

The Rhythms of Natascha Waeyen

The first thing you think of is a lost, lonely firefly, a blue-purple glow tumbling through the night sky. Every unsuspecting driver, on their way through the dark to Heythuysen in the province of Limburg, will later recall being faintly perplexed. And with good reason, they have seen blue and purple lights glowing on the horizon like a mirage in the night.

Were it not for the fact that Natascha Waeyen had already captured the senses of the oncoming traffic. Where the road meets a roundabout artist Natascha Waeyen has built a beautiful pyramid of light. The artwork which comprises 245 galvanised poles and is magically lit after dark attracts its surroundings just as the stars attract dust and rubble. Waeyen`s pyramid relates as naturally and unnaturally to its surroundings as the pyramids in the Valley of the Kings.

The corners of the pyramid point to the road as though the lanes of asphalt transform into poles, rising in a crescendo to the top of the pyramid where they converge and then flow their separate ways.

At night when the street lights come on, light is shone onto the poles; a different light for each season. During the day the pyramid is transparent and is always there to communicate with and guide the oncoming traffic. The spaces between the pyramid`s poles become narrower as you drive past creating a visual experience of spaces closing and opening. The artist invites you to a sensory game; forces you to notice the space and makes the invisible visible. In a way the Heythuysen pyramid is a metaphor for Waeyen`s skill as an artist; as the roads meet, so the different facets of her artwork come together beautifully.

Natascha Waeyen was born into a family of accountants, roofers and builders in Buggenum near Roermond. She discovered her talent for drawing at an early age and when she was fourteen she knew without a doubt that her future would begin at the art academy. When she was seventeen she first set foot in the art academy in Maastricht, with no big ambitions, no idols from the history of art nor inspiring rolemodels from the present-day.

After around four years she started posing the bigger questions: What is it going to be? What shall I do? That is the style of another, but what is my style?

So, there she was in her studio, waiting for her artistry to flourish.

Natascha Waeyen made two important discoveries that helped her develop as an artist. Firstly, that she would not let herself become restricted by frameworks, walls or borders. She wanted to create an atmosphere powerful enough to transcend the standard or the traditional. "The work must continue out into the space", she now explains, with rather more conviction than in those days.

Klee, Klein, Schoonhoven and Miró, helped her to formulate an idea about atmosphere and lines. Most importantly, a line should not be drawn in order to confine, contain or restrict a certain atmosphere. Essentially, the Heythuysen pyramid is a play of interminable lines.

The second discovery concerned drawing. She put away her pencil and began drawing instead with iron wire. She took this step in order to escape the boredom of

drawing and hoping to find a more subtle and layered form of expression. This choice resulted in work that had a spatiality that Waeyen's work had thus far lacked. The wire drawing was exactly what she had been searching for. Now she had found *her* means of expression.

Codes, rhythms and number have always fascinated the artist, their unrelenting regularity, the structures, infinitely repeated. With one glance at nature, you'll find them all around: in the nerves of a leaf, ripples in the water's surface, rings in tree trunks, spores on a mushroom, but you'll also find a pattern on a pair of jeans. You would think that perfectly ordered Zen gardens would make Waeyen's heart skip a beat, but nothing could be further from the truth. For her it is the rhythm that is important, not the way in which the rhythm is given a form. She doesn't make art to send a religious message; a pyramid is a form, not content.

Through searching, looking, tasting she discovered the possibilities of something as ordinary as everyday wire mesh. Not the easiest material to work with, but perfect for its intended purpose: fence for a pen or chicken run. Natascha Waeyen sought to dematerialise the material; by robbing it of a function, getting to know the material inside-out by forcing her will upon it. She set to work on 1.25 by 1.25 cm pieces of wire mesh, spurred on by the rhythms of the cells of metal wire. She 'drew' the usual shapes with it: squares, circles, triangles, rectangles. But also spheres, pyramids, cubes, and dots. They became individual artworks, with a particular shadow, light, space, rhythm, an own purpose and without any pretence.

Waeyen created many pyramids and objects made of countless blocks and wire. In Edinburgh, where she gained a post-graduate degree in painting, these objects were dubbed 'Mondriaan blocks' by her fellow students. They assumed it must have had something to do with the flat landscape and horizons of her homeland. Upon which Waeyen would mention the nature of the somewhat more undulating landscape of the southern part of the Netherlands. She had never really been too interested in Mondriaan.

It must have been a thrilling moment for her when she had the idea of incorporating the dice in her work. Die have many things that appeal to the artist: simple form, equal and even surfaces or faces, numbers, rhythm, repetition, a simple concept, a catalytic agent for chance. She approached her exploration of the dice very systematically. She enlarged and reduced dice, giving them an inside and an outside, she interlocked them, she granted the dice a negative shape, explored the shadows of dice, isolated the pips (the dots on a die) and then created new networks of lines.

And so the pips on dice return in a work entitled 'MoNUment', which comprises so-called 'rhythmic murals' and sounds produced by a barrel organ. In this work Waeyen has encoded two thousand years of history and ordered it according to a strict rhythm, drawn up on a canvas measuring nine metres high by three metres wide. At first glance, it appears to be just Braille, but on closer inspection you see that it is an incredible handmade piece of art. The fact that every dot has been painted by hand means that there are irregularities in the work, which afford the work a poetic character. Waeyen does not care for obvious textures. The dotted canvas reminds us

so much of the musical notes for a barrel organ that the artist came up with the idea to translate her codes to barrel organ music. Despite the obvious danger that her debut composition would result in noise mayhem and drive people mad, she carried through and presented her work: a cacophony of noise produced on a real barrel organ. "The past two millennia have likewise been a mishmash of events", the artist responded. MoNUment can thus be seen as the soundtrack to two thousand years of world history condensed into a few noisy moments.

"My work is neither abstract nor figurative", she says. "It refers to everything around you." The work acknowledges the surroundings, and the space in which it is situated. The artist simply forces the space onto the viewer; you are forced to experience it differently. But just as light and wind have their own way with the light pyramid, so too does the gaze of the viewer, passing Natascha Waeyen's work. This concerns all her works, be it the light pyramid, her metal mesh works or the metal wire shapes. "This is my thing, my truth", she says. "I hope that my art makes people look at things around them in a different way. I hope they may have greater visual awareness; while walking through the woods, they suddenly notice the order of the trees or the way the river and the sky meet the horizon."

Emile Hollman – March 2008

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