

Interview by Barnaby Tidman

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Nina Pettinato has an astonishingly broad range of talents, creating painted works, drawings, and photographs; her paintings alone demonstrate an intriguing mixture of abstract, animal, and landscape-forms. Nina's work will feature in NEU/NOW festival in Vilnius next week, she tells us about her ethereal photographic series Inkubation, shot in a rural area of Southern Germany.

You've said that the photographs in your NEU/NOW submission should be viewed in a numbered order. Do you take photographs with a narrative in mind?

Whenever I start taking pictures there's no explicit idea that I try to approach. The narration unfolds while working with the available image material, especially in the case of long term projects, where I work intensively with the images, viewing them over and over again and combining them countless times on the studio wall.

Do you consider the photographer to be a passive presence (the observer), or an active creator of an image?

For me, the photographer is first and foremost an active observer instinctively tracking everything he's attracted to. If something meaningful becomes manifest in his current surroundings, he tries to catch it intuitively. Later on, every good image is able to transform the passive viewer into a mentally active creator of thoughts and associations. By the means of involving the recipient emotionally the photographic author hits the target.

Moving away from your photographic work for a moment, and looking at the detail of your ink drawings and the abstraction of your painted works: do you see a relationship between the two styles? Perhaps a harmony, or opposition?

Working with the different media of photography, drawing and painting gives me the opportunity to pursue different, sometimes contradictory, strategies of image making. Shifting from one media to another gives space to experiment and enables me to test different media-specific perspectives, since the working process itself differs a lot. In my opinion, an entity consisting of several media matches the complexity of life more than one media would be able to.

Your landscape paintings are quite impressive. Have you had much opportunity to travel and create works? How have these opportunities come about?

Immediately after grammar school I studied natural sciences and, besides the laboratory work, we did a lot of biological and geographical excursions. Dealing with the current topics of life sciences and exploring them on-site has enriched me in many respects, providing me with precious knowledge that I wouldn't want to miss out on.

Could you tell us about the use of both the Italian and German languages in the titles of your works?

In the early sixties my father emigrated from Southern Italy to Germany where he met my mother. Although my two sisters and me have grown up in Germany we have a strong relationship towards Mediterranean history and culture. This multicultural background from time to time leads to Italian image titles.

You've documented your studio and artistic working process in interesting ways ("Serie A", 2006). What role does your studio play in your life? Is it a place to relax? A sanctuary?

I consider artistic ideas, especially at starting points, as somehow vulnerable and fragile. Therefore the studio should be an intimate space providing the opportunity to explore and experiment without any constraint and disturbance. Apart from that rather professional aspect, the studio is an excellent place to have precious, personal conversations as the images often evoke extraordinary thoughts and unexpected statements.