

Hello Els! Tell us a bit about yourself. When did you begin doing art and how did you get started? When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

*I'm born in a family of five kids as the middle child, a dreaming, sweet girl, trying to make everybody happy and always busy drawing and making things. My dad was a gardener and my mom took care of us. She told me I was born with color pencils in my hands. When I thought about my future, I wanted to make people laugh.*

What artists of the past or present have inspired you?

*Artists of the past: Vincent van Gogh, Johannes Vermeer, Alice Neel, Käthe Kollwitz, Caravaggio, Egon Schiele*

*Artists of the present: Marlene Dumas, Paula Rego, Maria Lassnig, Berlinde De Bruyckere, Jenny Saville*

In reflecting back to the start of your artistic endeavor, what is the most useful advice you ever received?

*My dad did not want me to go to art school, but theater school was ok. So, I went to theater school and became a drama teacher and a director, but I kept on drawing. In 1998 I was ready for a break and my husband got a job offer in the USA for four years. And so, we went with our three little children to Augusta, Georgia, ready for some adventure. I did not get a green card, and so I did some unofficial theater work. And beside that I started art classes at Augusta State University. It felt like coming home and all was coming together. I got very good responses on my first steps into painting and the most useful advice I got was to take more classes and go for full graduation. And in 2002 I graduated with only A's. I am still thankful for the education I got there. It created me as a painter and made my world so much more colorful!*

You say in your work you try to capture everyday moments. How do you capture that energy to create your artwork? When do you realize it's the right moment?

*I love to watch people in their daily activities and can lose myself in it. And in response I often get an image with something extra. For example: I am watching hardworking fishermen and see them kissing their fish, am watching an old lady knitting socks and I see the sock change into a flounder, am watching the dirty laundry bag in the nursing home of my mother and see old women wearing that laundry, am watching pieces of wood on the beach and see the tragedy of refugees. Sometimes the journey of my paintings starts with a fabric or a print on it and sometimes with the image I want to present.*

Tell me more about your technique that helps you achieve, as you say "dialogue between what it is about and what it is painted on".

*It started in the last year of my art study at Augusta State University. I was out of canvas and found an empty potato burlap bag. I stretched it on a frame gave it a few layers of gesso*

*and the result was pretty cool. I felt a bit homesick, thought of the Netherlands and ended at Van Gogh's potato eaters. I broke up his composition and put myself in the middle, having potatoes with my imaginary Dutch family. The burlap, the image, my feelings, suddenly it all came together. And from that moment on I started to experiment for more of these combinations. I worked with postbags, lace, burlap, floral and printed cotton, cleaning cloths and even with toilet paper from the Biennale in Venice. It all became the substrate I was painting on. It led to works about reading or writing letters on the postbags which had transported letters all over the world, to little pigs on the burlap bags they need to have in their beds, to fisherwomen wearing lace on lace, to a toilet cleaning lady on toilet paper and so on. These kinds of odd substrates do not work as a smooth canvas and require much more efforts. And during the work a conversation starts between the painting and myself with leads to the definite work. So on beforehand I never know where it will go or where it ends.*

What are some of the tools you use to create a distinct style of artwork?

*As described above I look specifically for the interaction between substrate and the image I am painting. To create this, I mostly use a standard canvas, bookbinder's glue to glue my substrate material on the canvas, a copolymer dispersion to prepare the substrate and charcoal + color pencils for the under sketch, oil paint, a lot of brushes and palette knife for the definite painting.*

What are some real-life situations that inspired your artwork?

*That are situations in the normal world around me, the people I meet and situations I see. For example, my mom died two years ago, and I took care about her in her last years. I did her laundry and collected some of the laundry bags of the nursery home that are used to collect the dirty laundry. In that time, I also learned nursery homes are mainly filled with old women who like to gossip about "the dirty laundry" of the others. That was the start of my series 'Dirty Laundry' and I am still working on that series. Or for example about the piglets, I see regularly on the news how we treat animals in the bio-industry and then think of how we should treat them. And I miss the love, respect and care that they deserve. Combining these thoughts with the burlap bags is becoming then a series. Or, as it went with the lace. Two years ago, I had a studio very close to the harbor in The Hague. On my way to the studio, I crossed by a lot of fishermen and their companies selling fish. Working with fish is a craft and you feel their love for this work, being out on the ocean and fighting with the elements. Experimenting with the lace showed me not only the lace structure clothing of the fisher women, but also their weathered skin, the fish skin and the water of the ocean. Looking for these combinations is a continuous search in the way I look, the image I have in my head and the answer of the underground.*

Your art is very unique. What's the most challenging part of your artistic process? And how do you overcome it?

*Most challenging is to find a working interaction between substrate and the image I want to bring. Not every underground works, but I keep on trying. I do a lot of testing to see how materials work and look, when I glue them or treat them with paint. Often the results after a few days of experimentation find their way to the garbage. And sometimes I have so many ideas that I do not know where to start and it blocks me. Walking along the beach with my dog or watching nature in my backyard helps me then to make decisions. In other words I stepping out of it.*

What is the most recent piece you've enjoyed working on the most?

*The painting 'Little secrets, little lies'. My mom was a very loving and honest women, she did not like to gossip at all and was sometimes very upset about the gossip in her nursery home. I think painting that work was a way to overcome the grieving of her death and at the same time also an homage to her.*

What's next on the horizon for you?

*I mostly go with the flow. But within two weeks I have a big solo exhibition in The Hague. I will step out of the silence period of more than 1,5 year of covid. I am ready for that. And besides that one of my three kids is living in Los Angeles. Going to the US and have a project or an exhibition over there would be the cherry on my cake.*