

Vidya Gastaldon with Fabrice Stroun

Fabrice Stroun :

Who is your work intended for?

Vidya Gastaldon :

For everybody, I'd have thought.

Fabrice Stroun :

Your drawings contain nobiographical elements and, unlike most of the work of your contemporaries, do not deal with our "relationship to culture," but rather depict strange visions or cosmic phenomena like genesis, "transmigration"... Maybe I ought to rephrase my question: where are you coming from?

Vidya Gastaldon :

To talk of futilities would only confine what I am trying to bring about, and make it incommunicable. Krishnamurti says of the creative act: "The inspiration must not be from the self. Beauty is total self-abandonment and with total absence of the self there is 'that.'" This "that" is the most basic thing I possess and, by the same token, the thing I share most absolutely with Others. This "that" is what I am trying to feel and get across.

Fabrice Stroun :

For ten years or so, you have been using a lot of "effects of landscape" in your work. Why is that?

Vidya Gastaldon :

There are several reasons. The landscape is the most appropriate form for evoking a certain contemplative state. It is also a metaphor for consciousness and "consciousnesses"; consciousness as a given plane, with its deserts, its summits

and all the height variations between the two... Hence the fact that sometimes in my works there may be several landscapes one on top of the other, or embedded one within the other. Some tiny ones, barely born, others bigger and so on. And then, above all, it is the ideal backdrop for bringing out visions. Often what I draw arises out of, or is just contained in a landscape—and this is when things get complicated... Starting out from the simplicity of the "elements" (earth, air, plains, vegetation, hills, mountains, clouds etc.), all kinds of things can take root, grow, spread, explode, reproduce, float, fly, dissolve, live, laugh and die... finally to be reborn and so on and so forth. When these life principles become apparent, the 'landscape' is no more than a means to 'microcosm' or 'macrocosm' other more or less tangible realities.

Fabrice Stroun :

Do you expect the viewer to perform interpretation, to decipher the signs you put in place? Not only do you use symbols taken from the sacred traditions, but we also find appearing in your drawings characters from pop culture, like "Darth Vader," or those "smileys" that seem to be floating in space. What meaning must be read from all these motifs?

Vidya Gastaldon :

My works are partly made up from allegories and metaphors that seem to me accessible to a wide audience. The references to nature are simple and shared by many different cultures. The motifs I take from other fields are in the order of a pretty archaic symbolism and potentially understandable by anyone. My "smiley" with the big grin embodies cosmic laughter, the Adva•ta, a principle of non-duality, beyond good and evil. Dark Vader¹ is the central figure of an animation film in which he is transmuted into "Bright Vader," and filled with light by a breath (his own?). These "detournements" are far

from being naive, but—and this is crucial—they are never ironic either, in the sense that I make no comment on how they perform on what you call "the expanded field of culture." This distanced position is of no interest to me. Each element in my works has a precise meaning, and is never purely decorative, even when tending towards the abstract. But I have no desire to supply keys for interpreting all these transformational operations. I consider this to be my "back kitchen" work. And like cooking, while you can identify here or there a spot of lemon, pepper, saffron or a drop of honey, what matters is that it is a delicious recipe, and, once again, that you reach that "something else."

Fabrice Stroun :

Do you, as an artist, consider you have an "educational" role to play, such as for instance, making these theologico-biological principles explicit or visible?

Vidya Gastaldon :

It is a question I sometimes ask myself but in any case, I do not feel I have a "mission" to carry out. My work seeks to be radiant and beneficial rather than didactic. Ideally, I would prefer to talk of a global consciousness talking to other global consciousnesses.

Fabrice Stroun :

What if that fails to happen?

Vidya Gastaldon :

I am always interested in how people interpret my work, even when it is far removed from my own considerations. Too often my vision has been reduced to a kind of childish regression—"cuddly toys for adults"—or mere nostalgia for the hippie years. These comments were also being made during the time

I was working with Jean-Michel Wicker. If my works often make use of forms taken from the counterculture of the sixties and seventies, this is because at that time an ultimate need for freedom of minds and bodies transfigured many aspects of architecture, design and fashion. The comfortable, the plush, the appearance of so-called 'organic' forms, rounded and folded, etc., all this was not baby stuff, but a profound reformulation of our relationship to the world. Or are adults not allowed to experience gentleness these days? I have nothing special to say about childhood, except that we ought to remember more often our ability to wonder at things—or just be happy.

Fabrice Stroun :

Do you try to bring about this "wonderment"? It's a word you use to describe the effect certain scenes from the films of Hayao Miyazaki or Frank, the post-psychedelic comic book by Jim Woodring, for example, have on you.

Vidya Gastaldon :

All my works, at a certain level of interpretation, contain a metaphor of revelation. That's already quite sufficient, wouldn't you say? Does revelation have to provoke a feeling of "wonderment"? You might also talk of "stupefaction" or hallucination... In my drawings, some people are even completely terrorized by certain apparitions. And I myself sometimes wonder "what if I really saw everything I draw and make?" Well, if I draw or make these things, it's because, in a way, I have seen them!

Fabrice Stroun :

I'd like us to address the question of your "labour." Your three-dimensional works call upon various kinds of craftsmanship that are arduous and have fallen into disrepute.

Your sculptures take hundreds of hours of knitting and embroidery, and you produce your films literally on your knees! And although you sometimes call on assistants, you use no industrial techniques. Why is that?

Vidya Gastaldon :

I am interested in the studies of certain geobiologists on vibratory emissions due to forms (which are also known as quantum waves or form waves) and which are applicable to artifacts. The objects are sponge-like vibratory receptacles and, with a bit of luck, they manage to pass on the "intention" to those making them. Without going into moral considerations, I am attentive to what I "give" through what I "do." even though it can sometimes be really arduous...

Fabrice Stroun :

And yet, the extremely elaborate, clear-cut appearance of your works would seem to be in contradiction with that basically "expressionistic" philosophy.

Vidya Gastaldon :

There is nothing expressionistic about this ideal. The expressive gesture strikes me as being shameless, irresponsible and self-centred in its desire to convey "something felt." On the contrary, I prefer to take the time to do things in a meticulous way, precisely in order to exercise a form of control over and distancing from this emoting "I." I even have an "industrial" fair trade project for Japan based on a piece I made in collaboration with Jean-Michel Wicker, somewhere between art and design and for which I hope to control the choice of materials as well as the manufacturing conditions and processes.

Fabrice Stroun :

Jean-Michel Wicker and yourself have been producing works under a joint signature for seven years. This collaboration has set the foundations for your respective practices.

Vidya Gastaldon :

Yes, and more specifically in my case, drawing and sewing. The period of collaboration with Jean-Michel was already a kind of test case for what creation beyond the ego might be. Above all, it was an opportunity for us to blend our respective knowledge and knowhow. Jean-Michel is much more cultivated and curious than I am with regard to the field of art...

Fabrice Stroun :

You are always presenting yourself as someone working on the extreme fringe of contemporary art, on the border with visionary art. And yet it seems to me that your works, your sculptures mainly, can only be understood, precisely, from the field of ample, see you putting on a show at the chapel of Sacred Grey's museum in New York!

Vidya Gastaldon :

I don't agree: I believe, quite sincerely, that are intelligible to people of all ages from to ... As before, I am absolutely not interested in targeting some exhibiting in Alex Grey's museum, frankly I don't see O'Neill, a close friend who actually happens to work folkloric forms, Alex Grey's work represents the acme the same, I surely share more centres of interest in so-called "visionary" artists than with most of contemporary enough, if I could really choose, I would ideally prefer in the chapel of Yucatan Mirror Displacements—which that you have a point...

1 In French, Darth Vader, the "villain" in Star Wars, is translated as "Dark Vader."