

Silvie Aigner

A Conversation with Ingeborg G. Pluhar

Conducted in the Artist's Studio Apartment at Stallburggasse, Vienna, and at Café Bräunerhof.

[In your family, both you and one of your sisters have pursued an artistic career. Did you grow up in an artistic environment?](#)

I was born in 1944, in the last year of the war, that is. My parents' true life actually took place before the war. My German-speaking father came from what was then Bohemia, went to school in Prague, and came to Vienna with his family when he was 18. On the one hand, he wanted to go to university here, but it was also because his father had been actively involved in efforts to establish an affiliation between Bohemia and Austria after World War I. When these activities had failed, however, he was expelled from the country and the Austrian state subsequently granted him a pension, thus providing for his livelihood. My grandmother was a great theater enthusiast and she went to the Burgtheater as often as she could. She lived nearby, which was quite convenient. It is certainly from her side that the theatrical element runs in our family. This gift was handed down via my father, who was a welcome guest at social events and a good speaker, to my sister Erika. My mother came from a Viennese household where everyone was more interested in fine art. Her father was a "master craftsman" glazier who cooperated, among others, with the Wiener Werkstätte, and whose large firm was located beneath the residential building in the Währing district. I was very impressed when I was allowed to watch grandfather draw sketches for church windows or artistic portals at an easel in his studio. I will also never forget the general excitement and the sweat-covered workers when they set about the tricky process of firing leaded panes in large underground kilns. Already in the times of the Monarchy, this workshop had delivered church windows and artistic glass facades to just about everywhere. After World War II, among others, the new glass windows for St Stephen's Cathedral or the Votivkirche were made here. My mother, who had considerable artistic talents, enrolled at the Academy of Applied Arts when she was seventeen and became, among others, a student of well-known art educationalist Franz Cizek. During her so-called «preparation» at Fichtegasse she did drawings and paintings under his guidance. My father couldn't find work in Vienna after his graduation and therefore accepted a managing position with the Texas Oil Company in Brazil, and my mother followed without completing her art degree. They married in Rio de Janeiro, and my oldest sister, Brigitte, was born in 1933. They came back, among others, owing to the great expectations my father had of the Nazi regime. As an "Illegal", however, he was not allowed to enter Austria, so they lived in Munich for some time. My sister Erika was born in Vienna in 1939, after the Austrian Anschluss and shortly before the start of the war. After holding several occupations, my father finally took up the position of an Adjutant to the Galician governor in Poland. In a move he probably made because he had come to recognize his mistake, he managed to get himself drafted and sent off to war in 1943; all the while, my mother, pregnant with me and with the two older children in tow, had to live through dangerous times (bombs, air-raid shelters, evacuation, etc.). Shortly after I was born, my father became a British prisoner of war for a few years.

But now we have drifted quite far from your question about the cultural background!

[The Cizek School and Viennese Kinetism, which was introduced by Franz Cizek and his students, were an essential contribution to Austria's avantgarde. Did your mother pursue her artistic path later on?](#)

When she studied under Cizek – who was in favor of and encouraged linking up to applied arts – she designed many wallpaper patterns and costumes and created abstract style drawings. Much later, under Oswald Oberhuber's tenure, a large part of her works was acquired for the collection at the Museum for Applied Art which, aside from the estate from the Wien Museum, owns a large collection of works by members of Cizek's class. Later in life, my mother, unfortunately, abandoned her abstract use of form and adopted a naturalist style. As she also had a gift for music, we went to many concerts and operas even though oftentimes that was quite difficult in the postwar era. Literature, too, was an important element in our family, and appreciation of fine art was encouraged through visits to museums. As our apartment in Vienna-Döbling was bombed out we stayed with an aunt for a while. After my father returned from captivity, he was not allowed to practice his academic profession until his "denazification", which is why he had to earn the money necessary to support the family by taking up

unskilled labor. He worked for my grandfather on my mother's side or installed chimneys on new buildings, as he did not suffer from vertigo. Finally, we «only temporarily» moved to Floridsdorf, a district of Vienna controlled by the Russian occupying power. There was an enormous presence of Russian troops, mostly intoxicated soldiers, and my mother would always take us firmly by the hand when we walked through the streets; we then had to keep up with her rapidly accelerating steps. The drawings I did as a child often show the occupying forces. Something I personally liked very much was the natural environment that was still intact at the time and where we could play with kids from the neighborhood. Later, when my father finally was able to practice his profession again, we moved within the district to a larger and brighter apartment with a view of the Wasserpark. We went to high school in the immediate neighborhood and the teachers were very encouraging and supportive. Our parents' motto was always: "We can't leave lots of money to you, but in any case you will have a good education!" Therefore, it came as a shock to them when my oldest sister married at the age of seventeen and emigrated to America, the second went to the Reinhard Seminar to become an actress, and later I, too, rejected their offer to get a «decent» university degree and began my sculpture course at the Academy of Fine Arts. To them, these occupations did not provide me with a perspective in life! Unlike my father, my mother showed some appreciation for our wishes and tried to mediate between all those involved.

[Already as a child you drew a lot; in part, people from your immediate surroundings but also a comic strip story, the hero of which was Cowboy Lex Körnie. In 1976, you exhibited part of your drawings at Galerie nächst St. Stephan.](#)

On the one hand, this exhibition was ignored or smiled at tolerantly; on the other hand it was mistaken for some kind of «child prodigy postscript»; it was not seen as testimony to the "Picture of life" formed by a young person living through the postwar years. I really drew all the time when I was a child. For me, it was a confirmation of my existence, maybe even more so than writing a diary is for other children. Whatever was on my mind, what I had seen or had been told, everything was turned into a drawing. I would frequently make up new plots and expand the stories; that's why some characters often appear several times on a single page. I drew everything off the top of my head; occasionally, of course, instead of doing my homework. It had already become a habit with my mother to quickly search my desk for secret drawings. But she obviously realized there was some quality to them as she stowed everything away in boxes and gave them to me later when I was a grown-up already. That was a nice surprise.

[Back in 1962, for a woman to decide to enroll, of all things, in a sculpture master class was something highly unusual. How did that come to be?](#)

My high school art teacher was highly committed, her name was Ilse Breit, and she was one of Franz Cizek's «real» former students, that is to say one from his famous school project; already as a child, she did whole books of paintings and drawings there, which were even published. It seems that later, for various reasons she somehow resigned in terms of her own work, but she was an amazing woman who was able to get us, the entire class, absolutely enthusiastic about art. Apparently, she thought I had talent and fostered my artistic growth. In graduating class when I had to decide which form of art I was going to pursue, she said: "You don't have to "learn" to draw and paint anymore. But you have good spatial understanding, which could still be expanded through a sculpture course!" I liked the idea, especially because, at the time, sculpture was an unusual and remarkable thing to study for girls. She recommended Fritz Wotruba as a teacher right away, «the only one worth considering in this country». So, even before my school-leaving exams and the Academy entrance exams in fall, I put together a portfolio and went to Böcklinstraße to see Wotruba. He was rather condescending, but he did take a thorough look at my portfolio, albeit accompanied by some mocking remarks that had made me expect the worst. At last, when he handed me back my portfolio, he finally said the magic words: «All right; well, come in the fall then!» - That really meant a lot to me! Everyone knew Wotruba accepted a maximum of three students per year. Thus, throughout my years at the Academy, the total of all students from all course levels was 12 (with the exception of a few short-term guest students), and I was the only "regular" female student.

[In the summer of 1962, you went to Salzburg for four weeks to attend Oskar Kokoschka's Summer Academy.](#)

I very much wanted to get to know Oskar Kokoschka. Actually, the fact that he was still teaching classes was really amazing! At the time, the "Alma Mahler" biography had just been published for the first time and, again and again, he wouldn't let anything stop him from going to the administrative office where an announcement microphone had been installed to read passages of the book referring to himself or other people around. He would then present his own version of the facts in a very lively fashion, not to say in a

choleric manner! In the meantime, we all sat working on our nude figure paintings and were greatly amused. Towards the evening, he would walk around the classroom once more and assessed the clay's work of his students. As a sign of approval, he would hand out wrapped candies, but only to students who had imitated his style of painting in an epigonic manner. I never got candy. Later, in August and September, I was in Bonn where I was to take part in the establishment of a gallery. For various reasons, I was lucky enough to experience an unforgettable long weekend with Yehudi Menuhin, his charming sister Hephzibah Hauser and their families at their cottage at Gstaad, Switzerland. I also went to two concerts in the small church at Saanen. Thank goodness, the Bonn project did not evolve further, so I was back in Vienna in time for the beginning of the semester and took up my course of study under Fritz Wotruba. All in all, 1962 was a very exciting year for me: Graduation from school, Oskar Kokoschka, Bonn, Yehudi Menuhin, and then my entry into Fritz Wotruba's master class in sculpture.

What was it like to be the only woman studying under Wotruba?

As a woman student, one had to be just as committed as the men. One was also never allowed to complain, and saying that something was «too hard» was no excuse. After all, as far as weight is concerned we learned to achieve leverage with certain makeshift tools right at the start, and also how to produce «armatures» for clay figures or reliefs, which often involved large quantities of material. One of the hardest tasks was to cast our often technically complicated works on clay in plaster, sometimes also in concrete under the instruction of our plaster caster. In any case, the same craft skills were demanded of me as of the male students. Other than that, I enjoyed working with my colleagues very much. They were all so nice! If things got difficult, everyone helped each other anyway. With regard to subjects, we were instructed to exclusively focus our efforts on the human figure. In terms of abstraction, the only possibility we had was to create cubic diagrams or studies in proportion. On the other hand, in the mornings in the large figure-modelling hall, both a female and a male nude model were always available to us. So, we were able to work directly from the models and change their position according to our individual needs. They really did take great care of us. The large clay figures we often worked on for three to four months had to be life-sized. When they were completed, it was decided which of them would be cast. The others were destroyed. During my years at the Academy I did twelve to fifteen clay models (in the mornings), and I think only two to three of these were cast.

Were you free to also work from your own designs and ideas?

Yes, starting from noon, all of us worked in our "own" studios. Here, we were able to give free rein to our creativity, but in spite of all attempts at abstraction and other unconventional endeavors, the human figure still had to remain discernible. Torsi were highly popular among us students, in part also because Wotruba did so many torsi. With some, their teacher's «trademark» style was strongly visible in their work, and Wotruba encouraged orientation towards his oeuvre. When people strayed too far from his style and pursued something of their own he could become quite aggressive at times. At least once a week, he came into the large classroom where we worked from nude models and took a look at our works. I still remember vividly how one day, without a word, he walked up to the figure I had concentrated on developing for weeks and cut off large parts of the armature with a knife until it all lay on the floor like parts of a dead body. That was really cruel! Sometimes, he would come to our individual studios afterwards, and then he could be in a great mood again. Every day from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. we attended evening figure drawing with Herbert Boeckl at the Academy at Schillerplatz. We really worked hard in those days!

Did you also work in stone?

I didn't have to. Aside from the fact that one had to pay for every stone, Wotruba also didn't like to see me engage in that type of activity. It could happen that, in his charming manner, he would say things like: "Come on, girl, leave that, we don't want any of these chunks to land on your feet!" Of course, I still worked on smaller sandstones and also granite blocks now and then in order to learn about the craft and the qualities of stones.

What was your perception of Vienna's art scene in those days? In the early 1960s, Maria Lassnig, Arnulf Rainer, and Markus Prachensky, among others, brought informal art to Vienna and Nitsch, Mühl, Brus, etc. staged their First Actionist performances. Georges Mathieu visited Vienna several times and, among others, did a painting performance at Fleischmarkt in 1959.

We not only learned about art theory and art history at Schillerplatz – where we also had to attend lectures, after all – but also where our studios were located, at Böcklinstraße, through Mr Kuchling, (who

maybe did not hate women in general, but certainly the ones involved in sculpture, and did not exactly give me an easy time). In both places, however, this only covered developments up until the period of classic modern art, which ended with Paul Cezanne. During my years at the academy, the exhibitions at Galerie nächst St Stephan and artists from the circles of Msgr. Otto Mauer were very important to me. He was a man who frequently came to our studios, looked around and was interested in everything. Now and then, he also purchased one of my drawings. Wotruba saw Art Informel and the various painting performances as a farce; he did not appreciate that at all, neither Actionism. For us, too, the Actionism of Nitsch or Brus, (although his uncompromising Viennese Walk left quite an impression on me) was, therefore, not art, as we had learned nothing about the motives or background of Actionism from our teachers. In retrospect, I think we were way too conformist and uncritical, which is accounted for by the remoteness of our studios, all the hard manual work, and the pressure to keep abreast of things, which was very real (students who did not succeed were dismissed rather quickly!). I was deeply moved when I saw the first photos of Rudolf Schwarzkogler's Actionist performances, it was amazing to me that something like that existed outside of our artistic environment!

[In Wotruba's class, everything was oriented towards the figure, so to speak, while abstraction prevailed at most of the exhibitions at Galerie nächst St. Stephan.](#)

Despite all this abstraction, in those days the figured, creative process that had gone before was still visible with many Austrian painters. I guess it wasn't yet such a shock to me to see non-representational paintings as it was in Paris later on. I had won Master Class prizes, Füger Awards, and so on, when, towards the end of my Academy clays, I realized that my interest in the human figure was waning. When I began arranging figures in rhythmic patterns, that is to say creating movements involving several figures, Wotruba called that «playing around». Today, I think these approaches may have started me on a path to further experimentation. I was in too much of a hurry to get my degree, too, which may not have been all that necessary. In terms of sculptors who focused on the figure, I was interested, above all, in international artists such as Giacometti, Pevsner, or Naum Gabo. Artists, that is, who were exploring new aspects of the human figure through abstraction and defamiliarization, and also by defying the ideal of beauty. Not in the direction of deformation or abnormality, however, a tendency emerging at the time that I couldn't get anything out of. In 1965, I studied under Joannis Avramidis at the Summer Academy in Salzburg. I liked his mathematical principle of the human figure a lot. Also, his notion of not only defining the human figure according to its outline but also its inherent lines influenced my drawings from these years.

[After graduating from the Academy in 1966, you had a show at Galerie nächst St. Stephan. Was this seen as the start of a career or as your final breakthrough?](#)

At that time Msgr. Otto Mauer staged a small, wonderful exhibition of my drawings, which he thought highly of, as I have mentioned. Back then, however, I still had the feeling that my diploma had actually only provided me with the requisite know-how for embarking on an artistic career. So, I was only hoping to maybe become a really good artist at a later point. – Leaving that aside, in those days, there were no galleries that went round banging at the doors of young graduates, anyway.

[After graduating from the Academy, you went to Paris on a scholarship, to the Academie des Beaux-Arts. You wrote once that you took drawing material along, and on returning to Vienna you suddenly realized you had forgotten your unused sketchpad in a closet in your room in Paris.](#)

On my first day at the Academy in Paris, I was supposed to model a relief titled «expectant motherhood». Not knowing just how fitting this title would soon be for my life, I not only thought the subject was terrible, I was also spoilt in terms of living space and all the muddle and milling crowds of students were awful to me; So I didn't go back there for a few days. When I came back, my locker had been broken into, and aside from my working jeans. (a real pair of «Levis» jeans!), all my expensive stone-sculpting tools had been stolen. I saw this as a chance to simply stop working for a while. The enrollment provided me with the advantage of reduced canteen prices, I could ride public transportation and attend cultural events. In the mornings, I took a French course, and from afternoon to evening I was out around town. Exhibitions, theaters, concerts, ballet, movies, I was just sucking all of that in; it was a time of absolute absorption. In the beginning, I did feel a little guilty about not really having anything to do; but I saw so much that was new to me and began to gain confidence in forming my own opinions, free from the instructions given to me by my teachers at the Academy in Vienna and the "humility" towards great works that had been instilled in me. At the same time, I had the bitter realization that my years at the Academy had provided little knowledge about the development of contemporary international art. At the

time, that figured prominently in Paris, which deeply impressed me. Thus, I saw works by Jackson Pollack for the first time, and much that was unknown to me by the Dadaists, surrealists, cubists, and futurists, among others. It was quite an experience after the strict years under Fritz Wotruba. What's more, Paris with its elegant stores and nighttime illumination felt like some Christmas country, quite unlike Vienna, which was still a little dirty and felt much darker in those days.

What I missed in Paris was the support I had received from all the people back home; my family did not regard my sculpting ambitions as a professional occupation, no one was proud of the good diploma I got at the Academy in Vienna or of the fact that I was able to go to Paris.

[After Paris, you went to Berlin in 1968.](#)

Already in Paris and then also after I had returned to Vienna I realized I had finally lost interest in figured representation. Both in sculpting and drawing. I even felt an aversion to continue further on this path. Therefore, I saw it as a lucky coincidence when in this time of rethinking my son was born and we became a family.

In 1968, the three of us went to Berlin for one year. In Berlin, 1968 was a time of the dawning of a new political era. All these impressions and my changed personal situation led to the assimilation of entirely new subject matter. I was aiming to create distance towards my conventional working method and browsing slick magazines, which had already impressed me in Paris and which I enjoy reacting to this day, helped me arrive at my own individual collage technique. It consisted of extracting individual elements from color pictures, subjecting them to a variety of treatments and capturing their changed appearance by sticking it onto paper. A procedure where the creative process already set in at the stage of selective searching and finding. Up until the nineties, this made up a part of my artistic renderings. At the outset, for example, I made a rectangular stencil, which I moved across color illustrations until I had found an image detail that seemed interesting to me. It was almost always possible to pick out an abstract image detail from ever so representational images, photographs, that is, which I cut out and glued to a white sheet of paper. That resulted in about 200 to 300 works. Owing to the process they originated from, I called them «Funde» («Finds»). «Funde» was followed by «Entfunde» («Stripped Finds»); here, parts of a representational subject were removed, the appearance of which was, therefore, completely altered. The «Leerfunde», («Empty Finds») followed later where the object itself was now missing completely. The only thing still visible was the effect it had had: for instance its shadows, reflections, or reflections of light. In the case of «Verfunde» («Modified Finds»), I kept on intuitively drawing an existing object by hand until an altogether different message was achieved. Almost simultaneously, but at a much later time as well, I developed «Erfunde» («Combined Finds»). These are collages where I joined together separate cutout parts into an abstract composition of a picture.

[How, then, did you arrive at the combination of text and image? What role does text play in your images?](#)

While looking through magazines but also when I was reading newspapers it so happened that I realized I was perceiving text contributions as belonging to different subcategories. The pure sentence, for instance (= «pure text»), the interplay of image and text in advertising (= «to one another»), or the pre-existence of text the moment a photograph is taken (= «in one another»). That is how I finally came up with the idea to combine random sentences with random images (= «at one another»). Through this synthesis, which was brought about arbitrarily, a «third» message would emerge that was not contained in the initial elements. Numerous significant examples of these arrangements were likewise fixed to white paper. To this day, text forms an important, additional component of my work.

[Your 1970 exhibition at Forum Stadtpark was a great success. Did that serve as a springboard for further exhibitions and commissions?](#)

Forum Stadtpark was an important hub for new tendencies in art. This exhibition was made possible by Horst Gerhard Haberl, Humanic's advertising manager at the time and a visionary in matters of art. I exhibited a series of stage and costume pictures, which were practically sold out immediately. It was like a small surprise carnival, not more. These works were largely collages: in part, I had combined objects of everyday life, such as cigarettes, lipsticks, pots, pot lids, etc. into costumes, and I had created stage sets by arranging car parts and drawings coupled with cut-out color surfaces. The «Stage Drum» model I had invented was also shown there. It was not a springboard for my career, however. It showed again seven years later when I had a show at the Vienna Secession that people were still disappointed at the «cheap» collage technique and, what's more, were behind their time once more, still not sufficiently informed in terms of concept art. I myself, on the other hand, wasn't either, I simply enjoyed making these things.

Around this time, I also created large-format «Illuster» collages, which deliberately included the so-called «hardware of everyday life» (as H. G. Haberl once called it), brooms, pots, dishes, and packaging, also an oven embellished with figures, or a dishwasher.

In the 1970s, a strong Feminist movement emerged in the world of art Exhibitions such as Magna at Galerie nächst St. Stephan featuring Valie Export in 1975 or associations of woman artists wanted to point to the presence of women in art. To what degree were you involved in this movement?

Initially, I took part in IntAkt but I didn't want to keep on complaining about the fact that, as women, we had no or limited chances in an art world dominated by men and I soon stopped attending the regular meetings. To me, it was more important to consistently continue my work all on my own and for myself, to follow my own path. I did not find myself ignored by art due to my being a woman, but on account of my working method, which was quite sensitive then, but also due to my rather cautious or solitary disposition. So, therefore I was hardly present in the women's movement.

Your position as an artist, however, was not an easy one in these times. Additionally, you were a young mother and had to work in a field of tension between your kitchen, child, and career.

In part through my husband, sculptor Roland Goeschl, above all the artists of Galerie nächst St. Stephan were friends of ours in those years, including Josef Mild and Markus Prachensky. Also Kiki Kogelnik, Horst Gerhard Haberl from Humanic, Peter Noever and Christian Reeder, including their wives, were among our circle of friends, just as graphic designer Karl Neubacher, who at the time did the catalogs of Forum Stadtpark and the "pool» journal, which was a driving force behind the Graz art scene in its day. Of course, I also had contacts with Andre Heller and many of my sister Erika's acting colleagues. Still, it was not always easy for me. When my exhibition at Galerie Würthle opened in 1985, a well-known Vienna critic wrote in the opening of his review: Ingeborg G. Pluhar, sister of Erika Pluhar, wife of Roland Goeschl, ... There we are, that was my definition; you couldn't find much of a critical examination of my works there. In those years, I also did stints in advertising, both at Humanic and at an eyeglasses company. Some interesting material is still left from that period. But it was particularly in the field of tension you mentioned that consequent and continuous work on the collages was very important to me.

In an interview, Markus Lüpertz once called art a means of survival, a kind of alternative truth to reality. Would you agree with that?

Even though, generally, Markus Lüpertz and I are not exactly twin souls, one could agree with that. It is necessary for me to be interested in my work for its very own sake, I never consciously worried about trends on the art market or thought of looking for people who would buy my work. The subject itself, which in most cases has to do with some kind of investigation, was paramount to me, but also the aspect of time. I wanted to work on it until the result matched my intention. The peace of mind I experienced, and still experience, upon what I regard as successful completions has helped me come to terms with various situations in my life.

Starting from 1979, you had a teaching assignment at the Vienna University of Technology.

At first, I was an assistant, then from 1990 on an assistant professor at the Institute of Art and Design. Additionally, I had an assignment teaching «Photo and Graphics» for twelve years. I wanted to be financially independent, and I enjoyed the relative security of this position. What's more, I very much enjoyed teaching all these years. It's interesting that in the beginning, when I was 35, I felt young when I was dealing with students and, actually, I didn't feel like a teacher-student relationship. I always tried to create a friendly and considerate atmosphere, which was very well received. But the older I got, the more I could feel the distance growing on the other side. This is something I had to come to terms with but it's just not that easy to admit to oneself that one is growing old. Still, I am friends with some of my former students to this day and we regularly meet and keep in contact. Naturally, quitting that occupation was a turning point for me. On the one hand, I now have more time and freedom again to dedicate myself to my work and realize projects; on the other hand, I have to admit I am not only missing the studio at the University of Technology I have worked in so many years, but a little also the regular contacts with my colleagues that come natural in a working environment!

In the 1980s, you mainly created paintings, in part large-format paintings. With "Leopoldstag" you also published your first novel.

From 1980 on, I used acrylic paint to create «Leerfunde» («Empty Finds»). As I've mentioned, here it was not the object itself but its reflection, shadow or impression that became the subject of an image. With

my writing, I wanted to put a little distance between myself and the visual arts. Many autobiographical elements are present in the «Leopoldstag» novel - I took reference to my previous life with the figures in this plot. The only constant in my life was my son Sebastian, or that's how I felt, and, therefore, he does not appear in the novel at all.

That was also a time when fate dealt our «sisterly» family some terrible blows in a way we hadn't seen before. In writing this book, I also wanted to come to terms with a certain chapter of my life.

The coexistence of text and image is characteristic of your work. You not only use text in your images, but also in connection with constant literary work, which stands as a sideline to your work as a visual artist. There are letters regularly written to Artie, and with "Paradox", your second full-length novel was published in 2002.

I went on writing letters to Artie for a long time. They were directed to a kind of friend, (art, of course!), to whom I tried to explain what I was actually aiming at with my works, that is to say what prompted me to make them. I was able to make things more clear to myself. With my second novel, I split myself into two parts, as it were, first, a rather practical and family-conscious scientist and, second, let's say a somewhat out-of-touch and quite isolated artist. Both observations made around Vienna's art life and short stories taken from my real life were woven into this book. In contrast to «Leopoldstag», I also tried to experiment with language itself. Thus, starting from a type of notebook entry or diary style of writing, I developed a language that can do without auxiliary verbs. This has stepped up the pace of text tremendously.

In your 2004 started series of works titled "Private Finds", you took to the new medium of digital photography, which brought a new element to your previous oeuvre.

I prepared this series for the first time by means of digital photography. Already from 1980 on, photography, still analog then, provided the basis for searching out subjects for my paintings. Then, with «Private Finds», I even went a step further and pushed on with the defamiliarization of subjects through new media techniques. Thus, the camera is the tool that is moved by hand and takes the place of the paintbrush. Nevertheless, it is still the hand that carries out the movements. The camera merely transmits the unusual subjects I have found. They are later printed on canvas, which is intended to evoke a painterly surface.

In your large-scale 2005 solo exhibition at Kunsthalle Exnergasse, you not only showed "Private Finds" but also the "Several Ones" series. In terms of form, it was a continuation of the approach you had taken with the collages and the text-image works from the 1970s, but it was now applied to the medium of digital photography,

Yes, in the old days I used scissors and browsed magazines to find image details that were interesting to me. I now proceed in the same manner when I work with computer scans. The concept and the mental process behind the cutting of image segments and the layering of individual elements remains the same. Only there's no need for glue anymore. As far as text is concerned, in most cases I now place it directly into the image and make it float above the picture or let it dissolve into the background as the need arises.

As a professor as well as in your present life you are always in search for contacts and exchange with artists and theorists from a younger generation, and quite intentionally so.

I used to search out clever older people and try to engage in conversations with them but now it's more important to me to exchange ideas with young people, with artists or art theorists, too, who have repeatedly provided me with good feedback on my work. In a certain way, this automatically links up my work with a contemporary environment.

But also apart from that, I enjoy being around younger people very much: Especially when it comes to two sweet little girls called Stella and Una. Their grandma absolutely adores them!