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## The Vleeshal Opera

Dorothy Iannone & Juliette Blightman

27.06.-12.09.2021

The first seeds for the duo exhibition The Vleeshal Opera were sown when Juliette Blightman was given a publication with correspondence in words and works by Dieter Roth and Dorothy Iannone. It was the first time that Blightman (1980, UK) came across Iannone (1933, USA) and she immediately felt a strong admiration for and affinity with both woman and work.

The two artists met each other for the first time in 2014, at Dorothy's house. During this meeting, Iannone told Blightman the whole story around her hand-drawn artist book *The Story of Bern* (1970). She had been invited by her beloved Dieter Roth to participate in the exhibition *Freunde – Friends – d'Fründe* at the Kunsthalle Bern, but some of the other participating artist "friends" pleaded to cover the genitals in her work *(Ta)Rot Pack* (1968–1969) with tape. The work depicts scenes of Iannone and Roth's everyday life and their passionate relationship in 27 cards, painted on both sides with felt-tip pen and ink. Some of her works were removed by the Kunsthalle a few hours before the opening, so that the next morning Iannone and Roth took out all of their works from the exhibition to protest against this censorship. Published soon afterwards, *The Story of Bern* bluntly retells these events in Iannone's distinctive and explicit comic book style. Hearing the artist recall "The Story of Bern" led Blightman to make a series of penis portraits, which she exhibited uncensored at the Kunsthalle Bern. In *The Vleeshal Opera*, these paintings come together with Iannone's work for the first time.

And it didn't stop with the penis paintings: Blightman reacted to Iannone's *(Ta)Rot Pack* with her version of a Tarot card deck; the series *Stages of Seed Development* (2020). Together, the two Tarot works serve as the starting point for the duo's exhibition at Vleeshal.

Different motifs from Blightman's *Stages of Seed Development* recur in the artist's other works in *The Vleeshal Opera*—a monumental pussy flower painting, phallic cacti fountains in fulgent green and the above-mentioned penis portraits, entitled *Still Life #2* and *#3*. Similarly, symbologies and intimate friends of Iannone who are, directly or indirectly, present in her *(Ta)Rot Pack* reappear in the exhibition. For example as wooden cut-outs, entitled *the Giant People who gather around the sculpture Roulette Table*, *Love is My Inspiration*.

In *The Vleeshal Opera*, there is no risk of being alone. Artists Dorothy Iannone and Juliette Blightman both draw down time into all-encompassing symbologies of love, sex, care, work, autonomy, joy and other selfhoods. This exhibition brings together these two highly individual and yet affiliated cosmoses.