



**'I CONSIDER BRYANT PARK AS MY LIVINGROOM NOW'
ARTIST TALK EMMY DIJKSTRA
THE MANHATTAN GRAPHICS CENTER. JUNE 28TH 2014**





Jag åker hem

Artist talk New York June 28th, 2014

My name is Emmy Dijkstra I'm originally from the Netherlands but currently living in Sweden. My artist talk is about how my visiting and working in New York two years ago influenced my life as an artist and how my work has developed since then. From an artist who was making all these journeys in her head I became an artist who opened her eyes to the world that surrounds her.

By showing my work to you I want to point out those changes to you.

I'm going to show you work I made before coming to New York, the work I have made during my stay and the work I made after I returned home.



Dreams from the jungle

I started out as a printmaker by making a lot of drypoint etchings. They were always about tropical landscapes with a lot of details. I could spend hours working on a print. Sometimes I even forgot what I had drawn and after I run it through the press I discovered all these tiny creatures again, hiding in the jungle. I really can't tell where all those tropical images came from, I guess I have always been interested in different cultures and how people live and what kind of rituals they have. I think I used this information for making my own stories in my prints. I never went to a jungle or a far away country to see those cultures with my own eyes; people asked me if I had travelled a lot but I didn't. I made all those images at my kitchentable. I just have a vivid imagination.

What will happen if I actually did go to those places? I don't know if it will change my work.



New in town

After a while my work started to change. I wanted to make work that was more about what was going on in the world. I started to draw from pictures I saw in the newspapers. And from drawing people that were flying through the jungle and hiding in trees, the people became more like travellers, fugitives, wanderers trying to find a place in this life. I can't really relate to those people because I never have experienced war and I never had to leave my home, but in a way I do understand the feeling of finding a place where you feel at home.

Praying monks in a destroyed city.

I started to draw about things that were going on in the world; I read newspapers, watched the news, I discovered that anything could lead to a print. For example; the protesting monks in Myanmar.

People were still thinking I went to all these places myself, because my images were still with a very tropical atmosphere. There is this funny story; I had an exhibition in a gallery in Amsterdam. I was showing all these tropical images and all of a sudden I heard the gallery owner telling a customer that I grew up in South-Africa and that my work was about my childhood. I was surprised but I didn't say anything because I didn't know what to say. But in fact: my childhood was somewhere in a small quiet town in Holland, very safe and peaceful. Like I mentioned before: I just have a vivid imagination.





Morningside Park

So for someone who didn't travel at all, it is kind of funny that I ended up in New York!

In 2012 I had the opportunity to go to New York. I wasn't that excited right away. I thought; just let me be, I'm fine where I am. But eventually I got on the plane. Before I came here I wanted to prepare myself, I wanted to make the city my own. At the same time I watched this interview with the writer Teju Cole. He wrote the book *Open City*. It is about a young Afro-American physician who makes long walks after work. He wanders the streets of New York. During his walks he thinks about his life, his childhood in Africa, his parents and his ex-girlfriend. It is more a philosophical book than a novel with a beginning or end. In the book the author describes the city and the places the main character goes to. I read the book and it really helped me to make the city my own; I went to all those places he describes. For example: Morningside park. I went to this park and sat on a bench for a while, just like the main character.

I combined the walks of the main character with my own wanderings through the city. You could say that *Open City* gave me an open mind. Because during those walks I have seen a lot of places and met many different people.



Mr Upside down

As you probably noticed already: in every print the same guy shows up. The Afro-American guy wearing a suit and a tie.

After spending some time in New York I wanted to make a new series of prints. I was thinking about it; I wanted to combine the story of Open City and my own experiences. But how? Then one Sunday morning I was sitting in subway 1, going to the Manhattan Graphics Center. Then this Afro-American guy came to sit across from me. He was wearing a suit and a tie and holding the bible in his hand; obviously on his way to church. As he sat down he closed his eyes as he was contemplating. As I was observing this guy I thought; that's him! That is my main character. He reminded me of the main character from Open City. Since that morning he started to appear in my new series of prints. Sometimes he is alone or together with other characters, such as Nina Simone.

Every day I close my eyes and think of what I have seen today

During my stay I learned the paper litho technique at the MGC. With this technique it is possible to work in different layers and colors. You can really build up an image.

For me this print represents New York City.

It has many layers. This is how I see the city: it is a city of many layers. It has so many cultures, stories, colors, smells and noises. And I can use it all for my work.

I consider my stay in New York as a rite of passage; before I came here I had all these stories in my mind and using my imagination for making my work. Then during my stay in New York I have learned that there is so much going on in the world around me and that anything can lead to a work of art.



Paper dresses

Since a couple of years I have been making paper dresses.

When I returned home from New York I made a new one. This paper dress tells about my rite of passage that I experienced in New York. The front of the dress shows a young boy or girl (I really can't tell) with her or his eyes closed ready to experience his, her rite of passage. A little bit scared because he or she doesn't know what to expect. But she or he will do it anyway because maybe some good will come out of it. I was afraid of going to New York, as I didn't know what to expect. I thought I would get lost. But I didn't.



The back of the dress shows a guy who is getting dressed. He has his eyes open. Ready to go to the city and ready to face the world. That's how I feel now. New York taught me to really open my eyes and look around.

I actually wear those dresses. I use them for performances and for art classes that I teach to children. I enter the classroom wearing a paper dress and the children can ask me all kinds of questions. It is funny because the teacher always warns me before I go in by saying that the children probably are going to laugh. But they never do. Instead they are surprised and show a lot of respect.

The dresses are very vulnerable and easily damaged so I usually bring some tape so I can fix them right away.



When I returned to the Netherlands I discovered what a great experience it is to live abroad for a while; just to see and experience that there are many ways of how you can live your life.

With that experience it was not a very difficult decision to do this again but not to New York but to Stockholm. Stockholm is a different story from New York. It has a more quiet and introverted culture. First of all you have the long and dark winter.

I remember sitting at my table, probably working on a print and I noticed the room getting darker. I thought that I had lost track of time and that it was already five o'clock in the afternoon. But then I discovered that it was only two o'clock! I was in shock; it was such a strange experience.

Now living in a new country I really had to think where to get my inspiration from.

When you are in New York walking down the streets there is so much going on; you will find inspiration everywhere. I could sit in the subway for hours, just to watch people. Here, in Sweden life is more about nature, home and your family.

In the beginning I was still making these tropical images, but somehow it didn't work in Sweden.

Then I thought about what I learned in New York; I had opened my eyes and started to look at the world around me.

So that is what I did in Stockholm. I started to use things from my new environment, just simple things from my daily life.



Tunnelbana

Tunnelbana is one of a new series of prints I have been working on in Stockholm.

That's me sitting in the subway. Still fully awake, thinking of my new life. The darkness can be interpreted in two different ways; the subway riding in the night or the dark sky filled with stars. And me still fully awake and thinking of my new life.

Jag åker hem

This is the final image I'm going to show you. In Stockholm I decided to open my eyes again to see the new world that surrounds me. My rite of passage in New York changed me from an artist who was making all these journeys in her mind, to an artist that opened her mind and look around. The work I have made in New York has many layers and a lot of colors. In Stockholm I have chosen to tell about the silence, the snow and the darkness.

My work became more simple and quiet. The print 'Jag åker hem' reveals all this: the darkness, the light, the home and someone going home. Because that's what "jag åker hem" means: I go home. Wherever that is.

