

Interview with Agnė Juodvalkytė

by Frederiek Weda

Agnė Juodvalkytė - Tools for the Future (ANSKA)

18.06 – 30.07.2022 Galerie Bernau

Describe your work/practice.

My practice is very intuitive. Regardless of whether I'm working on a painting or an object, I have the same approach. My focus is on abstract painting, but textile also has an important role in my practice. I often switch between these two media.

Now I work directly on the wall. It's very physical. Every detail resembles the whole. My process is slow, so I need my space every day, even if just briefly. Having a studio is essential: without it, I feel disoriented.

What is the first memory you have of your grandmother?

Though it's not my first memory of her, I do remember us weaving together. I held the yarn in my hands, whilst she would make the wool into a ball. It's a conversation, with rhythmic up and down movements with your wrists, so that the threads come off more easily.

This ritual stayed in my memory because we constantly collaborated. It's a non-verbal thing, a sensitive process, that gave me a lot. The time I spent on the farm, in nature, made a great impression on my imagination and has given me a lot of inspiration. I feel most relaxed and most interested in natural surroundings.

When did you realize that you could turn the experience with your grandmother into your practice?

It was a very natural process. In 2016 I started working with garments related to my family history and am still using this theme in most of my works. Nevertheless, I still do work with traditional painting.

This cloth for example (showing a cloth), I picked up at my grandma's place. It had a particular purpose: it was for squeezing apple juice. It was always folded in a certain way, meaning that the middle became darker. These practical things caught my attention and suddenly I saw them everywhere. I wanted to show their form and the ideas, sensuality within and tradition behind them. It's important for me to expand it.

The past is present in your work. What is your relationship with tradition as an artist?

Time turns in circles and things come back again. Become visible. I wouldn't frame the items I collected at my grandmother's place or put them in a museum. I'm not careful with these artifacts. I see them as a starting point or an inspiration for my work, that constantly change and mix with other things that I read or saw. In the end, an installation may have nothing to do with my grandmother's

story anymore. But still, it's important to me where it started, or where I started. I think things are in constant change, but it's all connected in a way.

Ah, now I understand the title of the exhibition: "Tools for the Future (ANSKA)". These are both present. First, I thought it was ANSKA your grandmother handing you the "Tools for the Future", but now I understand that you are making the tools for the future, and she is there as well.

The Title "Tools for the Future" assumes that we care about something else than just meaning or a reason. By their nature these objects are fragile, provisional constructions of textile and sketches that give hints rather than state. They test processes at the interface of sculpture and painting, metaphor, and measure. The title is also related to "Recreation", a textile piece I showed while on a residency at Schloss Plüschow in 2020. In that show I used old canvases, that I ripped into pieces and stitched together again.

"Tools for the Future" also expresses a desire: the tools may not yet be useful, but perhaps one day they will develop a purpose for someone. With "Tools for the Future" as a title I give them a purpose. They inspire me, they remind me of another history, another way to be. "Tools of the Future" is also thinking through making: a flow of thought within which the image develops after some time. It's a sensory thing, which is also why material is so important to me: sensory making.

Do you mind sharing a little bit about the titles of your work, and where they come from?

Most of the titles have an emotional connection for me. There is a lot of memory in it. A viewer is free to see in it what they want to see, depending on their own experience. I am lucky if they express a few things to someone.

Did you always work with textile, or did you incorporate it for this show?

My first solo exhibition "Hybrid Organism" in Berlin Moabit at AESTHETIK 01 in 2016 had textiles. I took handmade pieces of linen from my grandmother's farm and exhibited them as subjects, as some kind of bodies. These textiles previously had a clear purpose: they were clothes before I brought them to a gallery space.

I am fascinated by upcycling, the „memory“ that material carries. In my practice, I often use different materials such as clothes, textiles, natural pigments, plants, seeds, and fabrics made by my grandmother. I generally tend to exhibit pieces and present pieces mostly in an anthropomorphic way.

Look, this one I found at my grandmother's farm as well (showing a needle-wrapped pile of different patterned patches). I don't want to change anything. My grandmother collected the collars of shirts that were no longer able to be worn. I find it so inspiring. I use these things in my installations sometimes: sew them together or apart.

It amazes me that somebody took the time to preserve these things! I know why: my grandmother and her family were brought to Siberia - it was not an easy history for them as a family with young kids- in the middle of nowhere, they had to survive and build their "home" again, somewhere very far from homeland. There she collected everything for the future, learned to save, preserve and take good care of what you have, even little things. Of every little thing... For me to see this was an enormous inspiration. When I'm in the village, I disappear to the attic- it's a treasure trove- and I'm gone for hours.