

On the way

You do not know what you see in the artwork of Sarah Grothus. Her drawings, paintings and poems constantly play around the edge of reality and imagination.

An almost magical power in contradictory blacks and whites, in contrasts of colours and shapes, switch between a dynamic image and a more stable energy field. As an observer you get confused and at the same time you feel strongly drawn in, carried away.

Her work shows different sides of an action which then takes place in a different way. That creates tension. This stratification in the theme is reinforced by the graphite or paint she works with. She uses charcoal and paint for drawing or blackening the background while other parts remain untouched. The lines that tell or conceal the story are thin or, on the other hand, accentuated. They are controlled or left to her imagination.

In her poems, for example, Sarah Grothus mentions *the other side of her eyes, or a shadow in the night*. Her figures are living in the clouds and at the same time confused in their existence, *a knave or a slave*. The image is always in motion; before you know, it is the other way around, in contrary.

The 'thing in itself' as Kant says, is unknowable. What seems to belong to reality can also be determined by your own thinking or imagination. What we experience is often subjective. We are not sure of ourselves.

Art exists by the denial of that factual reality. The drawn stories and painted visions by Sarah Grothus do not leave a trace of misunderstanding about that. Her art disturbs and thrills at the same time because she gives insight into what we see and who we are, and so – loosely translated from Schopenhauer – lifts the earthly to the heavenly. There is a break with the familiar accompanied by a feeling of euphoria. It is always about encounters with or creating distance from various characters and figures which come out of a dream or a world outside ourselves and address another sphere. There is disorientation. Nothing is definite.

'I work without a preconceived plan', she says as we are on our way from Enschede to Germany. It's a grey day and the fog almost obstructs our view. Sarah was born in Germany and studied at the AKI, Academy of Visual Arts in Enschede. She lives in Enschede and her studio is currently situated in an old coal mine. While and shortly after gymnasium in Germany she worked for a while with a sculptor. She is also trained in classical dance, is a lover of ballet, an admirer of Pina Bausch and plays saxophone.

We cross the border without noticing, the fog becomes denser and then thins again, one passes the other. *The sky touches the earth* is the title of a group exhibition in China with work of Sarah Grothus, 2010.

Where can I find a place to work, a place where I get feedback and make contacts? Sarah asked herself. She went to Gent in Belgium, studied there for two years; spent three months in South-America, had a group exhibition in São Paulo and returned to Enschede. *Different approaches* is the title of an exhibition in 2011. Spring 2014 she is artist in residence in Olofström, Sweden. *I dreamed I was nature* is titled a booklet with drawings and photographs of plants, clouds, water and reflection; 'I catch the wave and fly away'.

The small camper takes us further to the studio in Dorsten. I remember the exhibition in Diepenheim, 2008, where I saw an artwork on paper with distinct black and white; three heads, in lines, shading, brushes of black, three gazes from eyes that look up to me, address me; nonexistent half-figures keeping each other in delicate balance, connecting and detaching again. Where does it lead to? And then suddenly there is the exit. This should be it: *Industrial Culture Night*, as they call an

event with a group exhibition in the old coal mine in Dorsten. Huge halls, some set up as exhibition space but also un(re)used ones. At the end of one of the tall, broad spaces paintings hang. Fields of colour which would overwhelm elsewhere but at this place strike you with their flashy shapes, as the painting *Ferne* an interplay with men in striped suits against wild animated colours, two canvasses combine to a painting that is more than four and a half meters wide and almost three meters high. 'Stop', one seems to shout at two who are fighting. *Don't let me see, don't let me know*, Sarah quotes when looking at a big green beak-like figure pressed against a pair of blue-purple and orange-yellow red coloured surprised bodies. *Let us be together*. Some paintings are not ready yet, others are partially painted over. Images in motion. The overwhelming space is momentarily conquered, then reasserts itself again.

Sarah decides to take me to a higher floor. In a few small rooms are her books: of Pieter Bruegel, Goya, Ensor, William Kentridge, and her small paintings. *I am with you*: two heads, the lips of one seem to melt together with the wrinkles on the forehead of the other. The drawing encompasses the smooth colours, from dark to light and back again. From the chest of drawers emerge drawings that I remember from her previous book, 2012. Or are they drawings of drawings? The lines have followed their own route. And not just the lines. Swirling black wool threads have travelled on or through the paper and have been caught up or continued by drawn lines like *a shadow in the night* or they form the phrase *shadow in the night, secretly waiting for me*. A poem.

The day is fulfilled with a shadow of the night. That is what Sarah Grothus has drawn and where she has been lead by.

Erik Slagter