

Spiritual Wanderer: A conversation with Karin Lambrecht on the occasion of her exhibition at Instituto Tomie Ohtake

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Karin Lambrecht, *Perdão* (Pardon), 2012, 50 x 59cm. Courtesy Instituto Tomie Ohtake

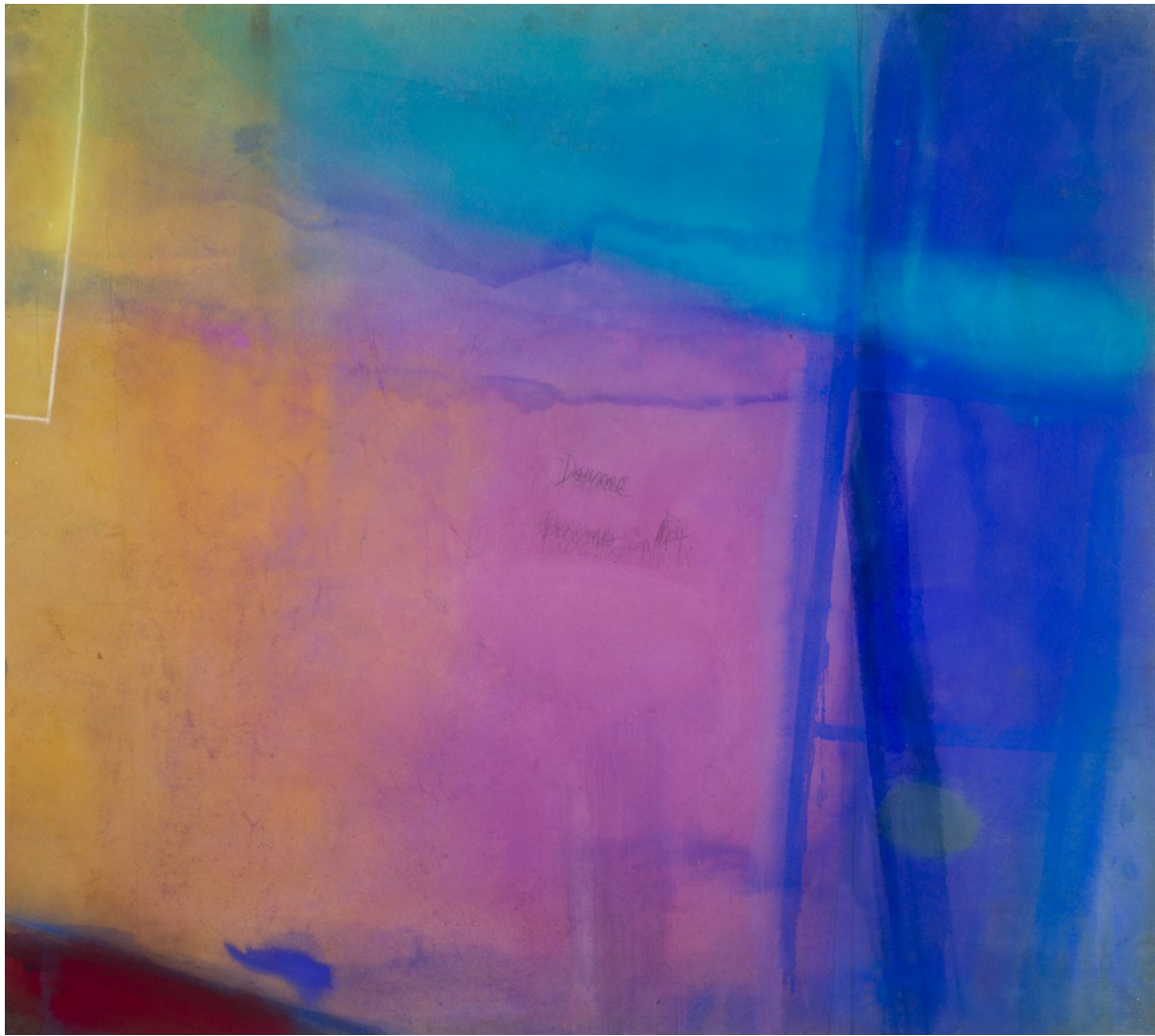
Karin Lambrecht's work is being celebrated at Instituto Tomie Ohtake in this resourceful artist's first institutional exhibition in São Paulo. Sixty-one-year-old Lambrecht, who proudly defines herself as a painter and since 2017 has lived in the UK, has come a long way since she began in the visual arts in the mid 1970s in her native town of Porto Alegre in Brazil's far south. This is not an artist who only tolls over the surface of the canvas. This is a visceral artist, at times literally.



Karin Lambrecht, *Untitled (Eu e Você)*, 2001, four robes stained with last blood of three lambs of three farms in Rio Grande do Sul, 130 x 45 cm each. Private collection. 25th São Paulo Bienal, 2002. Photo Juan Guerra. Courtesy of the artist

In 2001, to elaborate her issues on the body and spirituality, she carried out a series of controversial ritualistic performances. Rooted in paganism, “Eu e você” (I and You) followed the path of the experiences in the Fluxus happenings of the 1970s that crossed the limits of the obscene and the sacred. The work consisted of collecting the last blood of more than a dozen lambs to use as paint over white canvases and cotton fabrics. The plasmic series, including a black-and-white photo of a lamb’s heart on an open palms in a sign of offering, was gathered in the untitled installation Lambrecht presented in her room at the São Paulo’s 25th Bienal in 2002. She explains this in the following interview where she also talks about her relationships with Louise Bourgeois, Joseph Beuys, Raimund Girke and Iberê Camargo.

Karin Lambrecht participated in international exhibitions but points out the highlights of her career as having studied at Berlin’s Universität der Künste (UDK), in her time called Hochschule der Künste (HDK); the art residence at Millay Colony for the Arts in New York State, in 1986; her first solo exhibition in 1990 at Galeria Subdistrito (now closed); the collective exhibition “Viva Brasil” in Stockholm in 1992; her participations in 1985, 1987 and 2002 at the São Paulo Bienal; all her solo exhibitions at Galeria Nara Roesler since 2005; and the artist’s monograph book published by Cosacnaify in 2013.

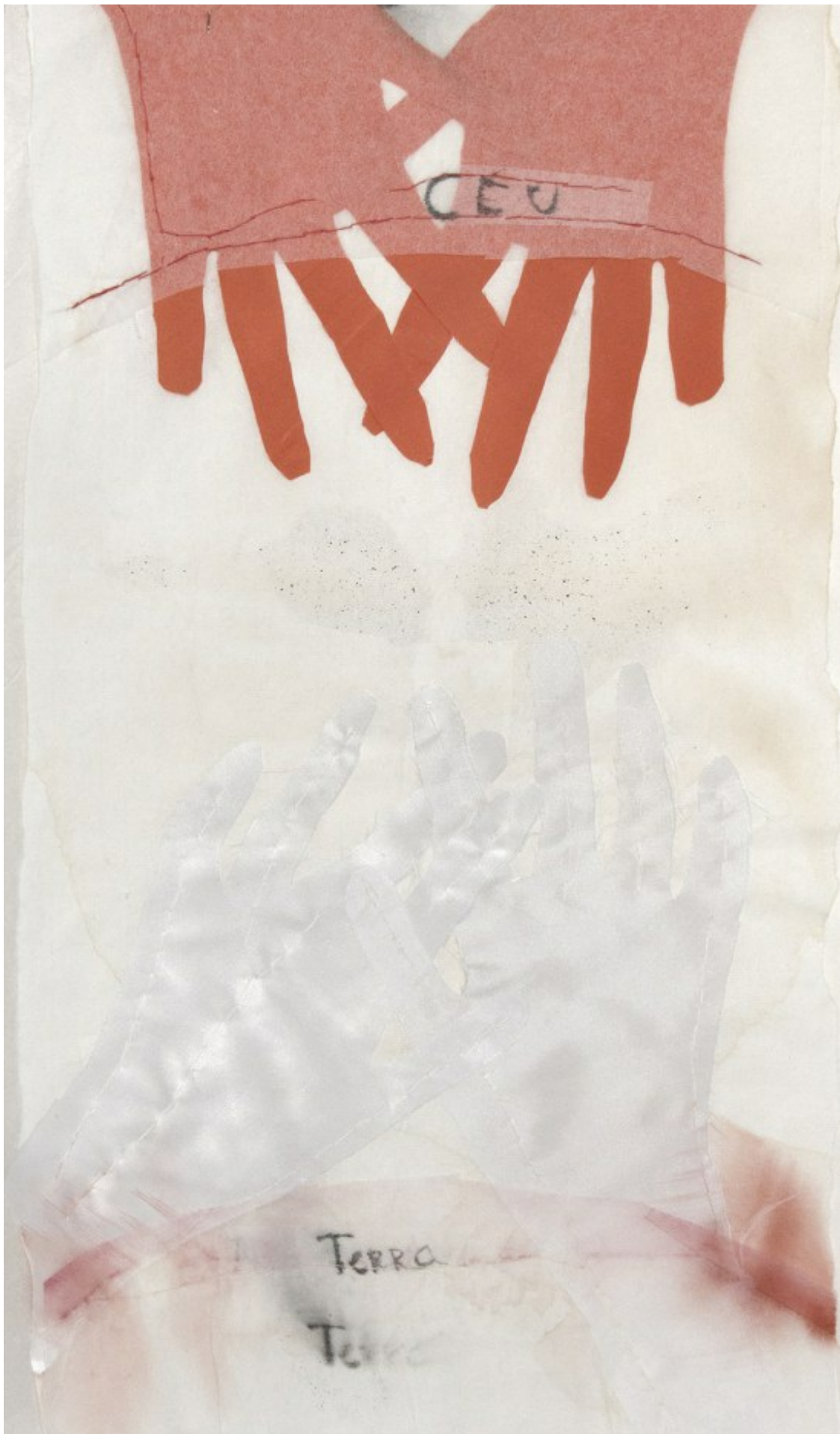


Karin Lambrecht, *Vimos do Vento Trazer estas Luzinhas*, 2015, 160 x 180 cm. Courtesy Instituto Tomie Ohtake

Karin, what led you to live in an island off the coast of Kent in the village of Broadstairs in the UK?

In 2016, my mother died at ninety-seven and as an only child I took care of her. After that, I lost my references in Porto Alegre—my father was born in Germany. So my daughter and I decided to live closer to one another—Yole lives in London, her father is English. The neighborhood where I was brought up in my native Porto Alegre in the house my grandmother built was once a beautiful, peaceful area. In a way, Broadstairs reminds me of the humane atmosphere of my childhood: children walk home from school on their own, the elderly meet in pubs and stroll along the streets with their friends. Life outside inspires safety the opposite of Porto Alegre. The memory of the city was scrapped off, now my neighborhood is a semi-commercial area. Long gone are the shady trees, orchards, groves, vineyards and rose gardens the original home-owners, mostly immigrants, planted when they built their houses in the 1930s and 1950s. I still love Brazil but I feel very sad with its current crude reality. I would love to work on an illustrated book for children with pictures of my old neighborhood.





Karin Lambrecht, Untitled, 2016, 49 x 24 cm. Courtesy Instituto Tomie Ohtake

Do you still maintain a studio in Porto Alegre?

No, since 2017 my life and my studio is now in Broadstairs. I went to Brazil in November

2018 for the opening of my solo exhibition at Instituto Tomie Ohtake in São Paulo and spent some time with some friends.

You have a strong connection with the Bible, was it religion that took you to the arts?

I have no interest in religion. Usually artists are wary about religious institutions. On the first month of my senior year in a Catholic school I was suspended from religion class for the year round. I was given a book on Mary, the Mother of God, which I had to study for an exam specially conceived for me. If I did not pass, it would stop me from moving on to college the following year. It was quite a challenge. My grandmother was very supportive and thought the school was prejudiced against me because we were Lutherans! She found it was impossible to have so much human knowledge on Our Lady in a single book. It was my first contact with Catholicism.



Karin Lambrecht, Luzinha (Tiny Light), 2016, 47 x 37 cm. Courtesy Instituto Tomie Ohtake

In the first two decades as an artist you investigated the Old and New Testaments. How do you deal with religion in your art?

I took some courses with amazing religious people to understand the bible. I used to read it on my own and some words from these readings surface in my work. Studying and reading are important tools for my inner peace.

Now let us move on to 1978 when you made a trip to the Amazon with a group of Brazilian and international artists that included Marina Abramovic and English sculptor Bill Woodrow.

The project was organized in the 1990s by the Goethe-Institut of Brazil with artists like

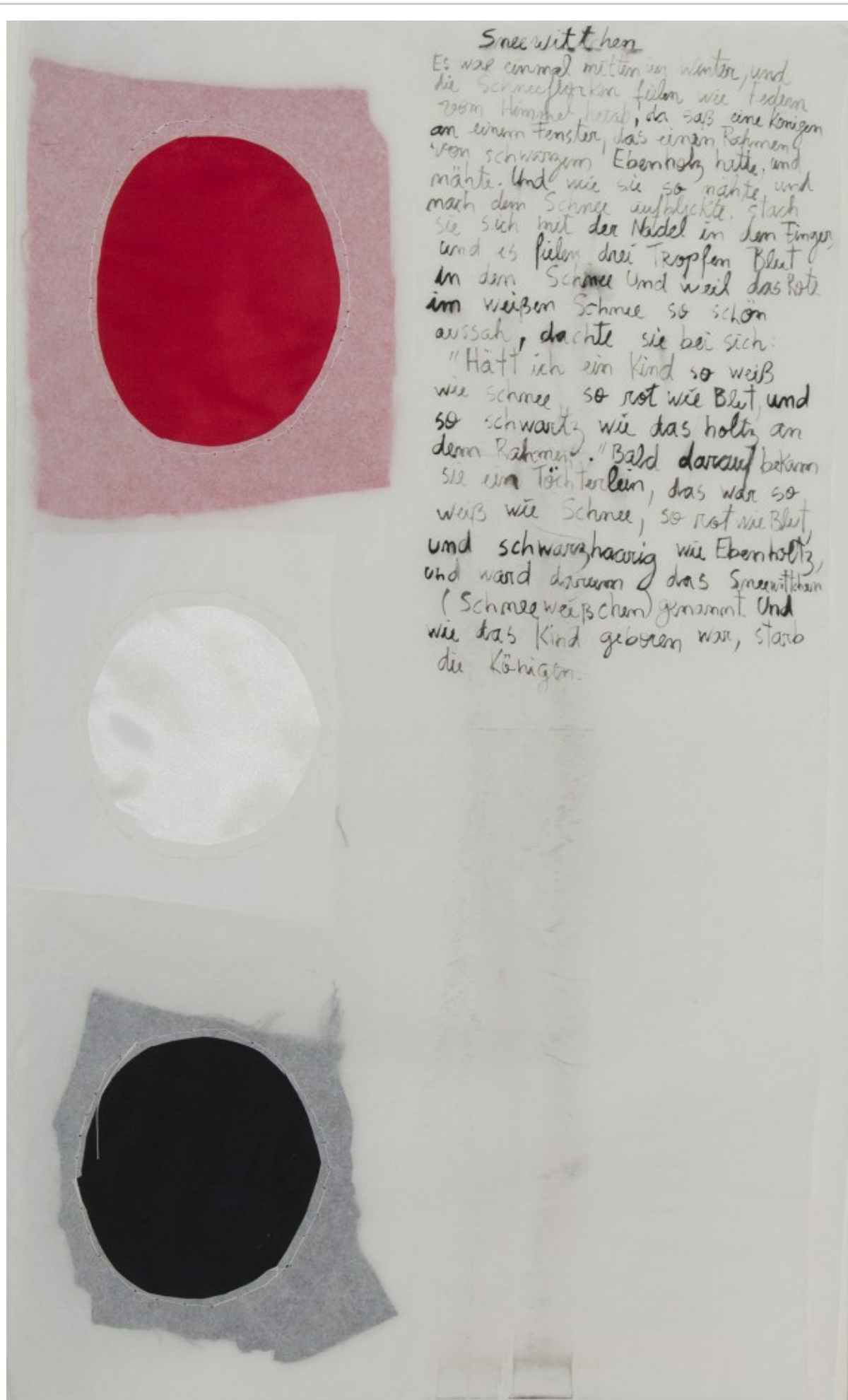
Tunga, Miguel Rio Branco, Julião Sarmento, Antony Gormley and more. We wandered in the deep in the Amazon Forest. It is a natural museum in all its beauty! The first time I visited the region I was in my early twenties I was in awe and since then I returned other times. Personally I think it should be declared a world heritage.



Karin Lambrecht, *Caminho do Rio (River's way)*, 1982, 70 x 70 x 30 cm object-painting afloat at Spree river, Berlin. Photo Karin Lambrecht. Courtesy of the artist

In 1982, during the Cold War, you made a performance by the waters of Berlin's Spree river and threw the work on its waters drawing the attention of the East Berlin police. Tell us about your experience in East Berlin.

My paternal grandparents lived in East Berlin (DDR), the Soviet sector of the capital. The DDR defined my life as a young artist. No one could foresee the wall would one day finally fall. To go from West Berlin to East Berlin we were forced to walk through a scary, dark maize-like underground corridor. At the end you would finally come to the famous Checkpoint Charlie. The East Berlin police could make anyone disappear. I lived in the "free" side of Berlin at Charlottenburg. Berlin in the 1970s and 1980s was a most exciting town. The Kreuzberg neighborhood was full of artists, musicians, writers. When David Bowie lived there he made a German version of "Helden." Under the orientation of my art teacher, Professor Raimund Girke, I made the object-painting "Caminho do Rio" (River's Way, 1982). Inspired by Impressionism, it was a seventy-by-seventy-by-thirty centimeter cardboard waterproof box painted in fresh morning colors. Just as the work was floating down river, a boat of the East Berlin police caught me taking photos and called me on the megaphone. I ran away in panic.



Karin Lambrecht, Untitled, 2015, 47,5 x 29 cm. Courtesy Instituto Tomie Ohtake

As a young artist what was the difference between the atmosphere in the 1970s/1980s of divided Germany and Brazil under the dictatorship?

In West Berlin's Universität der Künste (UDK), then called Hochschule der Künste (HDK), every class was a studio and students were free to roam around. In Berlin painting was brought once again into the global forefront in the major exhibition "Zeitgeist" (1982) with artists young and old. In Brazil, on the contrary, artists like myself who lived through the dictatorship felt a need to break with the past. That is why the exhibition "Como vai você geração 80?" (How are you Generation 80?", 1984) focused only in works by the young generation of artists. Nowadays, I personally think was a pity. It should have had artists young and old alike.



Karin Lambrecht, *Untitled*, 1986, 280 x 200 cm. Realized during her residence at Millay Colony for the Arts, New York State. Photo Karin Lambrecht. Courtesy of the artist

Then in 1986, you were invited for a residency in the Millay Colony for the Arts, in New York State, and met Louise Bourgeois.

Yes, I was there as a resident for three months. I had sent slides of my work to the art

colony and Louise Bourgeois selected them so as soon as I arrived in New York she invited me to meet her.



Karin Lambrecht, Untitled, 1990, 23 x 30cm. Courtesy Instituto Tomie Ohtake

Tell us about your encounter with Louise Bourgeois.

She lived on 20th Street in West Chelsea in an old shabby brownstone. The living room had a clothes drying rope stretched from one end to another where she hanged invitations, documents, letters... She was a very small lady with very bright brilliant eyes... She advised me to move to New York City, but my daughter being still a baby I eventually preferred not to. She told me my work was painting even when it was tridimensional. Because she wanted to follow my work, she invited me to visit her a second time—she was waiting for me sitting on the steps outside her home! Later on I visited her again in the 1990s and she gave me some addresses of people to see but my awkward shyness prevented me from following her advice. She talked a lot about herself, about her art dealer, New York gallerist Robert Miller, from whom she “divorced,” metaphorically speaking. When I asked about Duchamp she got very mad at me, criticized him, said he was a coward and that he had lived not very far from her.



Karin Lambrecht, Tomorrow, 2017, 70 x 25 cm. Courtesy Instituto Tomie Ohtake

Lamb's blood was used in your work in 1997. You smeared it over white cotton fabrics like a shroud. Why?

Indeed. For ten years, I collected the last blood of some ten to fifteen sheep before being killed. In 2008, in Israel, I did my final work in a slaughterhouse, the only one I went to

during the course of this series. I also went to farms in Chile and Uruguay. I found out that this way of killing animals is a long-forgotten appropriation of an old ritual of the Jewish tradition but when I got to Israel I discovered it was also used in the Arabic culture. It is an old biblical ritual. After that I was enrolled in a course on Kabbalah for four years. The book "Eu e Você" (I and You) documents these works that were exhibited in my room in the 25th São Paulo Bienal. In the Pampas lowlands, in the frontiers of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, where the sheep farms were, the landscape is a gigantic void with the horizon a long straight line between earth and sky. The absolute silence is only cut by the gasping of the animal minutes away from the killing. Sometimes I would hear the birds agitated, as if they sensed what was going on. It is brutal and hard. Man, bones, blood, landscape, entrails, it all converges to our limitations.



Karin Lambrecht, Ou (Or), 2015, 95 x 80 cm. Courtesy Instituto Tomie Ohtake

Now let's move on to a big name in Brazilian art, Iberê Camargo.

We became close friends from 1985 on when I went to his studio at Cidade Baixa in Porto Alegre. When he moved his studio to the area of Nonoai, he used to gather us, friends, on

Sundays. Iberê felt a constant inner angst. He enjoyed talking about politics, he was a very anguished, politicized person. He was originally from the interior of Rio Grande do Sul state where nature is very poor on colors. The landscape there is always frosted by the bitter cold and the houses are all built in a dark grey unpainted wood with very plain façades. That landscape reflected very well his dry character, his somber dark colors and small palette. At the same time he was impeccable, severe, sarcastic, playful. I truly miss him.

Did you get to meet Beuys?

I was at the Karl-Hoffer Symposium in 1980 where Beuys was present and I saw him at HDK. I studied his performance piece “How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare”(1965) for a long time. Strangely, I am forgetting Beuys and more and more I remember the teachings of Professor Raimund Girke.



Karin Lambrecht, Untitled, 1981, 80 x 80 x 80 cm each. Realized during the classes of Professor Raimund Girke of HDK Berlin. Photo Karin Lambrecht. Courtesy of the artist

So tell us about German artist Raimund Girke, your teacher.

I was very influenced by his teachings at HDK. For Girke when you enter the studio you leave everything behind. His classes had a meditative tempo. He appreciated Belgian poet and painter Henri Michaux and now I find my self interested in surrealist automatism—its oneiric aspect attracts me.



Karin Lambrecht, Com Sol (With Sun), 2015, 98 x 87 cm. Courtesy Instituto Tomie Ohtake

Who are the artists that inspire you?

For example, Bridget Riley. At HDK I had History of Art classes with Professor Robert Kudielka, who wrote extensively on Riley. Now in the UK, I have the opportunity to see her paintings at the Tate—her work with colors is wonderful. The temporary exhibitions at the National Gallery are magnificent, the lighting and montage are perfect—the Rembrandt exhibition was outstanding! I'm now dedicated to know about English artists. Lately I have been rereading Walter Benjamin's book "Dreams." I also like Klee. Oh my, so many artists... I'm happy I kept on painting although it wasn't easy.



Karin Lambrecht, 2012, A Cela Dela, A Pele Dele (Her Prison Cell, His Skin), 2012, 60 x 60 cm (dyptich). Courtesy Instituto Tomie Ohtake

To wrap up what would you say to a young person who dreams to be a visual artist?

A good teacher is crucial. Select some artists as your models and life examples, and get in contact with their work. Listen to your innermost voice. Deep feelings are our best guides at difficult times.

Karin Lambrecht

Through February 10, 2019

Curated by Paulo Miyada

Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo



Artist Karin Lambrecht in Rolling Stones show, London, 2018. Photo Yole Lambrecht. Courtesy of the artist

Cynthia Garcia

Rio-born Cynthia Garcia is a respected art historian, art critic and journalist fluent in five languages stationed in São Paulo. Her daughter America Cavaliere works in the contemporary art market and her son Pedro Cavaliere, based in LA, is in the international DJ scene.



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