

Measuring the World Through Art

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In 1992, Ingrid Gaier meandered through the al-Fustat pottery district in Cairo with a small, concealed Super-8 camera. Incidentally, she managed to create a small masterpiece, which culminates in the contrast between the chaotic street scenes and the subsequent images of the Mosque of Ibn Tulun, whose clear geometry seems highly at odds with the other goings-on. Ingrid Gaier was twenty-five years old at the time. One senses that only a young European woman somewhat familiar with her surroundings can walk through a Middle Eastern district in such a way. Born on a farm in Steyr, Upper Austria, Gaier spent her childhood in Tunisia, which placed her between more than two worlds very early on. Very different, even diametrically opposed perspectives on the world presented themselves to her, as did a crystal-clear perception of actual and ostensible dichotomies in this world.

This multiplicity also spans her education—from the pure theory of panel painting under Markus Prachensky at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the practice-oriented sculptural training under Herwig Zens to all manner of liberties granted to her by Adolf Frohner at Vienna's University of Applied Arts—and consequently her artistic practice, which stops at nothing and has turned from three-dimensional ornaments (Theresa Hauenfels has written about Ingrid Gaier's

“unshakable love for the ornamental”¹) to a more global textile design—yet to call it applied art would be a big mistake.

Much rather, her textile art presents itself as a metamorphosis of all the possibilities we have of measuring the world: From the point (stitch) to the line (thread) into the plane and into space, onto and around the body, a thread spins—a thread that stretches the fabric of images, sounds, words, silences, and movements with which Ingrid Gaier permeates virtually all media at our disposal today. And in the end, the skin is shed to begin anew.

In her artistic practice we encounter objects that appear to be, but aren't, items of everyday use; various design techniques and principles of form may collide in a single object. Gestural details and geometric structures do not cancel each other out. A pattern sheet—until recently a fixture in every household even if no one in the family knew how to sew—serves as the matrix. However, the art of pattern drawing is not the only design basis of tailoring. It superimposes the individual parts that should form a whole, much like we superimpose our images of the world, tracing the one that seems useful to us, or even just pleasant.

Undoubtedly there are artists to whom one does perfect justice in calling them “painters,” for instance. It is true, Ingrid Gaier does paint, but she also sews, prints, accessorizes, suspends, stumbles, collages and dresses (herself) up, wants her three seconds of fame, rolls out the carpet, and asks, “What does an artist need for living?” (in the 2011 film *Five Truths!*—she also provides the answer: art and a toilet); she

¹ Theresia Hauenfels, “Pater noster—Entfaltung,” in Ingrid Gaier, exhibition brochure Ingrid Gaier, Moni K. Huber, Gernot Wieland, Sep 29–Oct 29, 2005, Galerie im Traklhaus, Salzburg 2005.

pulls things on and off, designs, installs, packs and carries, ties, embroiders and hides, writes and conceals, unveils and keeps going!

One might also call Ingrid Gaier a producer of artworks of all kinds, but that might in turn conjure ideas of arbitrariness, which couldn't be further from the truth. It is not chance that governs the choice of means but the principle of commentary. Like artistic media and techniques comment on each other in Ingrid Gaier's work, so do the different work groups. Commentary as a hermeneutic principle is a deeply literary method. In all other artforms, it is no longer relevant to understand a given work as a written text that relates to other texts. An appetite for uniqueness has conquered the joy of interrelations; yet Ingrid Gaier stays defiant.

Ingrid Gaier's animated films play an important role in her oeuvre as commentary, not only because the medium of film incorporates and unites all other media, and not only because this consolidation is the very reason it demands a different perception than any artistic genre that preceded it. We discover in Ingrid Gaier's films educational and political intent that goes hand in hand with humor and irony, yet always presents itself in poetic garb—marvelously so in *two melons or the birth of an artist* from 2015 or in *art education* from 2013, in which an onomatopoeic sound level merges with an equally poetic visual level without being obtrusive. Add to that the credo: "Art must be slim!" In *dreamtime* (2016) Karamanti, the only female reggae artist who is a bonafide star, sings her hit *Don't Give Up*, while a "creative worker" has a breakdown at her computer.

What distinguishes Ingrid Gaier and makes contemplating her work so satisfying is her ability—independent of any given assignment—to

employ the techniques of so-called applied arts so freely that a complex, multifaceted, autonomous oeuvre has unfolded over the years, which is proliferating unmanageably, ramifying, and at the same time measures and remeasures a world that seems ever less transparent.