

Probe / Antoinette Nausikaä door Julia Geerlings 2016.

A white life-sized human figure is sitting peacefully in the middle of the space. She, or at least I think it's a she, has her arms laying nonchalant over her drawn up legs. She's observing a picture of a man, who is sitting peacefully on a big rock overlooking the ocean. Next to her I can see a stylized wall drawing of a mountain. The mountain has the same eyes as the clay human figure and seems to be observing her in return. At the same time I'm observing the scene, which has a calming effect on me. Everything is in harmony.

Besides the notion of observing and being observed, I feel a sense of tangible in the presentation of Antoinette Nausikaä. I see a hand resting on a turtle and a huge contour of a hand drawn on one of the walls. It triggers the idea for me that observing goes not only through the eyes, but also with the hands and even with our mind. The idea makes sense to me looking at the practice of Nausikaä. She usually starts her projects by exploring a specific location or site. Lately she has been visiting several sacred mountains, like the Mount Fuji in Japan, the Olympus in Greece, the Ararat on the border of Turkey and Armenia and the five sacred mountains Wu Yuè in China. Away from the busy city life these places offer tranquility, silence and a sense of timelessness.

The sacred mountains are also of interest to Nausikaä, because of their individual energies and the effect it had on herself and her surrounding. Nausikaä explains to me that she meticulously observes the stones, the trees and the other people who visited these places, in search of the ancient spiritual core of these sites. She uses a variety of media, like drawing, writing, photography, video and sculpture to express her findings. Sometimes she makes small clay figurines, made directly with the earth found at the mountain, which is an expression of her inner world. At other times she seems to capture the random, everyday life in her photography or videos, like the photo of the man on the rock. The tangible and mental observations might be the clearest in her wall drawing with the big eye and the simple drawings with titles underneath. A drawing of a mountain has the title 'mountain' and a drawing of a leaf has the title 'leaf'. But in the latter, the name 'leaf' has been crossed out and corrected by 'turtle'.

I see reoccurring patterns in Nausikaä's observations, whether it's in nature or with people. A leaf seems just as important as a turtle and a mountain has the same importance as a man who passes by. There is no hierarchy. Her work brings to mind the 'intermediate spaces' or 'empty shots' in the films by the Japanese film director and screenwriter Yasujiro Ozu (1903-1963). Between scenes, Ozu would often insert carefully framed shots of the surroundings to signal changes in setting. For purely rhythmic, non-narrative purposes the shots consists out of simple, static compositions of a group of objects, a room, a landscape or a building. These short poetic pauses that appear between the acting segments in Ozu's films are a very Japanese thing: they allow for reflection and contemplation.

In Nausikaä's presentation at Probe I also sense this reflection and contemplation on life. Could it be that the clay life-sized figure is meditating? Looking for emptiness, wisdom and stillness, like Buddha did before? Is the figure the artist or me? I feel Nausikaä is trying to communicate that the meaning of life is found in the small simple things and in the mundane. It's like a zen meditation for me. I ponder the thought that life is a bit like a handful of clay. You shape it into whatever you want in an effort to find meaning despite the inherent meaningless quality of the clay.