

"...it is not to give an answer...

it is just to have the people get started with something..."

(The artist Dagmar Pachtner, in an interview in 2012 in Breda, the Netherlands at the opening of one of her exhibitions¹)

Dagmar Pachtner is a conceptual artist.

Art as *Concept*: working three dimensionally, bringing processes to light and triggering unexpected questions in the viewer.

Dagmar Pachtner, the artist, challenges her audience.

"It takes time and space to work, I have to free myself, I literally have to dig myself free: then something starts to happen. I continue to develop." This is exactly what she demands of her audience too: she demands that they open themselves to her work, pause, listen, feel. What happens to people when they are surrounded by blue boxes, listening to sounds typically found in a garden – as was the case at her installation "*Arcadia 2012*"?

The chirping of birds, the age-old sounds of nature, the sounds of digging, of planting; what surfaces in a viewer who begins to truly feel?

Art as a *process*.

In 2002, in one of her most spectacular exhibitions to date, the artist transformed the centuries-old Heiliggeist Church in Landshut in a way that stirred every visitor.

In addition to earthy materials, at the time she had already discovered the importance of light for her work.

"Earth stands for matter we have been provided with," she explains, "Light, on the other hand, especially blue light, stands for the immaterial, the intangible, for everything that gives us a glimmering of the existence of other dimensions."

In her work, Pachtner always explores how we relate to ourselves, addresses the seemingly simple question of why we carry out our everyday actions, and brings to light the energy inherent in our daily routines. She has an astonishing way of challenging the commonplace – things that we take for granted – to then raise, in another installation, a question that burrows its way into our consciousness: Where should the limits of what is humanly possible – and sensible – lie?

Dagmar Pachtner delves deep below the surface: Character lies not in the outer shell; the essence of things lies deeper. For her, the outer shell is "*Just a Trace*", the title of one of her works, purchased by the Bundestag. Pachtner is an artist who reduces things to their core and strips bare the fundamental components of our existence and identity – to then anchor herself with her installations even more deeply in our memory.

In Japan, where she has spent longer periods of time pursuing her work as an artist (2001, 2004 and 2006), she incorporated Far-Eastern cultural imprints into her working process, exploring them and their differences to Western lifestyles.

Back in 2001, she had already had an exhibition in Tokyo where she showed work completed in Europe.

During her two subsequent stays in Tokyo in 2004 and 2006, she participated in artist-in-residence programs and developed installations so that her third stay was crowned with three exhibitions, two of which were held in Kyoto.

The artist Dagmar Pachtner also succeeded in challenging her Japanese audience.

In an exhibition in Aomori, Japan in 2004, she focused on a seemingly simple subject: sitting – in Japan people traditionally sit on the ground or on chairs, as they do in the West.

She realized that the act of sitting changes people; she developed her installation "*Sitting*" based on her observations of the culture of sitting in East and West.

This installation sparked strong emotion, even consternation in viewers in Japan. "An old woman started to cry. That's what touched me most."

From the time she began working as an artist, she had always considered viewers' reactions part of her installations. But, increasingly, the viewers themselves were becoming part of her art.

She filmed and photographed people walking from above in Kyoto Station, zeroing in on their feet. Exhibited in Tokyo in 2006, these images are amazing snapshots of life, amazing insights into the fundamental elements of our actions, into the forces that motivate people. Her work contains and provokes questions, evokes associations and stirs up memories, allowing for a change of perspective.

A retrospective of her work in Japan was first shown in 2009 in the Kallmann Museum in Ismaning, and then in Landshut in the Museum im Kreuzgang and the Neue Galerie: "*Closeness and Distance*"

Her memorial for the victims of a sub-concentration camp near Stuttgart Airport in 2010 also attracted a great deal of attention and was very moving. "I built two long, white walls. If you walk along them, you *hear* the names of the concentration camp victims *spoken* by inhabitants of the surrounding communities: "*Paths of Remembrance*". Historical topics, especially those that deal with war and violence, are a fundamental part of her work; this is reflected in the sensitive work she has done for historical sites and memorials, including an installation inspired by Fukushima.

Human energy – what is it that motivates people – this is a recurring question in Pachtner's work: What is it that motivates people to move forward, what is their inner motivation?

Dagmar Pachtner's work is based on intensive research. That is what impressed her about Paul Klee early on in her career. He wrote a great deal and prepared his work by doing extensive research. For Pachtner too, research became an important part of her own artistic process: for instance, in the way she approached the concept of truth – the central subject of her video installation for the *Blue Night*, Nuremberg's night of art and culture. She summarized the result of all her scientific, philosophical and religious research in a single, very short sentence: "*It is true*", projected on the ceiling of a church in Nuremberg. This short sentence already started to elicit debate while the installation was being set up, something even the artist had not expected would happen so quickly – here again, the viewers' reactions as part of the work of art.

When the selected material, the medium and the content she wishes to convey complement each other: "That's what is most important to me," says Dagmar Pachtner. Material and subject intensify each other: stimuli for the artist.

Heike Rudloff, spring of 2016