



ABOUT SCRIPT

... or: a language in the depth

Gertraud Bichlmaier, a close friend since childhood, is talking to Sigrid Artmann. The two of them have known each other very well – for such a long time now. It's this kind of re-cognition, which reads between the lines and sums it all up in a nutshell ...

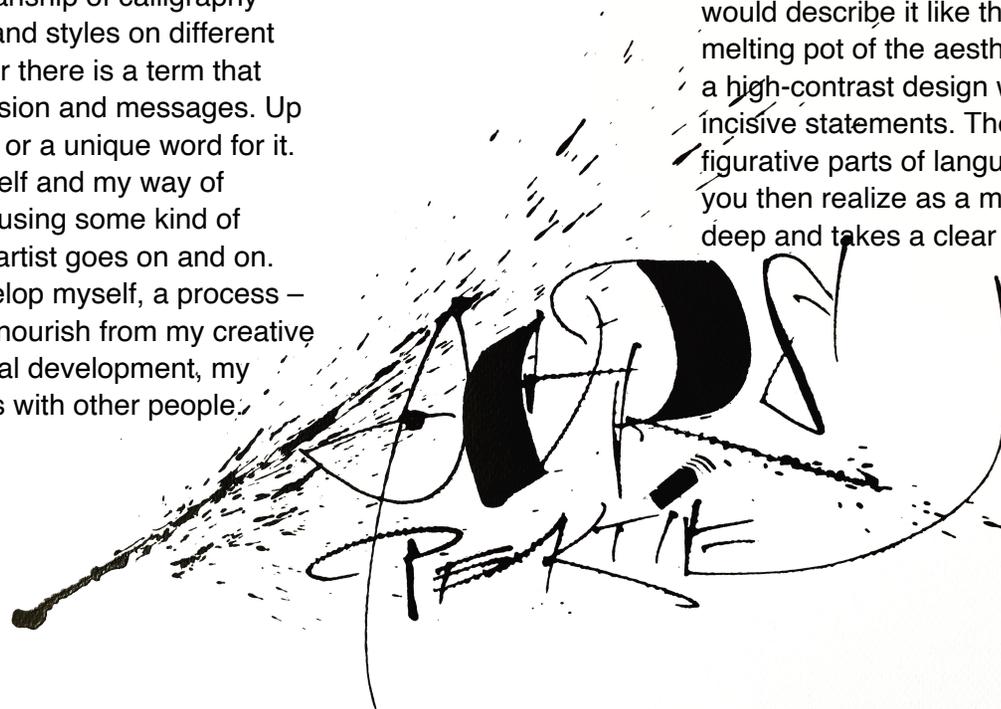
GB: Would you call yourself an artist: are you a calligrapher or a writing artist?

SA: Originally, I started with classic calligraphy. I have learned many historical alphabets; I appreciate the aesthetics of the form very much. Proportions, forms, lines and the effect of all of this in combination is, also today, the basis of my works – and this is what I was able to learn via the handicraft technique of calligraphy. Then there came a time when the norms of the historical calligraphy masters felt just as narrowing as a tight corset. I couldn't breathe freely anymore. Please don't get me wrong: practicing the basic forms of historical calligraphy was a significant part of my creative development.

Writing artist – well, yes, this was probably the next logical step in my creative expression. That's why people often call me a writing artist these days. Designing high-contrast scriptart on paper or wood with passion and dedication had been a major issue to me for a long time then. Surely you recognized me saying "for a long time". (laughs) Today designing scriptart means for me working with the craftsmanship of calligraphy while using diverse artistic techniques and styles on different kind of surfaces. I often wonder whether there is a term that would fit for my special mode of expression and messages. Up until now I haven't found a special term or a unique word for it. That's why I would rather describe myself and my way of expression in art more exactly, without using some kind of stereotype, because my journey as an artist goes on and on. Driven by the wish to continuously develop myself, a process – like a transformational process which I nourish from my creative impulses, which I draw from my personal development, my impressions, experiences and meetings with other people.

GB: You are working with different kinds of techniques. You've already created works on paper, wood, unique artworks and serigraphy. Since 2015 you have also illustrated everyday objects like shoes, chairs and paper bags. Even a Mercedes Roadster has already been an object of your art. Additionally to that you've also started to use installative speech in public space. What kind of role does script play for you today concerning this kind of expression?

SA: Despite the great range of transformation concerning it's expression there is one constant part in my work: that's script! That's the pivotal point of my work. With my words I can always start a discussion – whether I use calligraphy, handwriting or typography. Technically I would describe it like this: it's always a melting pot of the aesthetic of letterforms and a high-contrast design with powerful and incisive statements. These are those figurative parts of language in my art which you then realize as a message that goes deep and takes a clear position.



GB: A language in the depth – which issue is driving you?

SA: SAPERE AUDE ... this is a Latin proverb and means more or less: Dare to be wise! It was the Latin poet Horaz (20 B.C.) who said these words. The whole hexameter goes like this: Dimidium facti, qui coepit, habet: sapere aude, incipe. The philosopher and Latinist Rudolf Helm translated it this way: "Once started, it's half done. Choose insight! Just start right now!" It's mostly cited in the interpretation of Emmanuel Kant, who used it as slogan for the enlightenment movement: "Have courage to use your own mind!"

Since I have studied the essay of Kant, the content won't go out of my mind anymore, it's very fascinating for me. Cause if you take a closer look you realize that it's about much more than "just" about using your own mind. It's about lifting the curtains and looking behind the scenes, scrutinizing things and bravely speaking your mind. Sapere aude for me is the liberation from paternalism of media and authorities – being a free thinker if you want. Use your own reason means to reflect yourself, reflect on positions, happenings, relationships, about the "where from" and the "where to" ... and of course especially about the NOW. Therefore, I go into public space with my installations. In order to initiate an open dialogue with people and to encourage reflection. But also, to once again ask myself where I'm standing. Asking questions, for me is the best way to get my mind into action.



GB: To reflect yourself also means to go deep inside yourself. How can you reconcile this with your installations in public space, is there a contradiction between introversion and extroversion?

SA: We are living in times of radical changes, crises and wars, where I think contemplation and reflection is very important. Taking position, speaking out my mind, having the courage to send out a clear signal is important. That's what I want to do with my campaigns in public space, with my works, exhibitions and installations. SAPERE AUDE! Meanwhile, it's not so important for me anymore whether it's nice or ugly, readable written or not according to the classic art of writing. I think it's more important whether the writing is harmonious in its form of expression or not. Not too "well-behaved". I like it when the statements are polarizing. They shouldn't be too pleasing or decorative. The beauty of the letters is carried by the content. Thus the form is following the function.

GB: So what is your impression about the status quo of lettering and what kind of developments can you foresee?

SA: Within art, script is meanwhile experiencing a new age. It's understood as a contemporary form of art. New young artists approach writing from different perspectives. Graffiti, street art, concept art, lettering, ornament (just to name a few) – these are all important developments for script within arts. When you look at these developments you can recognize in every single one of them a deep love for this language of design and aesthetic of letterforms.

Working with script, by now, has become a worldwide phenomenon which I follow in many social media networks with respect and curiosity. On the one hand the letter itself is paid homage as an ornament on the other hand content is discussed with the help of these words - statements are made. If you transfer this to the here and now, historical role models are dissolved and brought into a contemporary "world language": writing is art.

I'm proud of being able to be part of this development. I'm constantly developing myself, reinventing my forms of expression. As I'm also working in different art academies, I have the opportunity to enter into a dialog with various people. For me a discussion about lettering and what it's allowed to be is very important. This way new ideas are constantly coming up, inspiring me and pushing me forward. Stay tuned in which directions script might go in the future.

Sigrid Artmann and Gertraud Bichlmaier

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