

Enfleshing the Unconscious

Auf Einladung der Universität Winchester nahm ich an der Ausstellung des „Institute for Theological Partnerships“ zum Thema „Enfleshing the Unconscious“ teil. Ich reichte das nachstehende Bild ein mit dem dazu gehörigen Text „Longing for Abundance“. Beides ist veröffentlicht im Buch zur Ausstellung:

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Longing for abundance

by Dr. Heike Knops

During my studies I experienced a first dialogue between art and theology. One of the professors, Prof. Dr. Horst Schwebel,¹ taught us to understand sacred spaces, churches, their shape and artistic design as part of theology. Together with his student partners, he later also planned art exhibitions on religious topics.

For me, as a feminist theologian, the exhibition "Die andere Eva. Wandlungen eines biblischen Frauenbildes"(1985) is unforgettable. Based on the biblical Eve of the Hebrew Bible (Gen 2), well-known artists worked on the image of women of former times and today, partly with a focus on foreign perception and self-perception of women, on being and appearances. I was fascinated how such an old biblical motive inspires modern artists and illuminates new facets of the archaic subject in their art.

Years later, I myself organized a dialogue between art and theology on the theme of "Being a Human in the Age of Genetic Engineering."² This explosive ethical theme got contours through the artworks and became tangible even for people who had not yet dealt with the topic. This access via art allowed a much more immediate and personal understanding.

Since then I have been interested in the confluence of art and theology and so it was certainly not by any chance that my path did cross the long-standing alliance of art and feminist theology of the University of Winchester.

So I am very pleased to have the opportunity to describe my own experiences in this fruitful dialogue between art and theology. The title of the book and the accompanying exhibition refers to the unconscious, the subconscious, which sometimes comes to light in our lives: in dreams, fears, behaviours and – as I

1 Schwebel, Horst, *Autonome Kunst im Raum der Kirche*. Furche, Hamburg 1968
Schwebel, Horst, *Glaubwürdig. Fünf Gespräche über heutige Kunst und Religion*. Kaiser, München 1979
Schwebel, Horst, *Das Christusbild in der Bildenden Kunst der Gegenwart*. Wilhelm Schmitz, Gießen 1980

2 2 Knops, Heike (Hg.), *Kunst und Theologie im Dialog. Menschsein im Zeitalter der Gentechnik*, Wuppertal 2006

mean – also in artistic expression. Those who pay attention to themselves become sensitive to their connection to the unconscious. Perhaps, not just artists, but women in general who feel this connection, take it seriously and integrate it into their lives. The unconscious leads us out of the narrowness of so-called reality and enables perceptions beyond the material world.

This exciting stipulation was the starting point for my meditation on a corresponding artwork.

Meditation on the Issue

The unconscious refers to an area of the human psyche that is not directly accessible to consciousness, but underlies it, both generally seen in hominization and ontogenesis, as we learn from psycho-analysis. It assumes that in every person at all stages of life, unconscious psychological processes decisively influence action, thinking and feeling.

The awareness and recognition of unconscious processes is based not only on psychology and corresponding forms of therapy, but also in the research programs of subjective theories such as arts-based research.³ The essential point of reference of the unconscious are the experiences, adventures and occurrences we have had throughout our lives.

Past and present shape every human being; and for women it is also the future - because they are particularly focused on the future through their ability to give birth.

This temporal dimension of the unconscious and the speciality of women's life has accompanied me through all my thinking and painting.

Again and again I have thought of the aforementioned lifetimes in colours: black, grey, white.

"Black" is the colour of the past – yesterday and the day before yesterday, everything that happened days or years before is blurred in the dark, in the unconscious. Our recollection is fuzzy and deceptive at times.

"White" the colour of the future. A really bright white stands for happy times, for what we hope and are longing for – in the future.

Black and white mixed results in grey – therefore it is my colour for the present. For on the one hand the present is shaped by the experiences and adventures of the past, on the other hand it already expects the future and plants hopes in a new morning.

This manifested itself in a special way when giving birth to a child: this is where the future begins in a very concrete way.

³ Schreier, Margrit, Kontexte qualitativer Sozialforschung: Arts-Based Research, Mixed Methods und Emergent Methods, in: Forum Qualitative Social Research (ISSN 1438-5627) Volume 18, No. 2, 2017

Past, present and future dominated my first sketches for a possible artwork on the subject.

In doing so, I first followed up with the Goddesses of Fate of the ancient Nordic tradition.⁴ It is a trio of Norns that are described as deciding the fates of people. Their names represent lifetimes and circumstances of life.

„Urd“ is the name of the old Norn. She represents the past and fate.

The Norn of the present is called „Verendi“, which means „the becoming“. And the Norn of the future is „Skuld“. Her name refers to what we are indebted to the future for what happened in the past. This mythological tradition of a connection between past and future is mostly unknown today.

Three female figures of different ages, from different female phases of life, came into being on my first sketches. I painted on different materials - on canvas, fabric and finally a sack. I used different colours: chalk, acrylic, wall paint. The choice of background and colour should well match the artwork statement.

The longer I designed sketches and thought and painted about the life stages past, present and future in the colours black, grey and white, the more I realized that these three colours have a variety of meaning.⁵

Black is also the colour of grief in Europe, as well as the colour of elegance: evening dresses and classy costumes are black.

Black is the colour of people's skin; people who are exposed to hunger and suffering on their continent, who experience discrimination in many countries of the world.

Other people are white – they were once colonialists and today give often reason to black people's suffering. Black and white – a great contrast in colour and in human history.

"White" I choose as the colour of future, but in Europe it is known as the colour of innocence. Girls are dressed white to their communion as well as brides wear white to their wedding.

White symbolizes light, brightness, clarity and purity – and so white stands for sterility in hospitals.

White also is the colour of ice and snow, the colour of winter.

Grey is an unattractive colour: inconspicuous, unobtrusive, nothing saying. In the idiom "grey everyday life" this can be found, as well as in "grey mouse" the designation for a reserved, shy person.

Grey and cloudy is the sky in bad weather. We choose grey as a clothing colour to emphasize inconspicuousness and "genteel restraint."

4 Kirschenknapp, Hildegard, *Parzen und Nornen. Die poetische Ausformung der mythologischen Schicksalsfiguren zwischen Aufklärung und Expressionismus*, Peter Lang Verlag, 2000

5 Heller, Eva, *Wie Farben wirken. Farbpsychologie, Farbsymbolik*, Reinbek 2013

Grey – the mix of black and white has become the colour of the present in my artwork.

Grey turns hair when youth is over and age approaches. This is my presence!

In the case of hair, black and white are contrary to what I said about past and future: black is the hair during adolescence, white in old age. So I finally got to myself and my present, leaving the symbolic and mythical figures of the norms. Now a woman's face appears on the sketch-block. Half a face but with a hairstyle that symbolizes the whole lifetime: the hair is black, grey and white – one after the other.

Black, grey, white – a play of colours in our hair, a play of colours in our, in my lifetime.

Realization of the Work

My artwork shows a woman's face only half. That might be many women's experience: not being able to be whole, not being able to show or apply all the talents, not getting the same payment as the male colleague, not the same career opportunities, not the same presence in higher ranks, not the same opportunity as males to walk through the streets at night – unmolested and without fear.

Women - only half perceived in their lifetime. The older they get, the less attention is paid to them. Grey hair only makes men attractive, in women they announce age and transience.

In my artwork, that „half-face“ wears the hair colours of the entire lifetime: black, grey and white. Because there is no half a life. Past, present and future make up life: experience, vitality (joie de vivre) and hope shape us in every moment of our existence.

Comments on the Artwork

Having drawn it, I showed the artwork to my friends to hear what it might mean to them. Those friends have known me for years. I informed them about the arts-based-research which the artwork is subject to and asked them for their comments.

The first viewer, a man, immediately said, "Half Woman! - Women are half!" Reflective men can not overlook it. Women do not have a full share of possibilities in our society, they do not have a full share in resources, in political and economic power. Women are half!

To another viewer, the represented half woman seemed angry.

"Is she angry because you only half-painted her ...?" was the slightly ironic question. A good start to the conversation. Women can become angry if they become aware of their lack of participation in society. If they try to race against prejudice and tear down the walls of established conventions. This costs a lot of strength and rarely leads out of the encrusted situation.

To another friend, I emailed a photo of my artwork with that half face and asked him for comment. He sent me a sort of lyrical text a little later, which I would like to present here.

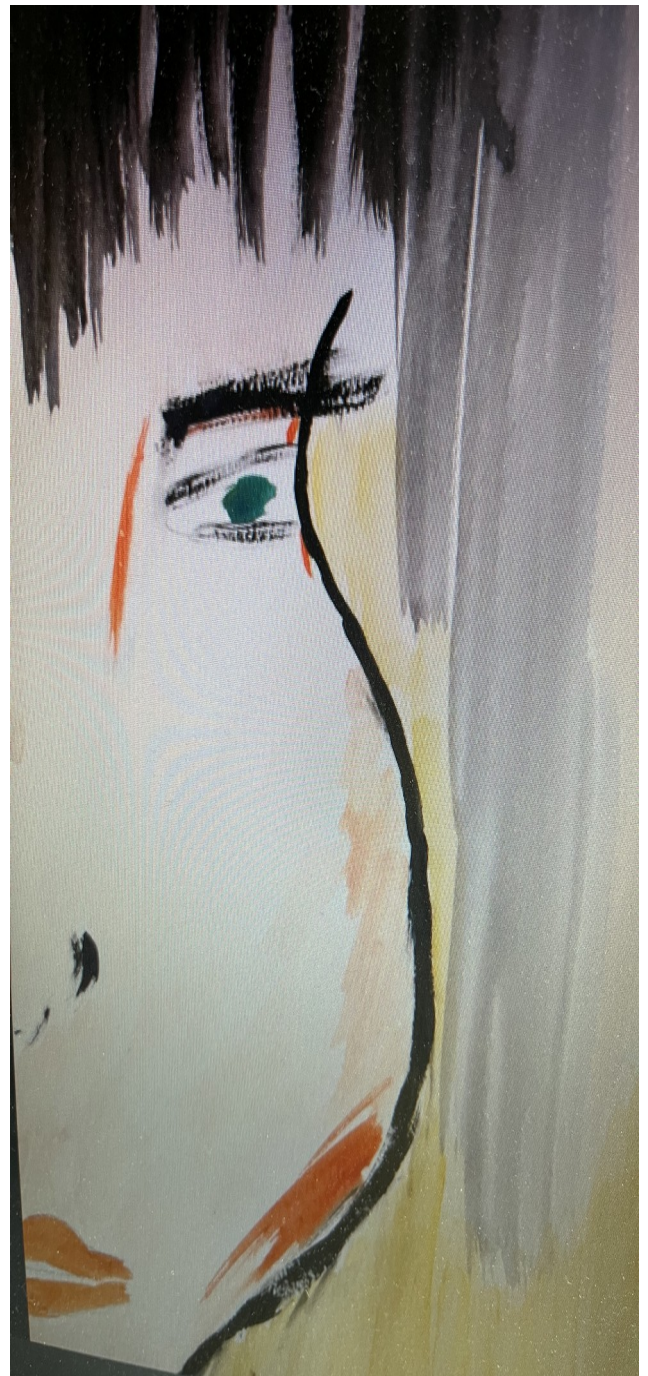
*The turned face – first turned away
than turned to the viewer.
Nose and mouth directed to the viewer,
hides the ear; cause hearing secondary?
What do you want?*

*The clear, dark line - looking still sideways.
Please don't be so rough with me!
She seems to say.
That's only half? - I don't think so!
You would be amazed
if you could look at me completely!*

*The green cat eye looks lovingly
next to my right eye.
The orange nose shadow reveals to me
good air here, between US!*

*The bold red of her cheeks
shines into my eye,
hearing her say:
You don't have two of them
either - just like me?
I only show little of myself
but you can discover more!*

*Thanks for looking at me.
Nice that I had been seen by you!*



A female viewer recognized my daughter in the artwork. I was surprised. Did I paint her? And why half?

My daughter has some disability. So she is not only restricted as a woman in this world, but also suffers from discrimination and lack of participation which is the destiny of people with disabilities in our society.

That viewer apparently perceived my daughter's life as half a life – represented by half the face. Intellectually, I would not agree to that kind of statement; but did I nevertheless paint it? Or does the viewer project her opinion of people with disabilities into this artwork?

The artwork apparently began to communicate and confront me and the viewer with unconscious levels.

That took me to the theological conception.

Relationship on Biblical Issues

Women - half perceived by others, nevertheless longing for fullness of life. What do we read about it in the bible?

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly," Jesus says in St. John's Gospel (Jn 10,10).⁶

This words I got in mind, when the discussions and interpretations about my artwork, that half-face-woman, had come to an end. So I decide to consult the New Testament and read again St. John's Gospel. What tradition about Jesus and women do we find in that Gospel? How does Jesus encounter women and in what theological context are these encounters?

In that chapter 10 of St John's Gospel just after the utterance I cited above, Jesus calls himself „the good shepherd“, who gives his life for the sheep (Jn10,11).

Close to that good shepherd believers get abundance, the fullness of life which does not exist in the world, neither in the structures of former societies nor of ours. Abundance is in taking a new view of life and desist from the arrangements of the world. Believers live in freedom from the world, its regulations and conventions. Here's how John can describe faith as overcoming the world (Jn 16,33). Beyond worldly standards life can be found in abundance.

In the tradition of St. John's Gospel Jesus is manifesting his overcoming the world even prior to his resurrection, in particular, in his dealing with women. For Jesus talks to women about central beliefs, about important theological topics.

⁶ The Gospel is quoted by the King James Bible online

St. John´s Gospel 2, 1-11: Need and Deficiency give Way

At a family celebration, a wedding, Jesus starts his public activities as St. John tells us in his Gospel. At first, he's a guest there like anyone else. Mary, the mother of Jesus, then discovers a deficiency – the lack of wine. To call too little wine a "Lack gives way when Jesus is among us" seems a bit exaggerated. Sure it is a breakdown and embarrasses the host when the wine goes out earlier than expected. But is it a "deficiency"? A deficiency that Jesus must remedy? Here in St. John´s Gospel, it is presented in this way. For Mary draws Jesus' attention to this.

He reacts rudely and calls his own mother "γύναι"⁷- woman.

A surprising address for his mother. In the same way, he also talks to the Samaritan and Mary Magdalene, to whom I will also refer later on.

Despite Jesus' negative reaction Mary instructs the servants of celebration to pay attention to Jesus' words and to act accordingly.

Mary trusts in Jesus to intervene and remedy the deficiency. That is why he has come – to remedy the deficiency and to give the fullness.

The time of need is over thanks to God's presence in Jesus.

This is what Mary knows, and so here she becomes a witness and preacher of the end of deficiency and the end of enduring adverse circumstances.

St. John´s Gospel 4, 4-30: Living Water liberates Women

St. John 4,2-42 is related to St. John 3,1-21, which declares that the possession of God's Spirit is independent of the respective ethnicity. Exactly this is illustrated in the following story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

Jesus meets her at some well and asks her for water. The woman is amazed that he is thus breaking Jewish purity regulations, according to which no drinking vessel may be used by pagan people.

This is followed by a conversation about well water and Living Water that Jesus can give. The fact that Jesus knows her life and that she now lives unmarried with a man after a few marriages shows her that Jesus is a prophet.

Then Jesus makes himself known to her as Christ and she becomes first a witness, then a preacher of the coming of Christ.

The Samaritan woman proclaims Jesus as Christ in her city. By her confession of faith many Samaritans come to believe in Christ. (Jn 4, 39-42)

This Story presupposes the reality of Christian Communities, where women can find a new community and survive economically even without a husband.⁸

St. John´s Gospel 8, 1-11: Darkness gives way to Light

⁷ Schottroff, Luise and Wacker, Marie-Therese (Hg.), Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung, Gütersloh 1999, p.529

⁸ Schottroff, Luise and Wacker, Marie-Therese (Hg.), Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung, Gütersloh 1999, p.533

The 8th chapter of St. John`s Gospel turns to the coming passion of Jesus. Just like an introduction, the story of Jesus and the adulteress is to be read at the beginning (Jn 8, 1-11). Here we learn how in former times believers deal with sinners. In this context St. John makes Jesus give the famous statement: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." (Jn 8,7). In doing so, he prevents the execution of women. This calls into question the patriarchal order at the essential point of its violence over women's sexuality.

Very likely the acquitted adulteress cannot go back to her husband or her childhood home after that incident. Here the reality of small communities is assumed, where unmarried women could find a new home. This kind of new community is also reflected in Jesus ' response: „I am not of this world" (Jn 8, 23)

Following the story Jesus says about himself "I am the light of the world." It is the second "I-am-word" by Jesus in St. John´s Gospel.

St. John`s Gospel 11, 1-46: Mary and Martha

The context in which Mary and Martha appear in the St. John` Gospel is completely different from that of Luke. Martha is a dominant woman acting as a homeowner. She approaches Jesus, receives him like a host. Feminist theologians as Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza and Mary Rose D`Angelo recognize in those two women officials: the heads of a house church as Mary Rose D`Angelo concludes⁹. In St. John`s Gospel Martha is described as a deacon (διακονος Jn 12, 2) and Mary as a sister (αδελφῆ). Both are official titles of the early christianity so we read in St. Paul's epistles.¹⁰

Moreover, Martha's confession in Jn 11,27 is a parallel to the famous Petrus' confession in the synoptic Gospels.

St. John´s Gospel 12, 1-8: Mary anoints Jesus for king and death

Just as the Synoptics report, Jesus is anointed in Bethania by a woman. In the tradition of St. John we find the same story (Jn 12,1-11). Usually in Israel, only senior officials (King, High Priests) are anointed at the time of taking office, or dying.

The anointing in Bethania is to be understood as anticipated anointing of the dead and symbolizes the imminent death of Jesus.

Here's a woman in an active role. She is not made a witness or preacher by Jesus. She herself takes the initiative and anoints the "King" recognized and condemned to death.

9 Schottroff, Luise and Wacker, Marie-Therese (Hg.), Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung, Gütersloh 1999, p.535

10 Schottroff, Luise and Wacker, Marie-Therese (Hg.), Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung, Gütersloh 1999, p. 535

St. John´s Gospel 19, 25 – 27 / 20, 1-18: Christ is risen

From Jn 18,1 onwards, the story of Jesus ' Passion is told, which is largely in line with the synoptic Gospels. It begins with the capture of Jesus (Jn 18,1-11), continues with the interrogation of Jesus and the trial, followed by the denial by Peter (Jn 12,12-27) and the interrogation of Jesus before Pilate at the end of the 18th chapter (Jn 18,28-40).

St. John, chapter 19 concludes the tradition of Jesus` Passion with the scourge and mockery of Jesus (Jn 19,1-5), his condemnation by the high priests (Jn 19,6-16a), the crucifixion and death of Jesus (Jn 19,16b-37) and his burial (Jn 19,38-42).

The Gospel finally ends with the Easter reports. Mary Magdalene is the first at the empty tomb; in the beginning, however, the situation cannot yet be interpreted. Then she meets angels at the tomb and she sees Jesus himself, who sends her to proclaim to the disciples that she has seen him and that he has risen.

Mary Magdalene is the first witness of the resurrection and the first proclaiming of the resurrection (Jn 20, 17-18)

There is some striking in the encounters of Jesus with women handed down by John. In the stories, in which a woman takes the initiative, she is named – and always called Mary. When Jesus becomes initiative, in the texts about the Samaritan woman and the adulteress, no name is handed down.

Using the example of the missing wine at a wedding, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, reveals the lack. She apparently knows about her son's mission and assignment. The evangelist Luke reports this very clearly (Lk 1, 52-53). And Mary demands it here – right at the beginning of the Gospel. Deficiency is to end, the hungry are to get fed up and the low are to be raised. This promise about her son has been bestowed upon her – now she wants to see fulfilment and have abundance.

The second Mary, of whom John reports, anoints Jesus completely unsolicited. Her initiative is disapproved by a disciple, Judas. Mary anoints Jesus to king – to moribund king. In the following story of St. John`s Gospel he is received as a king in Jerusalem. People cried, „Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.“ (Jn 12, 13) waving palm branches at him. Jesus then reveals himself as the king promised in Old Testament prophecy (Sach 9,9).

Anointing is a widely held religious ritual of transmission and legitimization of political power, widely held in the ancient Orient. It is astonishing that a woman performs such an important ritual here; a woman who, unusually in

this ritual, has no higher position of power than the one she anoints. She anoints Jesus and thus makes him a Messiah, which means translated „the Anointed“.

From this story we can see that the congregation of St. John had no hierarchical structures. It is unrecognisable that men and women are attributed different ranks.

In the stories concerning the unnamed women, Jesus takes the initiative and unfolds central theological themes based on the fate of women.

When meeting the Samaritan woman, Jesus breaks Jewish purity regulations and opens up to people, especially women of other ethnicities. Yes, he even takes her into his service and makes her a witness and preacher of the new religiosity, of the new life that is now possible. This story presupposes the reality of Christian congregations, where women could find a new community and survive economically even without a husband. Here Jesus ' treatment with the so-called adulteress is annexing intellectual.

The usual condemnation of women is brought into a new light by Jesus. Into his light, illuminating the darkness of former piety.

This new understanding of sin that this story conveys, is followed by a famous word of Jesus about himself: „I am the light of the world: the one who followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.“ Old structures break down when his light falls in. That means liberation to women, because they were subject to men's condemnation until then.

The stories about the nameless women unfold fundamental theological subjects – fundamental innovations for women: women become witnesses of essential theological content, they are put into service and begin to preach.

In the centre of the history of resurrection, there is again a woman and again she is called Mary (Magdalene). The ductus of the text differs from the first two representation. Here, in this text, on one hand a woman is described who takes initiative: without fear of hostility she sets out to visit Jesus ' tomb; on the other hand, that history also unfolds an essential theological content, namely the resurrection of Jesus.

At the end of the Gospel, both forms of text around women are united.

The woman called by name, which is again „Mary“, is portrayed confidently and decisively by walking to the tomb of the Crucified. There she is commissioned as a witness and herald of the resurrection of Jesus.

The St. John's Gospel tells of a progressive Christian community without hierarchical offices in which women were allowed to implement new life plans and dare to live in new forms. In the Federal Republic of Germany, I am not aware of any such congregation in this day ...

Thus, the gospel remains an encouragement for us women to seek and find the fullness as we free ourselves from social shackles and conventions and live the abundance promised to us.

Conclusion

From the topic asked to the feminist theological reflection, I have experienced an exciting process using the method "Arts-based-Research." The given topic of the exhibition "The Feminist Imagination: Enfleshing the Unconscious" left plenty of room for creative access.

However it lead directly to the unconscious. So the result, that means the artwork, was under the influence of the issue.

I myself followed various impulses that the subject triggered in me until I arrived at the form of expression that seemed adequate to me: half the female face – on the one hand sketchily put on paper, on the other hand provided with the hair colour of the entire lifetime.

Sharing this final version with others, asking for comments and impressions, was a new approach and experience for me. So far, I painted without worrying about how the result might be received. An artwork originated and had value for me, with no outside rating.

By making my art an object of research, it got a special intention and by this it was „displaced“: it stepped out of being pure and became an intentional product. Now others looked at it investigative and reproduced their impressions and associations. I was surprised by these results.

So it is "anger" that I projected into my artwork. Yes, I was finally able to see that, too. And yes, I can feel anger as I am a woman who has to fight for full participation. I was pleased that this deficiency of participation was immediately perceived in the work by another viewer.

The lyrical text to the artwork testifies to a similar perception of women's lack of participation in society and aims at the legitimate desire for full participation (he wrote: "*I only show little of myself but you can discover more! Nice that I had been seen by you!*").

A new impulse was given by that contemplation on the half face when associating people with disabilities. In fact, being not only a woman, but a woman with some disability, this is a double blemish in the Federal Republic of Germany – maybe also in other countries.

Obviously the anger at the deficiency of participation bases on the longing, the desire for abundance, for fullness of life. So, the verse from the St. John Gospel came to mind very quickly, as if by itself and – as I would say now: it came in a completely logical way.

A closer look at the Gospel in a feminist perspective, opened up to me further insights. Up to now St. John´s Gospel for me was not the first to search for feminist theology or feminist questions. Other texts, especially liberation texts

and women's figures from the Hebrew Bible had been in the foreground for me.

So I have experienced an exciting process in trying to subject my art to the method of "arts-based-research."

While enflashing the subconscious, for example by some artwork, the artist comes up with her feelings, her life. The more she herself becomes perceptible, the more the work apparently affects the viewer and draws him or her into the artist's life story.

In any case, that is the way I interpret the process, I was allowed to describe in this article. The subjective theory of "arts-based-research" opened up new horizons for my handling of art, the interpretation of art and the dialogue between art and theology.

Arts-Based-Research – Final Thoughts

Finally, I would like to explore the question of the relationship of arts-based-research to art and to social sciences.

When painting with the intention of using the result for research – what do I paint then? What comes up from the unconscious, when I try to paint for an exhibition titled: „The Feminist Imagination: Enflashing the Unconscious“?

First time I painted the half-face-woman, I immediately knew, that now I had the right motive for the exhibition. Later on I doubted the execution of that image. So I went on painting the half-face-women in a better artistic representation. Finally I realized that the first picture of the half-face-woman for the arts-based-research was the best. Because, what came out of the subconscious, was best mapped here.

As I understood arts-based-research, it generates an alternative form of knowledge and worldview by using aesthetic means. In this way, the method has potential to touch the recipients.

But is it science in doing so? We do not get context independent generalizable knowledge by arts-based-research. There is no independence of research from the person of researcher. The classical criteria for scientific research are unlikely to be met.

As arts-based-research is a subjective theory, it brings out different forms of knowledge and perception. And the various forms of art and media offer non-conceptual possibilities of pre-conceptual and non-discursive knowledge, which in discursive forms is simply not achieving.

So, arts-based-research is apparently an innovative research method, which leads to an openness of the research process, perceiving the role of the researcher's person in the process of investigation, generating contextual knowledge and including the participants as “co-researchers“ as part of participatory approaches.

This type of research fits well with feminist theory, as their concepts aim to create a renewed understanding of science based on feminist findings.

In addition, arts-based-research as well as feminist science do not only address an academic audience but are also useable and comprehensible for a wider public.

In the end, arts-based-research and feminist science deal with empowerment and research towards social change and breaking down positions of (male) power. Therefore it seems to be an adequate method to convey the breaking of old patterns of behaviour and conventions as we perceive in Jesus' dealings with women. Method and content match. Here, as there, it is about empowerment of those who fall short and who lack the abundance.

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