

“Is the artist a channel?”

A few days ago Austrian artist Christina Gschwantner replied to my interview just as I started reading a copy of ‘Basquiat - Boom For Real’ that was gifted to me for Christmas. It’s a theme that is prevalent for me as I connect with more and more artists...Basquiat certainly achieved it. Apparent in both the style and process of his work, Basquiat ferociously regurgitated an integrated (and elegant) version of the information and experiences that had been fed into him from the world around him. And with such profound and beautiful effect that I lament how his personal story may overshadow the merit of his work sometimes, at least in mainstream circles.

I’m talking about the flow state, where the brain produces fewer, but much deeper connections and sophisticated creative production switches to autopilot. It got me thinking, akin to an instrument that produces the music the musician feeds into it, is the artist merely a channel for the unique life (and intelligent force behind it) that informs the experiences around them?

No doubt influenced by my current pondering, I couldn’t help but visualise an eager and focused Christina as such an instrument, standing brimful with ideas and ready at her blank canvas as I read her words in response to my question; *What activities outside of painting help develop your creativity?*

She wrote, “Many things actually, almost everything. I like to dance Swing and Balboa, I like to cook, I like to travel and I love to be with people. Also, the movies and all kinds of exhibitions, all these things influence me and make me love to return again and again to the otherwise rather lonely place in front of the canvas.”

So too, in recalling a childhood memory that shaped her creative self, Christina hints at an already imaginative child able to creatively synthesise and produce wonder from the ordinary.

“As a child, I spent a lot of time at my grandma's house. I would often lie in bed spending hours looking at the walls with their old-fashioned wallpapers and the opulent curtains. Little by little textures and creatures would come to life and whole worlds would emerge before my inner eye.”

But it is the resolute words she uses to describe her various creative elements throughout her interview that has me convincingly suspicious that Gschwantner works much like an attuned channel, words like “obsessed with colour”, “seriality” and, when asked how the world around her influences her art, my personal favourite, “In times of crisis and uncertainty, I tend to cut back. This was already the case during the pandemic and the first lockdowns. Then I started to paint my series called Rundlinge, repeating circles that helped me find some peace and sort out what was important to me. I now found myself in a similar situation. - able to lose myself contemplatively in my repetitive polkas series, in order to generate the power again for the confrontation and creation of my beings.”

Unlike shows that unfold like a linear storytelling or are bound by theme alone, it would seem the pieces in Gschwantner’s upcoming mini solo show “Colour and Kin” are interdependent. The meditative recess achieved producing the colourful mishappen polka dots pieces “Flakes of Joy” was necessary for the artist to conceptualise and create the characters she considers her “Creative kin” in the balance of the series. “Colour and Kin” is a mini solo show of six limited pieces and opens in the gallery January 14.

-Written by Monique Di Russo