

**"...it's not to give an answer...
it's just to have the people get started with something..."**

(The artist Dagmar Pachtner, in an interview in 2012 in Breda, the Netherlands at the opening of one of her exhibitions 1)

Anyone attempting a logical approach to the Landshut-based artist Dagmar Pachtner, will soon come up against with their own limits.

Bright, blue plastic boxes, stacked high.

Art?

That's... plastic!

If you pause and stand still, surrounded by these boxes, you will begin to hear sounds... the rustling of leaves? The chirping of birds? Raking? Don't you hear someone digging?

Sounds everyone who has worked in a garden knows. Sounds that for centuries have remained unchanged. Gardens planted in plastic, surrounded by city noises? Sprouting just as green and exuberantly as outdoors – and yet just a stack of plastic and sound recordings.

And don't the stacked boxes look almost like a blue pergola?

Memories – sounds that are relaxing – feelings of joy.

Arcadia.

Dagmar Pachtner, the artist, stands there pleased. Letting go, allowing memories, feelings and wishes to surface – that, for her, is the creative process that viewers experience: they become part of her work and are active participants at the same time.

Just plastic?

Becoming an artist was not something that came easily to Dagmar Pachtner. Originally from a small Franconian town, born there in the early 1960s – the opportunities were non-existent. Instead of art, she studied to become a teacher of art and German. Her studies confirmed her calling: "Art! That was the direction."

Brush and canvass? No. Instead, art as *Concept*: "much preferable, much better!"

Working three-dimensionally, bringing processes to light and triggering unexpected questions in the viewer – Joseph Beuys, by no means a seminal figure, but one she repeatedly came up against:

By the 1980s, she had found her way and started to exhibit her work: initially in Munich and Ingolstadt, and as far back as 1991 in Landshut – in the city park's Skulpturpark.

Earth and all organic materials: the young artist created and formed using reduced shapes, preferring simple materials – and yet her work carried such clear messages and implicit questions that the art world took notice. Dagmar Pachtner does not just exhibit – she immerses herself, creating a piece of work specifically meant for the place where it is to be shown.

Many people will still remember her most spectacular exhibition in Landshut – no matter whether they had an interest in art or not – because in 2002, the artist transformed the centuries-old Heiliggeist Church in such a way that it stirred every visitor who saw it.

At the time, in addition to organic materials, she had discovered the importance of light for her work. "Earth stands for matter we have been provided with," she explains. "Light, on the other hand, especially blue light, stands for the immaterial, perhaps God, the intangible, for everything that gives us a glimmering of the existence of other dimensions."

Dolls were the main component of the installation in the Heiliggeist Church; lying face down, they had barcodes stamped on the back of their heads. The 900 square metres of floor space inside the church covered with *Earth* – while a wide river of blue light created a dividing line; above this all, an elevated viewing platform: the discussion surged.

“This doll was mine,” says the artist, all other dolls were cast from this original. “The comments affected me as if it had been me lying there.”

The “*Transgression*”, title of the installation, overstepping the humanly possible, a not always a sensible thing, was already taking place.

The genetic reproduction of humans is possible and now even permitted – but does it make sense?

The reproduction of a human being as a robot is possible – but does it make sense?

Humans can create themselves – but does it really make sense to do so?

“That was the final bang,” she says herself. With this installation she effectively ended her earth and blue light phase – or, as a friend asked her, “What could possibly come after that?”

A year later, Dagmar Pachtner was again the centre of attention. Her new work, which revealed, and let viewers intensely experience, the skin and the beauty of surfaces, hit a nerve – and was acquired by the German Bundestag. “From dolls to skin, absolutely logical,” she commented.

Dagmar Pachtner delves deep beneath the surface. Skin as opposed to surface – from make-up to glitter: Character lies not in the outer shell; the essence of things lies deeper. The outer shell is “*Just a Trace*”, the title of her piece. Pachtner reduces things to their essence and strips bare our skin and the fundamental components of our existence – to then etch herself with her work even more deeply into our memory.

After that, things seemed to quiet down around Dagmar Pachtner: but, instead of continuing to work in Landshut, she became active on the other side of the globe, in Japan. She spent three extended periods living and working there as an artist: in 2001, 2004 and 2006.

Back in 2001, she had already had an exhibition in Tokyo where she showed work completed in Europe. During her two subsequent stays in Tokyo in 2004 and 2006, she participated in artist-in-residence programs and developed installations in Japan so that her third stay was crowned with three exhibitions, two of which were held in Kyoto.

The artist Dagmar Pachtner surprised her Japanese audiences – ...
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Heike Rudloff, March 2016