

METRO PICTURES

Vargi, Yasemin. "Olaf Breuning," *artspeak.nyc* (March 20, 2017).

artspeak



New York-based Swiss artist Olaf Breuning's recent work consists of hand-painted ceramic sculptures exhibited alongside black ink and white paper drawings. Artspeak editor Yasemin Vargi interviewed the artist about his recent solo exhibition.

Yasemin Vargi: In a previous article you talked about how certain things trigger you and you follow them. What is the relationship between your interest in horror movies and the playful nature of your art? What triggers you these days?

Olaf Breuning: I don't want to disappoint you, but I am not so into horror movies. Anymore. That interest was in the beginning maybe 15 years ago when I did the works with black wigs and chains. I was never really interested in hardcore horror movies. I like John Carpenter or the Poltergeist, Exorcist, that kind of good classic horror movies but these days actually it's not what I have on my agenda. Often in my work, I am interested in something that I look at it for a certain time then I jump into the next one.

Y.V: Your works seem demure, yet humorous.

O.B: My work has humor but also underlying darkness and strangeness.



The Wall, 2017

Y.V: You mentioned in the past that you don't want to be stuck with one thing so you always come up with new ideas. What kind of a challenge is that for you? Are you re-inventing yourself with each series?

O.B: Maybe it's not re-inventing myself but rather expanding myself. I think one of my goals is when I am 80 years old, I look back at my work and see that it's kind of a diary. That way I know in year 2000 I was really interested in horror movies and I remember that time of my life. My works are kind of a mirror of it; they reflect what I have been thinking. What I want as an artist is to always extend myself to find something new that I could be interested in life. I want to get as much as out of this life in this short time.

Y.V: Do your questions and words in your works represent your thoughts or others' thoughts?

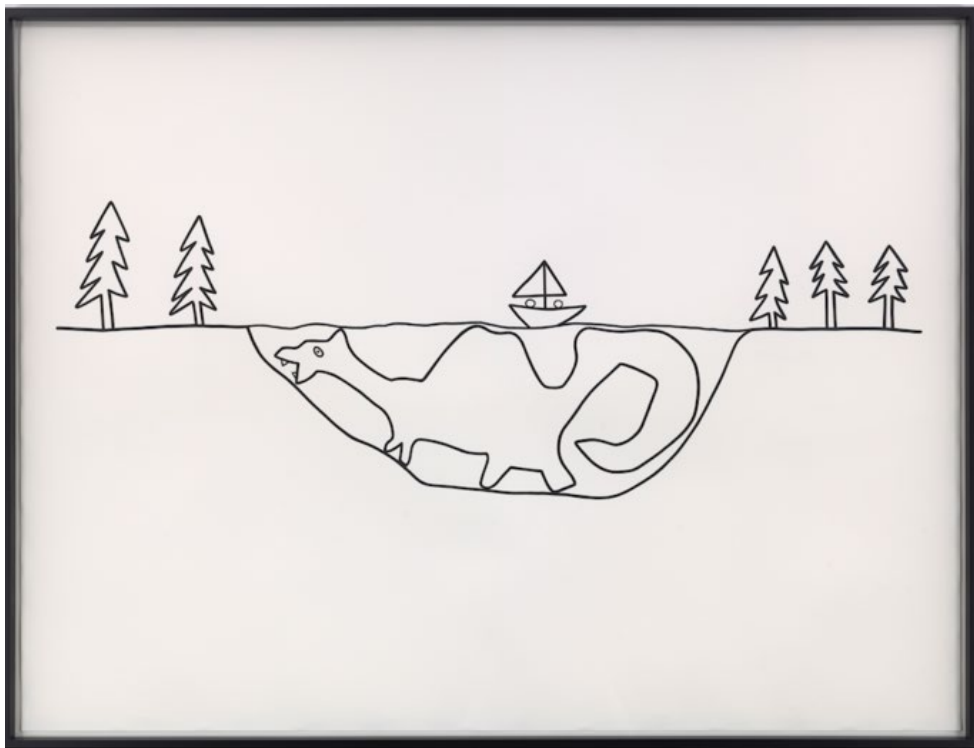
O.B: I try to do honest works and I am interested in addressing certain universal ideas which all of us do. Each day we are putting something in our mouth then we chew it and digest in our stomach, everything has a cycle. I often do that too. I just look at life and observe things, and then I want to take these it into my art. Well yes, most works have to do with myself.

Y.V: Do you want people to relate to your art equally today as well as in the future? If yes, do you think you are doing that with your work right now?

O.B: It would be beautiful if someone in 30 years look at the works I am doing today and be still able to understand it therefore I try to not to be very specific with my work. Some artists choose to be very specific and they do very complicated works. I try to be so open that people just get it. They get it today and they get it in 30 years.



Freak Show, 2017



Loch Ness, 2017

Y.V: You look at things from a wider perspective then narrow down your ideas to give something very simple to the viewer. How do you simplify your thoughts, what kind of a challenge is this for you?

O.B: Because I am a simple person (Laughs), but also at the moment I'm working on photographs in Switzerland about climate change. The photographs may be simple but my research, my thoughts, and the hours I spend try to understand it and position it takes time. My works can be very simple but often my ideas are bigger and I try to narrow it down. I believe in a very fast world therefore things cannot be too complicated. Simple things are just like a beginning of something more complicated. There is a fine line there. Artists like Maurizio Cattelan whom I always thought is good at making very simple one liners and they always work. That is the difficulty; doing simple things that work, otherwise it just looks stupid.

Y.V: Could you talk about your current exhibition at Metro Pictures. For example *The Wall* sculpture, did politics affect your recent works?

O.B: The exhibition consists of 3 big drawings and 9 ceramic sculptures. I published a drawing book and all ceramic works are based on my drawings.

It's not that I don't want to be political, but I think global warming is important for humankind in the next hundred years. I don't really care about presidents; they are temporary. I care more about my work. Producing good art is what we can do against it as artists. When I do a work, it's like an empty canvas I am happy that people find different stories in my works. I did not think about Trump's wall while making the ceramic sculpture but for sure it could be interpreted that way. I like when people see different things in my works.

Y.V: Your Instagram series is very interesting. It consists of all different kinds of faces you encounter each day, and it definitely reflects your wide imagination. Do you really see these faces everywhere?

O.B: I don't like social media but I like Instagram since the beginning. I am visual with images so I joined but I don't like to show my private life much.

I see faces all over the place; its funny. It was something I found stupid in the beginning then it became something I like. It is a long thing; I have been doing it for 3 years now. I would love to make a book with them one day.