

## You and Me

What is a coincidence? What is destiny? Is it really necessary to differentiate between the two? Two factors that apparently had nothing to do with each other, initiated the project <You and Me> which Maria Odilia Ostertag-Allwicher has undertaken with great perseverance every day since 1996.

While visiting the USA, she came across a specially fine store selling artist materials, located near the Art Institute, which she had just visited only a few hours before her return to Europe. With her last dollars she purchased a number of design markers because she was impressed by the large selection and the variety of colors. These markers were actually not necessarily meant for artists but for architects and graphic designers.

Back in Switzerland she had to cure her flu. This gave her a chance to experiment with the markers. They soon became her preferred tools, her passion. Friends gave her additional names and addresses of shops in New York where further supplies could be purchased. Thereafter the artist discovered COPIC Markers® in Zurich, which she still uses every day.

In 1996 the artist and her partner, Albert, made yet another discovery in the United States. While reading the breakfast menu and not feeling tempted by the choices offered, they decided to try a bowl of oat meal. This discovery turned out to be an ingenious one. Back in Switzerland Albert had a tooth problem and was unable to eat bread. From then on the artist prepared oat meal every morning, putting some of it into a Tupperware dish for Albert to take along to work. As a time filler, before Albert left the house, she took the markers and started drawing on small slips of paper. She dropped the drawings into the "brown bags" for Albert, as if to say: food for mind and body all in one.

After a few days, Albert started to write comments on the back of the paper. A sort of new dialogue started a "work in progress", which was exhibited for the first time in 1999. In 2003 the <You and Me> project took a new dimension with the <Daily's>. The paintings were laser-copied and mounted on identically sized wooden boards, then lacquered, each one showing a text on the back - and became "Multiples". At times, Albert would write a message to Odilia first, and let her paint the answer, instead of trying to clarify in writing a more or less subconscious painted message by the artist. At first, the two got involved in a purely private dialogue. As time went by, the "Multiples" were presented (and sold) in galleries – and the dialogue became public.

Art in some way or other means to go public with a personal thought. For the concept of <You and Me> this certainly holds true. The viewers perceive the paintings as a token of a private relationship and as an example and model of a genuine partnership. This might be the reason for the intensive emotions which prevailed in the first exhibition. The confidence in the dialogue with the partner is, of course, based on a clear artistic concept, but knowing about the imponderables of any human relationship, it is free from any conceptual patterns.

Today the public demands the emancipation of the artist as an individual in an anonymous society. Maria Odilia's independence and strength comes quite naturally from within, from her inner self. Her work is often inspired by coincidental perceptions. As a result, the <Daily's> are like an integral part of her creative art. She makes no difference between free art and applied art. For example, no-thing could keep her from participating in the <BankArt> displayed in the streets of Zurich in the summer of 2001.

She painted benches which are a beautiful addition to her communicative art. She never lets herself be constrained in her work by prevailing trends, nor does she feel compelled to subordinate her art to an image that may have been established in the public at large. The inexhaustible controversy about the antagonism of figurative or abstract art, respectively, the many ways to express art between these two extremes, do not influence her, since she instinctively chooses either figurative or abstract images, according to her instant mood.

Her work does not specially display unity of structure, but rather that of her attitude. That prevents it from being repetitive like so many other projects that continue with obsession in the same style year after year. Her paintings are like a diary, not describing every day in full, but rather dwelling on an event, an impression, or just by mood ... emphasis alternates from pure perception to a strict constructive statement day after day. The quote on a theatre poster or on a painting – after all, art belongs to her daily life – reminds her of a cultural event, and an object may trigger off memories of unforgettable moments. Without hesitation and with spontaneity she approaches these subjects and it might well be that an anecdotal reminiscence painted with a twinkling eye comes close to kitsch. She has her favorite motives. Occasionally she surprises with constructive works, this just being one of the many ways to express herself. Then again she is all spheres, symbolic at times, the symbols standing for the momentary constellation of the couple. The colors red and blue, the basic colors for a man and a woman, reappear as a leitmotiv. She follows the traces of her memories. In a similar sense, but in another technique, she also uses larger formats: aquarelle drafts are made and then the colors are slightly washed out. The traces of the remaining pigments inspire her and she continues her work with crayon. In both cases the art work unfolds while being painted and not as a preconceived idea.

The <Dailys> depict everyday life. The artist does not hunt for topics. Still, these paintings tell about the highlights of a day. Whatever lies next to her and is at reach, inspires the artist when choosing the motives or the material. An example: The irritating shape of a hanger from the dry cleaners prompts her to form a sculpture as is done with other ordinary materials being recycled. It reminds us of "arte povera" and yet the artist also feels at home with bronze sculpturing. Independent minded as she is, she does not want to be categorized nor squeezed into a pattern.

(Free translation from Martin Kraft's German text)