

## Encounters with the Self

A Conversation with Dorothee Golz

By Sabine B. Vogel

*SBV: You have become well-known with your sculpture „Hollow-World“, which you exhibited in 1997 in the Wiener Secession, and the year after on Documenta X in Kassel. Yet you also work with photography, drawings and panel paintings – how do you understand yourself?*

DG: I see myself as a sculptor, because I think spatially and always leave a lot of space for thoughts, for associations.

*SBV: In your drawings you spread out the individual elements on the plane, unconnected, with a lot of white space in between. Is it the sketchiness, that interests you in the „space for thought“?*

DG: It is an open space between the elements. I don't want to spell things out, but rather let the viewer carry the thoughts through to the end him or herself.



*SBV: But surely the „Hollow-World“ is a formally, and also in terms of its content, closed form?*

DG: Not really, because the elements have not been defined precisely, they intimate experiences, contain forms which cannot be categorised.

*SBV: Is the „Hollow-World“ a metaphor for a situation in life?*

DG: Not so much concretely for a situation in life as for life as such, for the reality we carry within us, which has been shaped by our experiences and the things that have happened to us, and that includes the less concrete things, which we can't describe exactly, but which nevertheless make up our humanity and our reality. It is an encounter between the objective and the subjective, the world of concrete forms and the spiritual reality – an encounter with oneself.

*SBV: You speak about „our“ reality, but it seems to me you mainly thematise the world of women?*

DG: I thematise the world from my own experience and from my perspective as a woman. It is the case that there are more women than men in my images. The men appear in relation to women. When I represent bodies in my drawings, the women are

often painted and carry plasticity and the men are interestingly enough merely sketched in – perhaps men do not have a bodily presence for me in my work. They are more a possible form of existence.

*SBV: In most of your works you have a very spiritual take on the topic of ,reality', yet in the "communication models" of shapes of daily life, in the ,stacking chairs', things get concrete – where do you see the common link?*

DG: I twist the vocabulary of our daily life forms and transpose them to new propositions, which then function as metaphors for interpersonal experiences. To that belongs also the attempt to shape life, to give it a structure.

Precisely my more recent work, things like "Siamese Isolation or my so-called "Life-Sketches", of which I make one each year, deal with the difficulty of realising conceptions or concepts of life. They are often the expression of a hope and contain within themselves their failure. Sharing an experience, and communication an inner conception, and all the difficulties which that produces, this I try to express with these sculptures and spatial installations.



*SBV: How to understand in this context the ,cactuses' that you entitled "I and Myself"?*

DG: Every fake cactus is combined with a small, real cactus plant. It is a duplication of form. These works arose out of the question, which image one creates of oneself, so again a form of encounter with oneself – what does this ,self' consist of? Is it creating itself out of itself, or is it shaped by external influences? Is it a projection of ideas and representations one has of oneself, an aspired ideal or does it correspond to the views of others?

*SBV: Have the digital paintings of renaissance heads and contemporary bodies originated from these questions as well?*

DG: In a sense, yes, because here as well, it is the projection that interests me. If I take a head from a renaissance painting, I take over a portrait which has been formed by the view this painter had of this person, and in the gaze of the renaissance painter the entire attitude of the society of his day is expressed in a certain way, how one saw women back then, or how people wanted to see them. I combine the head from the renaissance portrait with bodies which have a contemporary body language and are wearing contemporary clothing.



I like to cite postures as you can find them in fashion magazines. These pictures have mostly been composed by men, and a variety of images of women is created in the process. It is not at all my personal view which is expressed. It is much more that I play with stereotypes which society places on women. These are women the way men like to see them and the way women would like to be today. It becomes clear, that today we have a much wider spectrum of possible female lives at our disposal than 500 years ago. We can design ourselves. But we also react to the ideas and role concepts in our society.

*SBV: What interests me in this series, is the inwardly*

*directed, or empty, gaze, which is contrasted with the postures and which gives many portraits something bold and provocative...*

DG: ... the impression of provocation really only arises from the combination, because the postures themselves are not exalted. On one hand, you notice that these faces come from a different context, on the other individual aspects or essential characteristics are reinforced. You see, that these women really had a sense of humour, that they were self-conscious, cast a critical eye on the world and will also have been people who would have like to shape their world had that been socially possible – who today would have lived completely different, less confined.

*SBV: ... we don't know exactly ... our view today of the renaissance would imply this,...*

DG: ... at least this is how they were represented in paintings, the painters and likely also society wanted to see women like this: as creates, which do not look into the world and which do not take part actively.

*SBV: You also have some men in this series – do you see a big difference in the representation? Aren't they also more inwardly focused?*

DG: Not so much as the women. Both men in the painting "Footballer" were living around the same time and were portrayed by Memling and Van der Weyden. Both of them were important collectors in addition to their professional and private affairs, so in every sense self-determined individuals in the modern sense. It seems to me, with these images, that they differ far less drastically from contemporary portraits, and this is most clear in the case of Albrecht Duerer, who looks openly out of the picture...



*SBV: ... which you have transformed into a rock star...*

DG: ... yes, who perhaps was the first painter or man, who so openly made styling, self-representations visible and with that made the free self-determination of human beings a topic. The time was ready for the self-conscious gaze out of the picture. But that was only true for the men. For women such a self-representation would have been unthinkable. We are in no way really irritated by the cool leather jacket, as is the case with the modern dressed women's portraits. From Duerer's self portrait modern mind radiates – someone who has shaped his own life to an extraordinary extent. At that time, women still had a road of hundreds of years ahead of them. In distinction to the men, 500 years ago the image and self-

conception of women was far removed from what it is today. It tries to create a sense of that.



*SBV: I'd like to touch upon your 'panels', which you produce using a complex procedure?*

DG: I didn't want to paint on canvas, as I am not a painter and painting is not my topic. I was concerned to find a background which similar qualities to paper, and which gives the drawings a stronger presence. The carrier is for me not a means to an end, but has significance in itself which should be perceived. Here my claims as sculptor come through. After many experiments I came to these 'panels', cushion-like think plates with rounded edges and several layers of priming coat.

*SBV: The plates strike me not so much as paper but more like a wall?*

DG: That is an important point because I don't like the limitation of space, also not of a canvas or sheet of paper and want to achieve – even in the case of two-dimensional drawings – a radiance, a reaching into space. In this way I came to the idea of the wall drawings, in which I let the wall become an element in the work. I bring plasticity and the graphical in dialogue by the reaction between the drawings, which are applied directly to the wall, and the semi-circular protrusions. These works have no boundary, but correspond to everything else that is on or fixed to the walls.

[JS: dazu suche ich noch eine Alternative]. On another level this is connected to the decision for sketchiness, for openness – something which again elaborates itself stronger precisely in my sculptures. The wire objects are meant as three-dimensional sketches cast into space. They are very transparent objects, which I partly cover with glass-fibre laminates and which I sometimes paint. What interests me here is the tension between what is indicated and what is explicitly formulated. As in the panels and drawings my objects have a graphical dimension as well as a dimension of painting, a substantial, embodied one.

*SBV: Is the bodily not anyway a strong theme in all your works?*

DG: Yes, but only in the tension between bodily and incorporeal, hence also the ephemeral in my drawings and objects. This is also related to the fact that we, in our reality and our form of existence, are bodily present but always also as mental beings, who very strongly live in a world of thoughts. The haptic, the visible, world, is not all, it is only a small part of our existence – the far bigger part is there, where we can't take hold of anything. Because of that I always involve space. I see my work as not limited to a square or a definite volume. Therefore I look for ways in which the drawings can step into space, and also how objects can remain open in all aspects for associations, but also can remain permeable as forms.

*SBV: What does 'space' mean to you?*

DG: 'Space' is for me a highly charged and immensely exciting affair. This texture, this density, which I sense between the bodily and the spiritual, the reciprocal interpenetration of these two spheres, that to me is space. Space responds to us not merely with things as such, it responds with our projections, with that, which we have bestowed on things. In the case of my object "This cup is a cup, not a cup" no one will think just of a mundane cup, but of a very specific statement in modern art. Space is that sphere, in which something which originated as an abstract thought and which up until then did not correspond to anything in our mental reality, can acquire a corporeal form, and where we can give physically present things a meaning. It is the place where representations can realise themselves – a place full of possibilities.