

Between time

Vertaling: Willem Kramer

1. Serendipity

As a teenager, I once read the book *Away from the Past* by Anke de Vries (Lemniscaat, 1982). An impressive story about a boy who loses his girlfriend in a car accident, after which he is beset by anxiety attacks. The story ends well: he finds a new girlfriend. It was not so much the story itself that lodged itself in my mind, but rather a statement by the uncle of Juliette, the new girlfriend. This antiques and curios trader's motto in life was: '[...] if you are forced in life to choose between the useful and the redundant, always go for the redundant.' (page 85).

Art is often viewed as redundant; as seemingly useless. But then it deals with those things that are observed from the corner of one's eye – the small details. Unimportant perhaps for the greater whole, but nevertheless crucial to a better understanding or a different view. This is also the focal point of Karola Pezaro's work. Seemingly insignificant matters – like the rails of a tram, a bunch of seaweed or a city plan – prove essential to her oeuvre.

In the mid-18th century, the British art historian and politician Horace Walpole (1717-1797) introduced the term 'serendipity'. The term originates in a Persian fairytale about three princes of Serendip, the ancient Persian name for Sri Lanka. The moral of the fairytale is that clever people with an alert mind are better able to make chance discoveries. Serendipity is furthermore often defined as the discovery of something unexpected and useful while looking for something completely different. In both cases, the point is that one remains susceptible to the seemingly superfluous, the chance detail. This is also the case in the poetic work of Pezaro. She tries to find the unsought.

2. Transparent memories

In early February 2010, one can come across an experimental arrangement in one corner of Pezaro's studio. An experimental arrangement for a reprise. Simply put, it involves a couple of clotheslines with pieces of paper. But this description is too one-dimensional for such a poetic construction. First of all, the clotheslines themselves aren't made from that horrid, brightly coloured plastic wire, but from attractive, thin metal. And the paper is just as refined. The small rectangles are beautifully delicate, virtually colourless and almost transparent. Cut out and folded in two, they hang over the lines like transparent memories.

Next to these 'Transparent memories', one finds an experimental arrangement for the new work 'Between time', consisting of small clouds of transparent stitching that have been pinned to the wall. Words have been embroidered on these supports: smile; talk with father; in control. Some of these cloudlets are connected to one another by a thin, light-grey piece of embroidery thread. Barely visible, this connection is extremely fragile. Both arrangements are key works within Pezaro's oeuvre. 'Transparent memories' forms a departure from her early, fairly abstract work. Schooled in the tradition of the Hague constructivists, until the end of the 1980s, Pezaro primarily explored form, structure and the use of materials in her work. Constructions with stacks of paper; textile folded into a variety of patterns, occasionally coloured. The work of Nul artists like Jan Schoonhoven formed an important point of reference in this period. Pezaro's early work is never completely tight and rectilinear, let alone at right angles. Even then, the main point was to look, play and reflect. Beauty with a ragged edge.

At the end of the 1980s, this exclusive concentration on the (geometric) form no longer sufficed. This artistic inquiry by means of very small steps was too far removed from Pezaro's daily life and her personal experiences. She wanted to talk about – parts of – life itself. For example, about what happens in the minds of all those people walking down the street. To visualise this cacophony, she needed a different visual language. At that point, she took the step to admit figuration and signification in her work. In 1990, this resulted in 'Transparent memories'.

At the foundation of this work – and of all her work since then – lies a strong sense of wonder about the working of one's memory, the visible and the invisible. About how you remember your history; how you renew it and imagine it. About what is true and what is false. These questions form the basic tones of Pezaro's body of work. All of this is regularly conveyed by means of all kinds of elements that branch off from the whole. Sometimes, these are patterns that remind one of bloodstreams, but it could just as well be bundles of cables or city plans. Or other structures.

With 'Transparent memories', Pezaro also laid the groundwork for aspects that have developed and that have taken shape even further in 'Between time'. Memories being as fragile as they are, the 'discovery' of embroidery was a crucial development. She started embroidering some two years ago. She has always been an avid drawer. In the past, this already remarkably often involved bifurcations, genealogies, life paths, thoughts. With a sewing machine, it turns out that you can effortlessly make drawings such as these. Pezaro experimented on the sewing machine to see what happens if you allow a line to branch into two. She discovered the possibilities on the go. It's a kind of drawing with thread.

To adopt an elegant phrase coined by the critic Antonie den Ridder, Pezaro tries to 'find the unsought'. Without any preconceived plan, she sets to work on the material. It is only when she plays with it and lets things unfurl that she manages to surprise herself. Of course, you need to have an eye for this process and to do something with it at the right moment. An intuitive working process, in other words, that finds its point of departure in the fixed set of themes.

3. Inner architecture

Besides drawing a lot, Pezaro is always taking photographs. Her interest in architecture, the built-up area and the city – another major theme in her oeuvre – is clearly reflected in this work. But nature also regularly crops up in these images. After a period of making commissioned work, she once again wanted to concentrate on her uncommissioned art. That's why starting in 2003, she photographed parts of her home town and place of birth The Hague for a period of two years. She wandered through town, capturing specific details. She recorded her intuitive itineraries on a map of the city.

Pezaro subsequently combines, draws, writes and zooms in to such an extent that the process results in new images with alternate meanings. In an extremely intuitive way, she links the plan of the city to her inner map. For example, in Pezaro's embroidered version, that part of the town map that shows the neighbourhood that she was born is suddenly transformed into a foetus, while when the two maps are connected and elaborated differently, a strong red woman emerges from the town plan. It repeatedly turns out that a location in the town acquires meaning at more than one level: the personal and the universal. On top of this, the literal elements of Pezaro's work also have a metaphorical significance. This also applies to her more recent embroideries entitled 'Inna Architektura'. For these wonderful, finely embroidered images, Pezaro took photographs of Hague locations from her project 'City, I, image' as a point of departure. She subsequently prepared these images in such a way that she could 'draw' them with a sewing machine. This has an abstracting effect that once again adds an extra layer of meaning.

The dome of The Hague's Passage, for example is a literal place; an architectural element. When you draw such a dome from memory, you quickly arrive at a round shape. But in the photograph, the dome has a distorted perspective. That is precisely what makes the photograph so interesting. Together with the wispy effect of the embroidered drawing and the light blue hues, this inadvertently reminds you of a celestial vault. And the supernatural. And that's an unusual antithesis when you consider that the dome itself is suspended above the urban bustle, in the heart of the city. Generally, one is only moved like this in a quiet place (nature, a church, a cemetery).

To create even more distance from the original, everyday subject, in the case of some photographs, Pezaro has made a second version. The cobweb-like version of the dome with orange and yellow dots is even more ethereal. With exceptional precision, the artist is able in this way to elevate the local and everyday so that it becomes universal and existential. It acquires a certain gracefulness, thanks to the chosen material and technique. Furthermore, there's an extremely subtle hint of humour in the work: because after all: who uses a sewing machine to embroider a firmament?

4. Veil

Independently of various side-paths, Pezaro has developed her uncommissioned work, from 'Transparent memories' via 'City, I, image' to the embroideries of the 'Inna Architectura' series. The tailpiece, for the time being, is 'Between time'. In this series, colour (white and very light grey), material (beautiful embroidery thread and elegantly woven textile) and subject matter (memories and their workings) merge even further. The use of text ensures that this tentative tailpiece simultaneously forms a new beginning.

Pezaro's work originates in a not-knowing-for-sure: a search. As a consequence, she doesn't really follow a plan. What she's actually trying to do, every time round, is to raise a corner of the veil, in order to briefly, and partially, illuminate of the wonder of life. To achieve this, she has to surrender a lot of space and open up to the unforeseen, the seemingly redundant. As one does in life itself.

Sandra Spijkerman

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¹ Antonie den Ridder, 'Finding the unsought', Beeld Supplement 32, 2006.