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A review of four works for the contemporary artist: Lize Krüger

The fine artist **Lize Krüger**, living and working in Horsham, England formerly known for her exquisite large format oil paintings, recently started exploring new media and more specifically archival pigment printing. Archival pigment prints are often referred to as “Giclée” prints.

Process:

Archival pigment print

In the contemporary fine art market, printing with archival pigments is an ideal option for printmakers/artists to produce collectable, limited editions of high quality, light fast images. Archival pigment printing is the recent alternative to the classic standard dye-based inkjet way of producing prints. Dye-based prints were completely unstable and not light fast. Archival pigment printing denotes a printmaking process incorporating refined particles of pigment that are resilient to the environmental elements that commonly used to degrade and erode dye molecules, shortening the life of an art print. Archival pigment printing has a singular important feature: the ability to create exact, lasting prints that allow for the capture and storage of traditional images for extended periods of time without colour deterioration; ideal for the longevity needed in image archiving.

Archival pigment printers produce especially stable colouring of the image, which early inkjet printers could not do as to the acidity of the inks and chemicals used. In the early days of printing, inkjet images had a rampant problem with fading and dramatic colour shifts – some images changed in only days. Pigment based prints did not do this, and as a result the art industry began to employ pigments to maintain the quality of graphic and fine art. The archival pigments used are extremely small, encapsulated particles that, when put onto paper, are large enough to stay upon the surface of the paper as opposed to becoming absorbed into the fibres of the paper as seen with molecularly soluble dyes. This process assists in fine art pigment prints retaining their colour for a longer period of time (lately up to 200 years). This period is approximately the same for traditional watercolour paintings if not exposed to direct sunlight.

Giclée print

Giclée is a neologism coined in 1991 by printmaker Jack Duganne for fine art digital prints made on inkjet printers with unstable dyes or inks. The name was originally applied to fine art prints created on a modified Iris printer in a process invented in the late 1980s but was later replaced by archival pigment printing, a light-fast print on high-quality linen or cotton art papers. It is important for any art/print collector to understand the difference between a Giclée print and archival pigment print. However, the term Giclée print could potentially also apply to contemporary prints printed with archival pigment inks.

Conceptual background

For the last few years, Lize Krüger’s creative work mainly investigates social injustice and/or mental health issues and puts the vulnerability of the human psyche and -condition under a critical



spotlight. I am of the opinion that Lize is not merely an artist, she is also an activist. After the tragic loss of her son and brother, the artist is no longer afraid to tackle the rarely spoken about reality of teenage suicide. Krüger is also a spokesperson for a variety of other social causes such as the international refugee crisis.

Selected works

"I am done looking for love where it doesn't exist. I am done coughing up dust in attempts to drink from dry wells."

— Maggie Young

Flowers without colour is undoubtedly one of my personal favourite works. This work addresses the long-term effects of childhood trauma. Childhood trauma is an event experienced by a child that threatens their life or bodily integrity. Physical or sexual abuse, for example, can be especially traumatic for children and often only resurface later on in life.



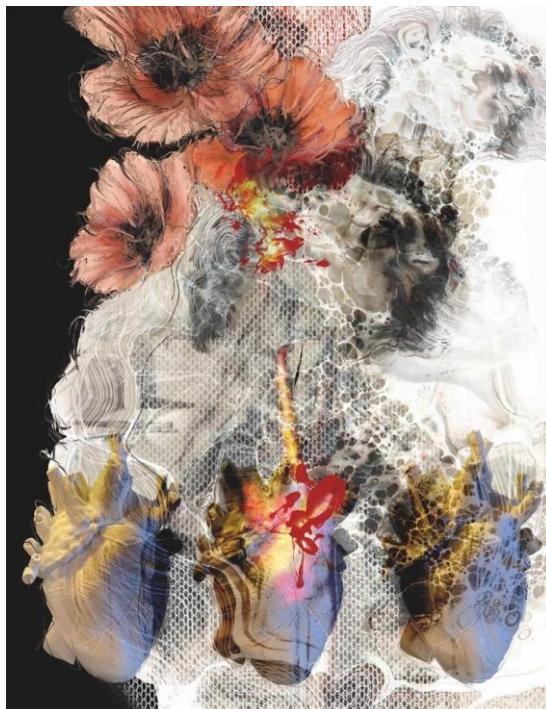
Flowers without colour, Archival pigment in on 350gsm William Turner fine art etching paper,
Size variable, 2020



One-time events such as a car accident, natural disaster (such as a hurricane), or medical trauma can take a psychological toll on children as well. The work is extremely colourful and powerful, even at first glance. By employing this strategy, the artist invites the viewer to first engage with the strong colours and visually pleasing compositions before discovering a deeper, more disturbing meaning to the work. The most powerful symbol in this work might be two dissolving brains in the top quarter. The brains are blood red, a colour often not only associated with pain, injury and/or a wound, but also, love, passion and compassion. In doing so, the artist speaks about the child (injury) to the adult viewer (love and compassion). Both brains are growing from strange alien flowers in the lower half of the work. The “flowers” are outlined by a red stipple line, maybe suggesting an attempt to close up a wound and/or to bring attention to what appears to be dead Iris flowers inside the alien flowers.

The flowers are floating on soothing Azure blue, the colour of the ocean, often associated with healing and said to represent Jupiter, the supreme god, associated with thunder, lightning, and storms. However, Azure is known as a stable and calming colour that just about everyone likes. It evokes nature, stability, calmness and hence makes conceptual sense in this specific work. Maybe the latter is an attempt by the artist to soften the suggested childhood trauma in the work by using a more soothing background. Generally speaking, the use of intense colours in the work is hugely ironic when reading the title: ***Flowers without colour***. By choosing this title, the artist underlines the tragic loss of childhood innocence, potential growth and the chance to excel in life as an adult. The mere outline of a little girl in the centre of the work is tragic, as if to say that she is an empty vessel or even completely gone, never to be found again. The outline also reminds the viewer of the outline of a dead body at a crime scene and underlines the grim reality that childhood trauma may indeed completely erase and/or destroy the psyche of a child.

For me, this work is testament to the artist's brilliant use of colour and in doing so, adding another layer of meaning to her composition and concept.



His heart and mind broke at the same time, Archival pigment in on 350gsm William Turner fine art etching paper, Size variable, 2020



In ***His heart and mind broke at the same time*** Lize addresses an issue maybe closest to her heart. Not only did the artist loose her beautiful young son to suicide, but also her brother. As a result, she became an advocate for suicide in general and more specifically teenage suicide. According to the online source www.tate.org.uk: “activist art is a term used to describe art that is grounded in the act of ‘doing’ and addresses political or social issues” ([https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/activist-art](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/activist-art)).

If anything, art is about morals, about our belief in humanity. Without that, there simply is no art.

- **Ai Weiwei**

“The aim of activist artists is to create art that is a form of political or social currency, actively addressing cultural power structures rather than representing them or simply describing them. In describing the art, she makes, the activist artist Tania Bruguera said, ‘I don’t want art that points to a thing. I want art that is the thing’. Activist art is about empowering individuals and communities and is generally situated in the public arena with artists working closely with a community to generate the art. Some artists concerned with activist art, are also involved in direct action, like the Women On Waves Foundation, a feminist art collective that runs a floating abortion clinic, carrying out abortions in places where they are not legal” ([https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/activist-art](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/activist-art)).

In the light of the above Lize Krüger is undoubtedly an art activist, she never makes meaningless “wallpaper” art.

The official online journal of the world psychiatric association (WPA) *World Psychiatry* states that “global suicide rates among adolescents in the 15-19 age group, according to the latest World Health Organization (WHO) Mortality Database, were examined. Data for this age group were available from 90 countries (in some cases areas) out of the 130 WHO member states. The mean suicide rate for this age group, based on data available for the latest year, was 7.4/100,000. Suicide rates were higher in males (10.5) than in females (4.1). This applies in almost all countries. The exceptions are China, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador and Sri Lanka, where the female suicide rate was higher than the male. In the 90 countries (areas) studied, suicide was the fourth leading cause of death among young males and the third for young females. Of the 132,423 deaths of young people in the 90 countries, suicide accounted for 9.1%. The trend of suicide rates from 26 countries (areas) with data available during the period 1965-1999 was also studied. A rising trend of suicide in young males was observed. This was particularly marked in the years before 1980 and in countries outside Europe. The WHO database is the largest of its kind and, indeed, the only information source that can currently be used for analysis of global mortality due to suicide.”

Again, and taking the above into consideration, Krüger is using art as her weapon/tool and her work is of the utmost importance, especially now. Our world is deeply troubled, and a dark cloud hangs over us. People’s depression and anxiety levels are extremely high and many close to breaking point. I am personally of the opinion that our generation might not be mentally strong enough to deal with the mental effects the Covid-19 pandemic on the human psyche.

In ***His heart and mind broke at the same time***, the clever use of colour or the absence of colour is again the primary element the viewer is confronted with. The figure is a symbolic portrait not only of her son and/or brother but also for all other young lives lost to suicide. The figure is without colour and represented as a monochrome (black and white) double portrait, almost as if she wants to accentuate her personal loss like a scream or echo. The absence of colour in the double portrait is a clever and powerful Strategy employed by the artist. An attempt to soften or enfold the black and white portraits with colour is evident in the three red poppies



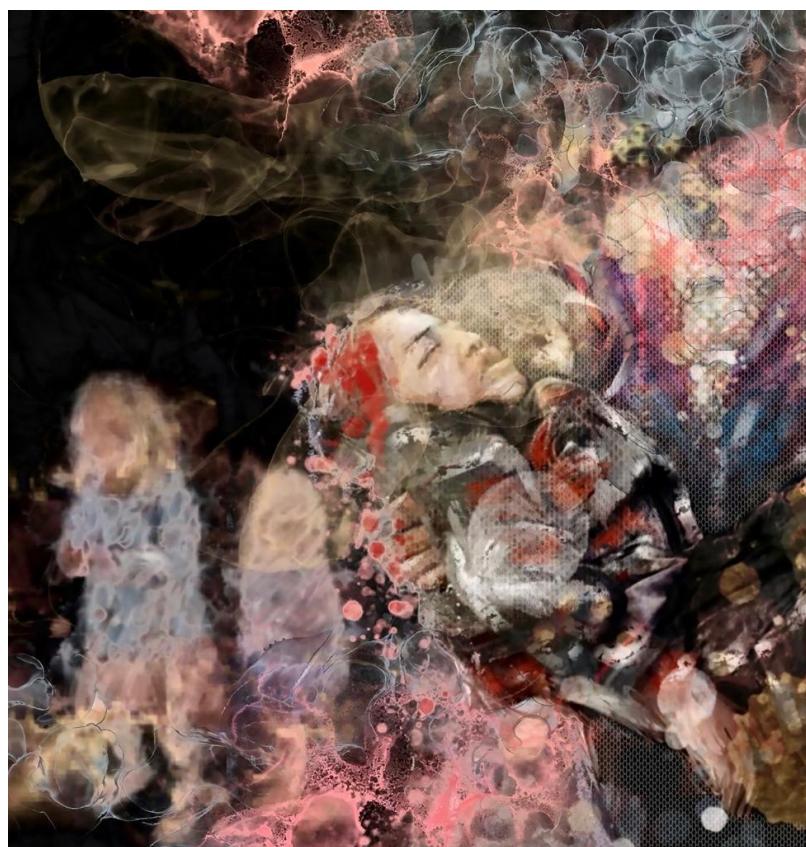
and three blue hearts. Blue is often associated with suffocation, these hearts, although depicted with colour is starved of oxygen and therefore life.

The use of the colourful Poppy flower in the work is intentional and important. The Poppy is a symbol of remembrance, especially in England, as well as a symbol of consolation and resurrection. However, this flower is commonly used as a symbol of death, peace and eternity. The deliberate use of the three Poppy flowers and three hearts in this work is not a mere coincidence, the number three has religious or cultural significance in many societies. In Christianity the number three is considered “sacred”, there is the Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Plato saw the number three as being symbolic of the triangle, the simplest spatial shape, and considered the world to have been built from triangles. However, to me personally, the most applicable explanation for the use of the number three in ***His heart and mind broke at the same time*** is that it is based on Pythagorean principles which proposed the view that there is some kind of order or logic in the cosmos. If this was not the case, how will suicide ever make sense on a much deeper philosophical level? This is of course only an opinion.

Lastly, a veil or “burial cloth” partially covers the main portrait in the work, maybe the use of the veil is a personal symbol for motherly protection and/or the divine feminine employed by the artist? However, lace is indeed considered to be the “ultimate fabric of femininity” (www.britannia.com).

A shattered soul loses pieces every time it's glued back together.

- ANON



Ultimate sacrifice, Archival pigment in on 350gsm William Turner fine art etching paper, Size variable, 2020



In her work ***Ultimate sacrifice***, the artist undoubtedly puts a critical spotlight on the global refugee crisis as well as child trafficking. According to www.un.org “the world is witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. An unprecedented 70.8 million people around the world have been forced from home by conflict and persecution at the end of 2018. Among them are nearly 30 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18.” According to the journalist Omer Karasapan in his article: *Sharing the burden of the global refugee crisis* (www.brookings.edu, Monday January 27, 2020) “the Global Refugee Forum did raise some funds—\$3 billion from multilateral development agencies and \$250 million in cash and kind from private sources. Much of this comes from repackaging existing funds. Moreover, the \$16 billion raised for refugees is less than three-fifths of estimated needs. Longer-term needs such as education and health for children who constitute half the global refugee population remain far from being met. This will mean millions of kids with little hope of bettering themselves, most living in the world’s most fragile regions. And we know that the despair and its manifestations do not stay confined to these regions. Now is the time to deal with this challenge, when the problem is still manageable. We should not await the development of crime- and radicalization-prone underclasses and then pour in billions toward makeshift solutions.”

Hearts rebuilt from hope resurrect dreams killed by hate.

- Aberjhani, *The River of Winged Dreams*

In the light of the conceptual background above, the main focus in ***Ultimate sacrifice*** is absolutely on the sleeping (or dead?) figure in the centre of the work. More blurred ghost-like, out-of-focus images of (female) children may be seen to the left of the main figure, possibly signifying the plight of many younger refugees such as displacement, separation from their families and or even death. The artist makes use of intense and complex layering as a powerful conceptual tool in this work. Layering allows an artist to weave different layers of meaning into one work by using colour, composition and other art elements to determine the importance of the urgency of each layer. Many of these layers are often created by hand using traditional media such as paint, ink, found objects etc. or photographed, scanned and superimposed or juxtaposed on top of another layer. A final archival print may incorporate many layers of meaning. As an accomplished oil painter, the latter is indeed an integral part of Krüger’s work.

Ultimate sacrifice may also deal with child trafficking. According to the online source www.nspcc.org.uk “child trafficking is where children and young people are tricked, forced or persuaded to leave their homes and are moved or transported and then exploited, forced to work against their will, or sold. Children are mostly trafficked for sexual exploitation and/or child labour.” Modern slavery is a grim reality globally. According to a *Walk Free Foundation* report in 2018, there were “46 million people enslaved worldwide in 2016, and there were 8 million people in India were living in the forms of modern slavery, such as bonded labour, child labour, forced marriage, human trafficking and/or forced begging” (www.globalslaveryindex.org). At any given moment, an estimated forty million people are being victimized in situations of trafficking and exploitation worldwide. Twenty five percent of these are children. As a mother and grandmother, children are very close to Lize Krüger’s heart and are often depicted in her works without being superficial and/or commercial.

It is, however, once again the artist’s genial use of colour in ***Ultimate sacrifice*** that impresses the viewer. Soft pinks and blues invite the viewer to immediately engage with the work, despite a pitch-black background. There is such beauty in this rather dark work.

I see black light (his last words)

— Victor Hugo



Elements of rebirth, Archival pigment in on 350gsm William Turner fine art etching paper, Size variable, 2021

Talk about them. Be proud of them. Losing a courageous battle doesn't make you weak.

- Anon

In **Elements of rebirth**, the usual layered approach in Krüger's work is largely absent, it is a quiet work with much clarity. In a recent telephonic conversation with Lize she shared that this work is based on a dream she had shortly after the passing of her son. A human skull is the main image in this work. Inside the skull is the same portrait, also used by the artist in other works and hence carries significant personal importance for her, most probably because it is a symbolic portrait of her deceased son. The most common symbolic use of the skull is as a representation of death, mortality and the unachievable nature of immortality or *Memento Mori* which is the inevitability of death – “remember that you must die”. In this work the skull with the portrait may be a “container” for the soul of Francois, Lize’s deceased son. The portrait is yellow, and the colour yellow is traditionally believed to be the colour of light, hope and encouragement. The subconscious use of yellow in **Elements of rebirth** is hence hugely ironic, however, in her dream, the artist’s son described his “expanding yellow soul” to her. Butterflies are commonly known as symbols for the human soul and transformation.

In the black, quiet bottom half of the work a snake and feather is to be seen. Historically, serpents and snakes represent fertility or a creative life force. As snakes shed their skin through sloughing, they are symbols of rebirth, transformation (the same as the butterfly), immortality, and healing. The Ouroboros, or the snake devouring itself is a symbol of eternity and continual



renewal of life. Not only is the snake a powerful symbol for rebirth by shedding, but it also represents the artist's son Francois, who according to his mother Lize, "became too big for his earthly life, shed his physical body and moved on to a new life". Its shedding skin considered the serpent as a symbol of healing, wisdom, transformation, and rebirth. Through the shedding process, the snake is healed, transformed and reborn. In this work, the snake is specifically a King Cobra or *Ophiophagus Hannah*, the longest venomous snake in the world. It is famous for its fierceness and is extremely dangerous. They are the only snake that builds nests for its eggs. The female will guard the eggs until they hatch. This may of course conceptually refer to the protective nature of a mother. Cobras are revered in India and represent the Lord Shiva, the god of destruction, which is important in relation to the conceptual meaning of ***Elements of rebirth.***

As a symbol across many cultures, feathers have always represented a connection to spiritual realms and to divinity. Because of their connection to birds, they have always been a symbol of flight and freedom, not just physically, but also in a mental or spiritual sense. The choice of the feather as a symbol for "Francois's freedom" is a clever choice. Feathers are furthermore powerful symbols of hope and spiritual growth. In a more spiritual sense, a feather represents communication from the higher heavenly realms. In the artists life, the latter is of monumental importance. Birds are free to fly and they represent freedom, they are extremely spiritual animals and also represent good luck, prosperity, love and an abundance of wealth and knowledge. In the light of the above the Lize shared with me that "the appearance of feathers out of nowhere would become a personal agreement" between herself and her son – her evidence of his afterlife.

Lastly, in the work the absence of a physical landscape in the foreground under a clearly identifiable mountain range, underlines a loss of physicality and the presence of another more spiritual realm.

A work of art never stops growing, every new interpretation by a new viewer adds to the conceptual depth and possible meaning(s) of the work.

Krüger's work is a brilliant light in a dark tunnel.

Christiaan Diedericks

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