skins, letter next to letter.

Those fragments of speech may offer more than the entire memoirs they are derived from. They create moments of a peculiar poetry and, detached from their originals, the words assume an enigmatic meaning. But knowing where these words come from we may not succeed in disconnecting them entirely from their source. It happened to me. Words are just words, we might think, but if they words came from a manual for a new fridge or a printer, they would not have repeatedly touched and intrigued me.

In "Words from Obituaries" we start to play with the gaps of biographies unknown to us. The life or parts of it are inevitably attached to those threads of colored yarn, which become the fine connection to a past life about which we begin to speculate..

Memory, as it becomes a time capsule, often has a poetic sense and so does a time intensive activity such as sewing. This is my assertion: the time capsule forms because one dedicates oneself to one single focused activity; because one opposes acceleration in an act of tender revolution. Time passes nevertheless, but differently, more slowly. May the slow trickling of time be tied to a rather subjective perception, it offers an opportunity to give recollection some space. With the "Words from Obituaries" this happens in two respects: language is recollection because it always traces and records, in "Words from Obituaries" though, someone who once was alive and is no longer, is given back a piece of language, a moment of speech.

In the work titled "And Death does Not Destroy (After Lucretius)" we see yet again words. They are woven so thoroughly into the flow of vertical graphite lines that they can't be distinguished from the forms and colors surrounding them. If we didn't know the shape of letters it would be easier to see them as the mosaics of an intricately woven carpet.

But we do recognize those signs as letters, so we begin to read. Requiring some effort maybe at the beginning, and even with hesitation, we slowly find the rhythm and the length of the words and as we grasp the meaning of them, they start to slide forward and away from their holding panels.

An act of curious transformation takes place when language detaches itself from the objects whose consti-

tuent part they nevertheless remain. It is this vibratory act that the text, no matter if its known to us or not, starts to resound in the echo chambers of our associations.

This fragment is part of the poem “On the Nature of Things” (de Rerum Natura) by the Roman poet Lucretius who lived between 99 to 53 BCE. It is a retelling of the nature teachings of the Greek philosopher Epicurus. While the philosopher, who had lived 300 years earlier, delivered the ideas, it was Lucretius who gave these ideas form in a poem.

Out of the 7500 verse long poem, Dianna chose a passage that addresses the materiality of language. For Lucretius words are like atoms, which won't be destroyed in the moment of death but merely rearranged to create new form. He makes a connection between words, the constituent parts of language, and atoms, the constituent parts of matter.

While Lucretius transformed the core message of the poem, namely the constant flow and recombining of things alive into the craft of the poetry, Dianna interlaced the chosen text with the craft of textile.

This is by no means arbitrary. Text and textile have the same etymological meaning; both words are derived from the Latin word “texere” meaning to weave.

Another way of inscription, inscription onto architecture itself, is suggested by graphite membranes applied directly onto the walls. This piece, “Evidence of the Material World #5” is one of an ongoing series of works. In this piece made site-specifically for the Alpineum, the space is charged by the membrane's wordless and dark presence. At the same time the work dissects the walls, and, as if held by two (giant) brackets, the text/textile pieces speak out from out of their center.

Dianna Frid interleaves seemingly traditional textile techniques – which embrace the sensual presence of material and the devotional act of embroidery – with the intellectual texture of words. In the recognition of the text, the words depart from their lexical storage, as we begin to bestow meaning we think we recognize in them. That's what I love and fascinates me so about Dianna's work.

Text: Monika Müller, 2014

> Next event:

Saturday June 14, 4pm

A conversation with Dianna Frid and Monika Müller (in English)

> Next exhibition:

The Artist As Producer 2

curated by whatsapp.nl

August 30 – September 27, 2014

Opening: Saturday August 30, 11am,

in conjunction with Kunsthoch Luzern

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