

Els Dietvorst

'STONES, STICKS and SAND'

07.05- 26.06.2021

Connection

Els Dietvorst is interested in how we, as people, engage with each other and our environment. With her work she makes visible things that go unnoticed. She has an eye for the unwanted and strange, or for what is at risk of disappearing. She has a consistent practice of working in dialogue with others; she creates places for encounters. COVID-19 has made it impossible for her to collaborate directly; it limits her possibilities. She has applied herself to what her surroundings have to offer, looking for meaning, there, as a way of dealing with the situation.

Dietvorst lives in the Irish countryside near the sea. The present restrictions have awoken her love for the organic and the connection with nature: there is beauty lying at our feet. Inspired by Joseph Beuys' ideas, Dietvorst questions the boundaries between art and life: she, too, approaches art as a spiritual exercise. What can art mean, as ritual, as particles of energy?

At Otty Park we can hear the hush of the sea. Dietvorst collects natural objects that wash up on the shore. She makes paintings of them, with bistre. She fashions driftwood into a tree, or works on it with a burner. The burnt lines on these wooden sculptures depict people or animals. Dietvorst collects, treats and admires what nature has to offer. Her rituals lend a new function to existing matter and cast it in a different light. Just as Dietvorst shows in her video work, that she respects people and invites them to look at her in a different way, so too, in her recent work, she shows appreciation for our environment. Nature is to be nurtured and respected. As human beings we are but part of a larger whole and everything is connected.

Dietvorst is acutely aware of how everything is subject to change. She embraces the continual movement of energy and metamorphosis in her work. Everything is temporary, and when something disappears, something new appears in its place. That is carried through in her choice of materials and her emphasis on process. She chooses ephemeral materials and gives natural matter a new lease of life by making an artwork out of it. With her rituals she shows variations on the same themes, making transformation visible. Her attention to process allows for the dynamic, present in all things, to shine through. She enjoys every moment, in the full knowledge that it is fleeting. Every day, during the first lockdown, Dietvorst typed up something that she had perceived; an emotion or a philosophical question. And every day she walked out to a rock in the sea and laid white stones upon it. She called this rock 'Covid19 Shrine', and it became a light point on the beach. Nature works with or against it, and she accepts she does not have matters in her control. Passers-by add stones to it. It has become a collective ritual, in which everyone can participate. That creates connection, even when people cannot meet.

Dietvorst creates the space for connection and looks for ways to communicate. For the time-being, Instagram is how she keeps in touch with the wider world. It allows her to share her working processes and to maintain the relationship between artwork and viewer. Togetherness, sharing and acting together are central to her work. Art gives Dietvorst hope. It makes people think and see things differently, and that leads to changes in behaviour. Can we restore the relationship between ourselves and our environment?

April 2021, Indra Devriendt

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