

14/2/2020

FELINE WHIS- PERS

AFRA EISMA
IN CONVERSATION WITH
HESKE TEN CATE

1646.

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About This folder.

Anybody invited to realize a project in 1646 is asked to engage in conversation with a previously unknown correspondent.

This conversation takes place via WhatsApp and stretches through the whole period during which the artist develops their initial idea into final results. 1646 invites the correspondent at the other end of this contact to figure his/her way through this actual process. In trying to picture what result the artists' work is getting to, such exchange can become a reflection on the amount of otherwise untraceable choices of the moment which make up to the artists' practice.

This issue is part of the exhibition by Afra Eisma, *Feline Whispers*, 14th of February 2020, in 1646.

This artist
Afra Eisma

This correspondent
Heske ten Cate

A very segmented and nightly
WhatsApp conversation

--- Friday Nov 8 10.51 PM ---

Afra: Come by soon
Afra: I'm drinking tea in bed
Afra: You must try this
Afra: It's Greek mountain tea
Afra: You would love it!

Heske: Are you ever home, lately?

Afra: Haha not that much
Afra: I had breakfast at Florencia, as I usually do - coffee and a cheese toastie
Afra: I skip lunch, then a frugal dinner and I work through the night.

Heske: An abstemious life

Afra: And sober, no more drinks, for now
Afra: These days, I pass up the half liter Export cans.
Afra: But!!!!!! for the opening I'll make a love potion

--- Tuesday Nov 12 2.54 PM ---

Heske: The other day you told me about aliens in your work. Is it important to know who they are, the aliens?

Afra: No
Afra: Although, some feel very personal to me, like friends. After I've made them, I instantly feel a connection

Heske: You seem to be looking for something extraterrestrial, yet still close to you

Afra: Yes. A mirror image from an extra- or non-human world

Heske: You mentioned on the phone earlier that *Feline Whispers* is about love

Afra: I believe nothing compares to love, it is something to get lost in. Love is a world that constantly eludes you, unable to get a grip on it. It falls over you. There are two things in life I find very important; generosity and... You know, that you get back what you send out

Heske: Reciprocity

Afra: Yes, that
Afra: Nowadays, this is very important
Afra: Also in relation to love

Heske: Are generosity and reciprocity the core values of what it means to love?

Afra: Not only

Heske: It is quite unique for an artist to take love as a point of departure. Not in the sense of loving a person, but trying to get a grip on a type of energy. An imaginary world where love wears the crown.

Afra: 🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷

--- Thursday Nov 21 6.02 PM ---

Afra: I made 200 ceramic cups for the show!!!!!!
Afra: During the opening I will serve a love potion in handmade cups

Heske: 200 unique cups?

Afra: Yes, maybe more, I've lost count. My body is killing me.
Afra: I have barely seen my friends these past months. With this exhibition, I would like to give something back. By collectively consuming part of my work everybody becomes a part of it. I want people to fall in love. Magic will happen.

Heske: Your opening is the fourteenth of February, coincidence, or...?

Afra: Partly. Although, the kitsch of Valentine's Day amuses me. I must sound like a hippie, preaching a love community.

Heske: What is a hippie, to you?

Afra: In short, I guess someone who deeply connects to nature. I'm more of an urban spiritualist: more rational.

Afra: Btw I have the feeling that the art world looks down on hippies and emotions

Heske: While rewarding rationality?

Afra: I would like to make a plea for an art movement births out of the act, craft and intuition. I cannot and will not put my work in a clear framework, the work just occurs. It's difficult to put words to the visual process, especially the poetics that I want to impart. I think it's fantastic that I have been given the opportunity to show my work at 1646. That they don't mind. It upsets me that there is so little space for intuitive art.

Heske: Me too.

Afra: Patriarchal constructs dominate the art world. The whole world, for that matter. That logic is front and center, leaving very little space for dissent. I feel anger boiling up inside me as I'm writing this. It is so unfair. Intuition shouldn't have to compete with rationality. Hopefully, this is what my work conveys.

Heske: Start a movement

Afra: Wow, Its like you're reading my mind. 😍 Eight years ago, I wrote a manifesto with Marnix, which we called "Het Intuitisme". We wrote it in the first year of the academy, as I already felt misunderstood back then.

Heske: Can I read it? 🙏

Afra: I'm afraid we lost it. I probably wouldn't call it 'Het Intuitisme' now, but I'd still like to make a plea for intuition.

Heske: I would applaud your manifesto and movement. Incidentally, I think I can include many male artists who are sick of the strictly formal, too, for that matter.

Afra: People ask me, for example, what the concept is behind my love potion, which is the wrong question to ask me. It makes me clam up. I don't know what my ideal question would be - one that aligns with

my way of working. However, I do appreciate it when art critics, artists and curators are open for alternative scenarios besides the basic question of "what's the concept?"

Heske: I think it's very powerful that you approach this imaginary world with such vigor.

Afra: I feel very at home in that world and it doesn't dictate a framework for a viewer.

Heske: I keep being reminded about how important that is to you.

Afra: Nothing is strictly comprehensible in my imaginary world. Like, why it contains aliens or my cat Larry, but I don't think I exclude anyone nor does this constellation of thoughts intimidate anyone. It is disorienting, which might fluster some.

Heske: All you ask is an open attitude.

Afra: Yes, you don't need any prior knowledge.

-- Saturday December 14 11.02 AM --

Heske: Does it matter to you I know your imaginary cat's name is Larry? How important are such details?

Afra: The first title I had in mind for the exhibition was: I want a cat named Larry. That title fell through, for different reasons. Mostly because it was found to be hermetic. My work is already so personal and born out of my own frame of reference, so I understand this decision. So, after going back and forth for awhile I changed the title to *Feline Whispers* and suddenly Larry was gone. This deeply saddened me for a few days, because I genuinely love Larry very much.

Afra: We laugh a lot together and for a second it felt like he wasn't real. That isolated me and made me anxious: what if this way of working has no right to exist? Or if it is seen as too solipsistic?

Heske: As if people are curating your imaginary world.

Afra: Yes, but I also know I have to trust the advice of my friends. Slowly, Larry came back: Now, he is in the text, in our conversation and he is painted on 200 cups. After the last sip of love potion you encounter Larry the cat. *Feline*

Whispers has become an exhibition where you enter my world without a filter.

--- Monday January 6 9.30 PM ---

Afra: I'm in my studio and very happy.

Afra: Last night, I couldn't really appreciate my seat sculpture, I was too tired.

Heske: The night does something magical. Appreciation needs time. I know the feeling of getting up in the morning, to look at your own fabrications with fresh eyes and see something completely different.

Afra: I'm going to enjoy this feeling all day. Take my time.

Heske: You work with very time-consuming materials. Ceramics that need to be baked, then painted and then baked again.
Heske: And the tufting, that's painstakingly tedious as well... thread by thread

Afra: These crafts are definitely very time-consuming. It'll be overwhelming: people will realize that every detail in the exhibition has been touched by human hands. My hands. Nothing is prefab, everything is crafted with a gesture and technique.

Heske: And those techniques are ancient. You make vases, chalices, cups and tapestries: vessels of storytelling and history from across the world and all ages. Whether you look at the Romans or the Greeks, the Aztecs or Egyptians: there are tapestries and painted ceramics across the board.

Still January 6, but now 11.21 PM

Heske: Yesterday, we spoke about your imaginary world and how it can come across as isolating, at least by others. This is heavily contrasted by the visual language and techniques you use.

Heske: Because you use ancient knowledge and you play with visual language and symbolism, I think your art resonates with many people.

Afra: I hope so

Heske: On the website of 1646 there is a lovely text about your exhibition. I like this part: "Feline Whispers is inspired by Eisma's imaginary cat, Larry, and the generosity involved in the speculative care for this pet. The exhibition will explore domestic space as an extension of the body, where nourishment and sharing are important counters to a world so full of deprivation and exclusion. Could ideas be tended to like they are our imaginary pets, feeding them, petting them, loving them?"

Heske: And this part: "The explosion of works function as characters or imaginary friends that invite the imagination to infuse sensuality and passion with whimsy and lightheartedness."

Afra: Yes, I am also happy with these words because they describe what I am, how I feel and how I relate to my work. My work just 'occurs', it springs up. All of a sudden, the works form interconnected constellations. I am taken over by the creative process.

Heske: Do you enter another dimension while working?

Afra: Yes, I need to be alone, then I kind of space out, I caper between the works and forget time or to eat. I enjoy it immensely though. I often sing when I'm making, or my own work makes me burst out laughing.

Afra: (sends a picture of ceramic slippers).

Afra: You really want to have these right?!?!?

Heske: ❤️
Heske: Do you think this 'spacing out' is a type of escapism?

Afra: Yes, it definitely is. It's just that the term makes it sound negative. You could also call it an imaginary safe space, where there is no judgment and everybody is free. But this space isn't noncommittal, because I will be sharing it with the spectators. What I make is hyper personal. You are stepping into my domain. I think it's important to mention that.

Heske: Because this means you take responsibility for what you're creating?

Afra: No, because it is also just a personal testimony, an 'ego document'. No matter how much I want it to be about love and empathy, I have to acknowledge that being an artist is egocentric.

Heske: Does this conclusion bother you?

Afra: Sometimes. I produce a large amount of work. Suddenly I thought: Oh no, I'm hoarding my own work. With overconsumption and the climate crisis breathing down my neck I more frequently have the thought: I'll only do performances and use my body as my only material. We have enough stuff, objects. Yes, even art. This thought bothers me the most.

Heske: Your overproduction might suit the imagined world that you evoke. Hoarding is a type of addiction, right? And addiction has a delicate marriage to ecstasy.

Afra: I think there is something wrong with me that I make so much.

Heske: I'm not trying to say you're an addict, I mean, the trance you get into when you're creating translates to the ecstatic experience you serve to people. The objects are pedestals bearing this non-physical world, making them crucial for that enlightening experience.

Afra: I think the comparison to addiction is very good.

Heske: Love might be another form of that. Of ecstasy. You want to indulge in it. And when in you're love, you beg the universe for that feeling to stay with you. But there's also a dark and desperate flipside to love. Your work shows that whole spectrum. From taking care, to cherishing, to dependence, to wanting to own it.

Afra: True. I also have to watch out that I don't suffocate my ideas with excess: a literal Afra-overdose.

Heske: I have the notion that we see a mere shadow of everything that is inside of you.

Heske: It's important to emphasize how your work breathes life into an imaginary world beautifully, making it tangible. The fact that I,

with my own imagination, can physically set foot into your imagination, makes this an infinite universe.

Afra: For me the imaginary and the tangible worlds continually entangling, and they are each equally important and complicated. I can love aliens and imaginary pets without them having to 'exist'.

--- Monday January 27 8.12 AM ---

Afra: Ideas can grow, they are not static
Afra: You live with them for a while
Afra: Take them with you on a walk with your grandpa
Afra: When you take a shower
Afra: Sleep with them
Afra: They grow and evolve
Afra: You nurture them, pat them on the back. An idea is a creature or a cloud, and one day it comes out and becomes your work.

Heske: If you give shape to that imaginary world, and it has become a piece of art, is that then also the end of the evolution of that cloud?

Afra: The idea still lingers and will remain in transformation, but after creating a work physically, it also dissolves into the background and new ideas emerge.

Afra: I can imagine that when all the artworks - and thus the solidified 'thought clouds' - are moved to 1646 they all move back to the foreground because the context changes.

Heske: Because they require something different there?

Afra: Yes, I always talk to my works out loud, as if the ideas are entities. How are you today? What do you think of the color blue? Here in my studio, the works seem to be in their place. The presentation that initially only existed in my mind, in its full intensity, has been given a body.

