

The Dragon Continues to Sleep Deeply / The Dragon is Awake  
Notes on Marianne Eigenheer

I met Marianne in New York City about 10 years ago.

Maybe less, my memory has become porous.

She came to my home in Brooklyn, where I used to live with my former partner.

I can't remember why she came but the important thing is that she showed up and we ended up having a long conversation that lasted the whole afternoon and was completed with a home-cooked dinner.

She spoke about her experience as an artist, as a woman artist, as a Swiss artist, and how she had survived all those years, teaching, working hard and moving around. We compare experiences. Chile, Switzerland, and New York. We also talked about the art market, how to deal with it, of how to navigate through it. Of how to stay true.

I don't remember more details – again, gray memory - but I do remember her contagious positive energy, almost like a delicate yet powerful, productive and hopeful, empathic punk band. I was deeply impressed by this energy.

Hold on, I think we even talked about her being in NY in the 70 or 80s, of how much it has changed. Did she go to CBGB? If she was in NY at that time for sure she did.

A couple of years later (2017) we met again at the dinner party and re-opening of von Bartha Basel. We chat more, we drink, we celebrate, and we participate in a group photo. Although we met briefly she felt close, like having similar fighting spirit, maybe a similar “fuck you” attitude, yet with manners, always manners. I also remember we discuss meeting again, possibly visiting her studio or home on the following trip, sadly this didn't happen.

Meeting Marianne felt like meeting someone you could trust, someone you could learn from, and share ideas with, it felt like meeting a new friend in the making.

In the following years, I start seeing her work, little by little, here and there. In museum collections and shows, at von Bartha, and on the Internet. I was nicely confused by it, which in my opinion is a great sign of discovering an artist, where you don't really get it at the first, second, or even third encounter.

Simplicity is also complex, and Marianne's work is both.

I was touched –and confused, again in a good way– by her constant experimentation, from drawing to painting on canvas to mural painting to sculptures to text. All this also constantly shifting from the deeply personal (interior world) to the natural references (exterior world). My work deals with abstraction, as a starting point, and later expands into the physical, and social, world. I believe Marianne's work deals mostly with nature, birds, trees, water, life cycles, the elements, and the land, yet then she processes them until they become abstract, or almost abstract, and almost representative, as she said once, she felt comfortable working from the “space in-between” (which I heard her say at the beginning of the only video I found of Marianne giving a lecture on YouTube).

She also reads and writes, constantly connecting with literature and poetry.

This again is another layer, another reason to feel confused, and lost. Yet the more lost I felt (and feel) the more I want to see, the more I want to know, or at least try to understand.

Looking at her drawings reminds me of my drawings, and I compare them as systems.

I see her drawings as studies, signs, language, as an almost infinite alphabet, which can, later on, be organized and reorganized in infinitely different ways. On larger-sized sheets of paper, on canvas, or directly on the wall. Even as sculptures. This alphabet is always the same and, simultaneously, is constantly growing, evolving, and adapting. Expressive and constrained. Flowing back and forward. Between this world and that one. Hers.

Looking at publications has always been a way for me to learn about artists. Even at Art School in Chile in the 90s' magazines and books were fundamental as we didn't have many museums with good collections or places where you could go and look at live art. Anybody lucky enough to travel would bring back a magazine or a catalog, the school's library was also a permanent destination. We photocopied everything.

What my friends and myself were looking for was interesting art from the US and Europe, both historical and contemporary. Due to colonization (historical and contemporary), we naively didn't care much about art from Latin America, which I discovered and learned to respect and love later, ironically enough, living in New York. On top of this most artists we looked for were men. Female artists were almost inexistent. Of course, this has all changed, I evolved, the art world evolved, and the world evolved. Reading the interview (This Confidence That I Am Able to Take a Risk) that is in the new publication one can feel the hard path Marianne took. Coming from Chile, one of the furthest edges in the south of the world, I have also felt that feeling, one of fighting an unequal fight.

As soon as I was invited by Stefan to do a guided tour I started looking online for books. I found a few old ones. I was also sent the new one. And I have been looking at them, reading them (what is in English) since then. The old books (1977, 1983, 1992) are amazing, small little gems, small portals into Marianne's world, mind, and spirit. The new one (2023) is fancy, flashy, colorful, and in English! Looking at all of them one sees continuity, experimentation yet also consistency... photos of drawings, details of them, and then explosions of them, many on a page (could they be the same drawing imaged through many different perspectives? The same/not same drawing repeated as a gesture many times and maybe infinitely?), some of them on a wall, some of them on large sheets of paper, a figure of a man and a woman, or mutations of a man and a woman. Same with animals. Animals not animals. Animal spirits/animal shapes. Even with guns. All sorts of mutations, infinite mutations.

I remember the show at von Bartha – here – in 2019. I remember those wired funny and noisy gun depictions. Are they paintings? Objects? Are they a critique towards men? Towards patriarchy? Or are they simply good jokes? Great puns? Guns that shoot party paper? Money? Guns that shoot the New York School? Guns that shoot happiness? Energy? Guns that shoot good vibes?

I get confused again.

I love them but I don't know why.

I have to look for more. I have to keep looking for more.

Marianne: why do you refer to dragons?

What makes you think of them, sleeping and awaking?

Marianne: it was great to meet you.

I wish we had more time to become real friends.

I wish I had the time to ask you these silly questions.

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Text written for and read at the *finissage* of Marianne Eigenheer's 2<sup>nd</sup> exhibition at Galerie von Bartha, Basel (February 3 – March 25, 2023)