



Fig. 1 *Homage to the "wild ones"*, Paris, 1999, F 109, from the series "Pictures and Signs"

Nadja Labudda

The Formation of Artistic Personalities

*A Lecture by Nadja Labudda
(28. Juni 2008)*

2008

Personal words

When I think of my childhood and youth, this time was always associated with music – the countless classical concerts I attended with my parents, the voice of Ella Fitzgerald I danced to with my mother. Chopin, Brahms and finally Johann Sebastian Bach, performed so movingly by Yuko Labuda at the piano. I was also impressed by the many exceptionally talented musicians I had the opportunity to become acquainted with at home, some of whom we shall also hear this evening. I was always surrounded by music. However, there were also sounds that like the songs of the spheres hovered over this music, and these were my father's melodies. Besides Bach on the flute and jazz on the flugelhorn, my father always had a melody deep inside him which only belonged to him and which was the basis for innumerable variations of the same theme, whether on the guitar at the dining table, on the piano after a long evening with books and conversations or in the morning after breakfast on a battery of myriad drums. Always when my father tried out a new instrument in the myriad collection he could call his own, or on a long or short car trip when he sang or hummed to himself; it is always this particular melody of his which resounds – and which in the course of decades has become my own as well. The melody expresses so many of the characteristics he has and always has had for me: serenity and creativity, love of life and humour, empathy and nobleness of heart. I can only describe the melody with these words; if I had to sing it or even write it down, I would be completely helpless. But when I hear it, it is as if I had been enticed with a flute to my most inner being, in order to rest there light-heartedly.

While thinking about how to formulate this lecture, my father suddenly went through my head and I knew then exactly what I would like to speak about: the specific formative pattern of artists; that for an artist who works creatively with different media it really doesn't matter which medium he chooses to eternalise his art. There will always be a medium which makes his artistic voice most clearly heard, but it will always be audible whether it is with granite, iron or paper that he brings what is resonating inside him to the surface.

Four artists with multifaceted work

I am subsequently going to show excerpts of the artistic work of four selected artists in which there is clear correspondence between the different parts of their works:

1. the photographer and draftsman Henri Cartier Bresson,
2. the sculptor and draftsman Eduardo Chillida,
3. the painter and sculptor Ellsworth Kelly and
4. the draftsman and photographer Win Labuda, my father

Henri Cartier Bresson

Henri Cartier Bresson (1908-2004) is probably one of the most important photographers of the 20th century. He became famous for his photographs of the "instant décisif", the decisive moment. Guided by an inner clock for the crucial moment, he was inter alia able to document the last days of life of Mahatma Gandhi, the transition from the Kuomintang regime to Communist rule in China and the days after the liberation of Indonesia from Dutch colonial rule. However, he became world famous not so much due to the important political events which he covered but rather for his capturing of the unconscious moments of human life, in which beauty, peacefulness and liveliness become an image in an unforgettable way. Bresson began his artistic career not with photography but with painting and drawing, a passion which accompanied him his whole life and which he returned to intensively at the end of his life.

After studying his drawings, his work appears in a new light; one comprehends the drawing dimension which comprises the basis of his supposed snapshots. In view of his drawings the momentary photography becomes a composed image, in which weight and counterweight, light and shadow, centre and periphery are used with an unerring eye for harmony and tension. Despite this, his drawings are not photographic, or - to be more accurate - not a meticulous, realistic copy of a selected motif. Rather, they are cast with visible swiftness, they attempt already here to capture a moment, to render an atmosphere exactly, to get at the basis of the moment. Thus we see in the comparison of drawing and photography how much Cartier-Bresson owes to drawing in the medium of photography, how much he sees things as a painter would and how only painting and drawing enable him to create the photographs that had such an epochal effect.

Eduardo Chillida

Eduardo Chillida (1924 - 2002) studied architecture in the 1940s, but after four years he left the lecture halls and turned completely to sculpture. His artistic work began by working in stone and wood. In the fifties of the last century he then turned to iron sculpture, inspired by his countryman Julio Gonzalez. But he also experimented with wood sculpture and other media, in which he formed his space-encompassing objects. A characteristic feature of his sculptures is the pronounced materialness which one can hardly escape. He is not only concerned with forms in iron and steel, but also with the iron, with the steel itself.

If we look at the development of art history from the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, then it is the painters who are the clear precursors of visual art. Impressionism, Cubism, Constructivism, Surrealism; the great strides were quite clearly taken in painting. When we look around here for the most important sculptors, we repeatedly come across painters who created innovations in the genre of sculpture as well: Degas, Renoir, Picasso and Matisse, Max

Ernst and Miro.

As can be seen, Chillida and his sculpture mark an important point in the history of art of the 20th century. With him and some other artists (for example Calder), a generation of sculptors came to the fore who succeeded with more or less new materials such as steel, iron, concrete and granite but also with aluminium, paper or feathers to create sculptures and objects which were formed alone from a sculptural idea.

Chillida's name is deeply associated with his sculptural work, although from the beginning he always made drawings as well. (4,5 see also Image Sources) The central motif of his drawings was and remained the human hand in endless variations and views. In the comparison of one of his drawings with one of his sculptures, a core message of his creative work becomes especially clear. Form, volume and tension, with these words we could describe both sculpture and drawing. Both are inherently dynamic, which for him is characterised with the full form and the empty form. The fingers of the drawing have the same inherent vitality that the spaces between them have. In relation to Chillida this circumstance is often described as space and emptiness, a play of forces that constitutes the fascination of many of his works.

Ellsworth Kelly

The American painter Ellsworth Kelly (*1923) belongs to this circle of extraordinary artists in America who after World War II turned the art world upside down and completely redefined it with their ideas and works. In the course of placative characterisations such as "Hard Edge" or "Minimalist", he was on occasion incorrectly categorised as belonging to certain artistic groups. But today one must say that Kelly - unconnected to any group and very early in the fifties - found his own forms and colours in his art, which were not picked up in one way or another by the Minimalist or other art movements until the sixties. In the 1940s he began working intensively in drawing, influenced by the automatism of Surrealism. He also devoted himself to Dadaistic collage with the same intensity.

He used both the influence of Dadaism and Surrealism merely to liberate himself from prefabricated creative processes. He always began with a drawing oriented on nature, i.e. a figurative form, which shaped the basis for the abstract forms he developed out of that. From the middle of the fifties on, these ultimately resulted in canvases – at first single ones and later several panels next to each other, usually painted monochrome – which were profoundly committed to pure abstraction. What the public first got to see of the works of Ellsworth Kelly were purely abstract art works without any reference to our natural surroundings. The drawings and even the photographic works of Kelly open up a dimension for us, which one would at first not expect.

Kelly expressed his views as follows:

"I like to work after things I observe, whether they be man-made or pure nature or a mixture of the two. Occasionally I work directly after something I've seen, like a window or a piece or fragments of architecture or the legs of someone or sometimes the space between two things whenever it only looks like the shadow of something. Things that interest me were always there. I'm not interested in the texture of a rock or that it is a rock, but in its mass and its shadow."

The drawings and photographic work of Kelly enable us to extrapolate the abstraction of his work into the world of objects which surrounds us. Whether it be the drawing of a leaf or the photograph of a haystack, we can recognise therein the form that he detaches out of the whole picture, presenting itself to us as canvas or perhaps later also as sculpture. In this respect, Kelly's drawings and photographs are not only the homogeneous component of his artistic work, but are also a work-immanent aid to understanding his abstraction.

Win Labuda

If someone had asked me when I was a child "What does your father do?" I would have answered with absolute decidedness a "draftsman". Clear & Clean, that was the company he was building up, but there was also a small, black book in which my father drew his figures and which always accompanied us both as a serious rival on our little excursions, on our long trips, at dinner and even during our special father-daughter cuddle-time in bed. This little black book, the countless successors of which now fill many shelf metres in the Labuda home, was the diary of my father for many years. But not only that; it was also his interlocutor, opportunity to contemplate and withdraw, aid in explaining things and, not last, partner in jokes.

My first intensive analysis of the artistic work of my father did not, however, take place in the realm of his own drawing but rather in the course of an essay on his photographic series "Pictures and Signs". In this series he photographs pictures and drawings which he discovered as wall sketches on the walls of European cities. If I look at this series today, with the focus of the homogeneousness in the artistic work of my father, then the parallels to his own drawings become all too clear. Viewed formally, the wall drawings and paintings which he captures in these photographs differ of course completely from his own drawings. Moreover, the "Pictures and Signs" not only contain pictures and drawings, but also words, confessions of love, curses or fleeting thoughts, which are captured in the moment they occur and are not only captured but also must be communicated. They are the secret confessions and pictures of unknown people, who in a feeling of exuberance anonymously and quickly scribble a sign or a figure on a wall. In spirit, however, these unknown people are unmistakably relatives of my father. They draw without taking long to compose; quickly and unpretentiously they bring forth a



Fig. 2 *Old Man, Sun and Child*, 1973, FP 044, from the series "People Today"



Fig. 3 Image 02 from "*Supper*", felt pen drawing, 2007



Fig. 4 *Eye Contact*, 1981, FP 022, from the series "People Today"

form or a word out of their innermost self and reveal it to the public. They want to impart themselves, want to give others a part of their existence for their way through life. It seems as if they wanted to say "Pause for a moment in your haste and share joy for just a brief moment in my little art."

But also the photographic series "People Today" finds its counterpart in the drawings of my father. Many of these are abstracted studies of people, as is especially apparent in the drawing. For some viewers the forms of the drawings may be pure abstraction, for me they are always an image of our world. I understand the drawing in as a family engaged in a discourse. Whether with words or remaining silent, the figures communicate with each other and express an unmistakable togetherness. This togetherness is found again in some of the photographs of people, such as of the children during the Venetian carnival and of the old man and the child at the sea. The bond between the respective protagonists can be felt; they have been captured in a happy moment, a moment of human togetherness, which seems to be indestructible.

The photographic series "Home of the Gods" is devoted to the monuments of the megalith culture. These are monuments that were erected in early history by human hand and whose original meaning has not yet been fully elucidated. In my opinion, the fascination that still today emanates from the primordial stones can be traced back to several circumstances: the places in which they were erected were far away from human settlement activity, the efforts undertaken for them were very great, and finally, they evoke an oftentimes majestic connection of landscape and sky. The subjects my father selected in his photographs are significant. Very rarely do we see individual rocks, but rather usually rock formations of two or more monoliths. Thus, even here the focus is on the action of forces together and on the counteraction of forces. The focus

of these pictures is the energy that connects the rocks rather than the rock as such. When comparing them to the drawings we see parallels once again. First, we find several similar forms united in their interest in one objective; that at least is how I interpret the three similar forms of Fig. 6 in their inclination toward one point. Furthermore, the rock accumulations and the people at St. Mark's Square in Venice in backlight are forms that are connected with each other, united in the collective of a superordinate relationship.

Another important, connective aspect in the work of my father is the support and load of his drawing constructions and also of the pictorial contents of many of his photographs. The forces of support and load are more or less counterbalanced in his work. Often they derive their stability from a side support, quasi as a symbol of interconnection. For that reason, in the works of my father the thought of heaviness never occurs, but rather – and this is essential – the communication of the elements determines the final form. This lends the work a certain architecture, which perhaps explains the affinity to the work of Eduardo Chillida.

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said: The drawing and photographic work of my father is to be viewed as an artistic manifestation of his faith in people, in humanity and in discourse. This conclusion is not surprising, since I stand before you today, before so many who have come here to be present on the occasion of his 70th birthday, to celebrate this day together with him and all who are connected to him emotionally in one way or another.

All important artists work, live, create apparently in dependence on a specific centre. That can be their own inner self, perhaps the beloved landscape of their native country, a fundamental insight, a consuming longing, a social empathy



Fig. 5 *Kilclooney-Dolmen III*, 2002, FM 020, from the series "Home of the Gods"

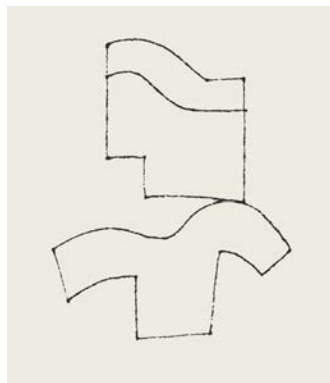


Fig. 6 Image 03 from "*Supper*", felt pen drawing, 2007



Fig. 7 *Kilclooney-Dolmen I*, 2002, FM 003, from the series "Home of the Gods"



Fig. 8 *Pigeons, People, Backlight*, 1981, FP 014, from the series "People Today"

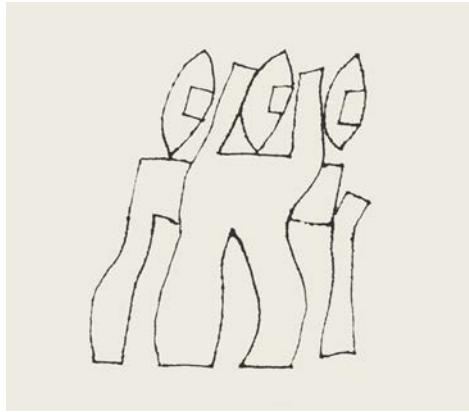


Fig. 9 Image 04 from "*Supper*", felt pen drawing, 2007



Fig. 10 *Stonehenge II*, 2002, FM 008, from the series "Home of the Gods"

or a passionate obsession. The formative pattern of a life, as Thomas Mann termed it, determines its parts in their whole structure. In this respect the elements of the artistic work of my father, which at first glance seem to be heterogeneous, fit together in a unit which is profoundly marked by his personal wishes and values for himself and for his surroundings.

At the end of this lecture I would like to remind you of the music, which seems to resonate inside my father – photographs, drawings, musical harmonies. When a universal, artistic creativity is alive in a person, then it finds myriad ways to burst forth to the outside and thus to remind the person himself and also others what uplifting forms the beauty that resides in all of us can assume.

Translation: Carol Oberschmidt