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Distorting Modern Life with Monika Grabuschnigg

By VERONICA

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Monika Grabuschnigg investigates cultural phenomenons and reshapes them in clay. By distorting technological symbols she is telling stories of modern life, love, and angst.

In 2018, Monika Grabuschnigg was awarded the [Berlin Art Prize](#), she's represented by [Carbon 12](#) and has recently exhibited at REITER Galleries in Leipzig, Brücke Museum in Berlin & Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden.

Her current shows '[Dancing at the Edge of the World](#)' at Sara Zanin Gallery in Rome and '[...of bread, wine, cars, security and peace](#)' at Kunsthalle Wien in Austria, were both closed down because of the Corona crisis. We recommend that you check out the work online.

What drew you to become an artist?

I never thought: "I want to be an artist," this was too abstract for me. I wanted to paint, sculpt, make – that was it. I loved to disappear into the quietness of the canvas and my paints. For a long time, I was deeply engaged in contemporary dancing, but in the end, visual arts gave me the most satisfaction, so I enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

What inspires you?

Visiting exhibitions, conversations with friends, and lots (and lots) of reading, from fiction to philosophy to news. Being as engaged in my surroundings as I can, then having loooong walks to sort out my thoughts, that's essential too.

What does your creative process look like?

I have pretty fixed studio hours, and this consistency is super important for my process. There can be times in the studio where I just sit and read, or organize the space – mentally prepare for a new work cycle. Then when things fall into place and production starts, I hit an intensely physical period, which can last for weeks. In general, I try to keep distraction-devices out of the studio. Focus is everything.

One of your main materials is clay – how is it working with this material?

Clay is an environmentally friendly resource, primal, accessible, and at the same time historically charged. I like those properties and contractions, but I also don't want to be suggesting some kind of material fetish. Clay and glazes are a means to an end, a medium to transform thoughts into visual output.

A recurrent theme in your work is social interactions in a technology-driven and individualistic society. What attracted you to explore these subjects?

I'm living it myself, like we all are, so it feels natural for me to look at this. There's something wonderful and privileged about experiencing the rise of these significant technological changes. But of course something terrifying and consuming too. When I was a small kid, my grandma still had a rotary phone – I am a pre-smartphone in terms of my upbringing.

With projects like 'What Shall I Swear By', 'Fantasy Electrifies My Hand', 'What Satisfaction Could You Possibly Have' you're discussing love and longing in the tinder era. What do you think, did late capitalism kill romance?

The sociologist Laurie Essig said that romance is a product of neoliberalism, designed to keep us tame and submissive; we avoid reality by hiding in fantasy. So love has nothing to do with romance, and capitalism thrives on romance – and wouldn't kill it.

I'm more interested in exploring the ethics – in whatever form – of relationships. Alain Badiou wrote something in the book *Praise of Love* that resonated strongly: "The world is full of new developments, and love must also be something that innovates. Risk and adventure must be re-invented against safety and comfort." Like falling in love has the word falling in it. He also said that love is an antidote to a narcissistic society, as you view the world through the eye of another. Badiou agrees with Essig; he also talks about love in terms of daring, risk, failure, and work – ideas that are contrary to illusional and self-annihilating concepts of love.

If social media was one of the big game-changer in the 2010s, what do you think will have the most significant impact on our co-existence in this decade? Why?

Wearable devices. AI, wildfires, and floods. And to the question of why: because it is inevitable. When it comes to technological inventions, there's no stopping them. And it's not really the technologies that are harmful in and of themselves, but how we are using them. It's always the human error that is the problem.

How do you see your art evolve in the future?

I honestly have no idea, and I'm glad about that. To produce art is to constantly question and seek; you search with your mind, your eyes, your hands. You never really know what you're going to find, only that you have to look, fumble, find. Things evolve in the studio, in the process as it happens; it's like dancing, the rhythm itself often dictates what will happen next.

What is the most exciting thing happening in the art world right now, according to you?

The late and posthumous recognition we've seen in recent years for female artists. However, it's disheartening that some of the artists, like Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, Betty Woodman, or Elisabeth Wild, had only so little time to gain satisfaction from it. This correction of the historical discrepancy is only a first, and minor step.

That said, it's encouraging to see older artists who are still working – Judy Chicago, Lynda Benglis, Miriam Cahn – finally get the careers they deserve; they are now at the forefront of the art world.