

or objects made by and for the people. I value its simplicity and precision in expression. I use anecdotes that underlie folkloric culture as a structure to achieve a work, but I take care not to arrive at a synthesis. I want this material to stay pure, by containing all ideas in a figurative form. **CD**

Can you give an example of how you've used such an anecdote? **KB**

My series of sand carpets combine two unrelated anecdotes that share only the time and place in which they were current: the tradition of housewives who scrub their stone floors with sand, and the use of caged canaries to detect poisonous gases in mines. Another example is the legend painting that places the tale of Saint Rumbold, who defeated a demon in the swamps of Mechelen and had its hairy skin buried underneath the cathedral tower, next to the cows of Fukushima that developed the skin disease vitiligo after the nuclear disaster. The latter can be characterized as a dermatological diptych, dedicated to the subject of skin, without aspiring to any philosophical discourse. I want all of these subjects, no matter how small and manifold, to be part of my work. **CD**

You grew up in Lommel, a Belgian city adjacent to the Dutch border, known for its sand quarries and nature reserves. To what extent did this background influence your personal language, which seems particularly sensitive to the symbolism of animals? **KB**

Many people comment on the recurrence of animals in my work, and perhaps I'm at the point of continuing this impres-

sion for the fun of it. I don't think about my background much. I am sensitive to place; I see each context as a specimen, and then try to pin it like a butterfly. In this way, a specific anecdote can represent a more general phenomenon or problem. For instance I made a very Belgian work around the Cinquantenaire Museum in Brussels. When it rained, I'd rush to an area in the museum where the roof was leaking and catch the water in a bottle. The underlying story is that part of the museum's collection consists of spoils, trophies, and diplomatic gifts that ended up in the hands of the Burgundian dukes, the house of Habsburg, and so on. The ensuing legend painting therefore consists of a vessel of water and a magpie. It's an institution that was founded to propagate the Belgian identity, and the problematic ways in which artifacts from other cultures were obtained is inherently part of that. The water seeping in is such a striking image that I felt it needed to be preserved and seen. Somehow the museum, with all its historical and political bearings, has produced a precious mineral. I had a glass sphere made to display the water, inspired by a makeshift magnifying glass used for embroidery. This brings us back to the idea of folk activism. **CD**

The magnifying glass is also a thing of the past, as are many other "devices" that you turn to. What attracts you about anachronism? **KB**

The market directs our attention to high art, and our economy is focused on tourism. But rarely anymore do we speak of the Catholic or Hellenistic heritage that has influenced our culture so immensely. In terms of style, the veil of anachronism installs a detachment that makes one better able see connections across past and present.

EILEEN MYLES AND ELIZA DOUGLAS IN CONVERSATION

Model-turned-painter Eliza Douglas recounts her decision to leave New York for Europe and start a new life afresh in the arts after a long period of being too afraid to fulfill a lifelong dream. The field of painting—because of its inherent constraints—has come to fit the overwhelming possibilities of her rebirth.

Eliza Douglas is an artist who lives and works in Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Eileen Myles is an American poet and writer who has produced more than twenty volumes of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, libretti, plays, and performance pieces over the last three decades.

A HISTORY OF LONGING

EILEEN MYLES I've been around different versions of you and your work for the better part of a decade. You're a tall person, and some of your work for sure is about being a figure and a gender-variant one. I saw you in Anohni's work, operating in a context with a lot of transwomen. I know you've done some modeling, and I suspect you've always done it on your own terms. You've played in a band. And of course we stood with our former partners in *Vice* magazine as gay power couples. You are in many ways a representative figure. You have hauteur and some mystery, and I think a quietly radiant, subversive sense of humor. So what's your history with painting? When I encountered your recent work in Frankfurt I thought, wow, this is it. You're destabilizing and entirely reconstructing what one might expect next from Eliza Douglas, and I am entirely blown away. I'm looking at an alphabet, I'm looking at an abstract superhero, I'm getting a real belly laugh about the body and what is painting and what are words. I experience these paintings as kind of a birth, like when Superman steps out, and there always was something about Clark Kent that kept our eyes on him. **ELIZA DOUGLAS**

It is meaningful to me that you experience my work as a sort of birthing process. Other than an intro to painting class I took with Amy Sillman twelve years ago, I basically have no history with painting. Or maybe the history is one of longing, like looking out the window at all the kids playing and

not being allowed out. I wanted to be an artist all along and thought about it constantly, but for various reasons was quite paralyzed and unable to even try. I left New York a year and a half ago in a state of crisis—after all these years of being too afraid to do what I really wanted to, I gave up, and was beginning a career as a social worker. Finally I felt a certain level of desperation and something snapped in me—an umbilical cord of sorts. In a few weeks I vomited out a bunch of work, made a portfolio, and abruptly dropped everything to go to the Stäedelschule in Frankfurt. I arrived quite scared, with no real plan. I didn't even know what medium I wanted to work with, I was overwhelmed with what felt like the limitless possibilities of art. This is largely what led me to painting: the tangible boundaries paintings seem to have. They are mostly contained within squares or rectangles, and there is a set of tools that are standardly used to make them. And then there is the challenge of the medium's history. At least thirty-five thousand years ago someone painted a pig on a cave wall on an Indonesian island. People have been painting for a long time. Some say it has died, some say it has been resurrected. And what makes a good painting? And how the fuck do I make one, especially given that I have no painting "skills"? Since I was taking this plunge, which felt suicidal, I figured I might as well go all the way and be a painter. Along with its weighty history, painting is particularly polarizing. Choosing painting was the ultimate way of











exposing myself. It felt like a region in which there would be no buffer, nothing to hide behind. **EM**

If I was going to meet my new social worker and got you, I'd be thrilled, but I agree, it seems like the wrong thing entirely for you. But "it"—that wrong choice—made you snap. That's great. That's a real step in the composition of a life and a career. And I can't help thinking that there's some hangover of the "social" about these gestures, these paintings of yours. So, there's two elements. The painted line, sometimes broken and sometimes not. Mostly not broken. But distressed, drippy, so, lots of the history of painting is in this gesture. And hands. The hand being the ultimate tool. And white background. So that's three elements. How did you get there? How did you choose? What did you mean for us to feel or see? Is there an "us" here? Are you signaling? **ED**

I wonder if you are referring to the paintings themselves being in some way social? The more abstract, gestural elements of my work could easily be seen as stand-ins or replacements for the body. But I think socializing with this work would mean one was assuming the painting has a subjectivity of its own, and this is what a teacher of mine, Isabelle Graw, would call an "anthropomorphic projection." But it is so easy to make boring or derivative paintings. If someone experiences my paintings as doing anything, social or otherwise, that feels like an achievement. And I'm with you when it comes to the "doing the wrong thing" idea. I am so grateful for these moments when what seemed like painfully wayward paths or wastes of time have purpose in retrospect. I also learned how futile it can be to try to escape oneself, or deny one's desire. In relation to your question about there being an "us," I suppose there is always an "us." I think about how the work will be interpreted, and I want people to like it because I want to be liked. I'm reminded of this Giorgio Agamben quote: "The desire to be recognized by others is inseparable from being human. It is only through recognition by others that man can constitute himself as a person." I think we cannot escape we-ness/us-ness, the superego, the other, and all that jazz. But while I want my work to be compelling and I strive for success, I don't mean for anything specific to be seen in my paintings. My hope is more to preserve an openness. I aim not so much to make a point but to clear space for potential meaning making and discussion. I want to make paintings that function prior to any real analysis while providing fertile ground for analysis. For instance you mention sensing the history of painting in there—I like this. I think about some dominant themes in contemporary art—subjectivity, the figuration-abstract dichotomy, the role of the hand in light of mechanical reproduction, networks and authorship—and I hope this can all be ripe for the picking in my work—if you're in the mood. I like the idea of creating richness using simple elements or parameters. I like the idea of using a little to do a lot. **EM**

Of course I want to tell your painting teacher to go to hell! I think we are in the room with paintings both while we make them and when we view them. I'm throwing out questions to see what you do with them. I mentioned that your gestures are social. Paintings are things. I like them because they carry residue of the painter working, her choices. The elongated limbs, the hands at the end. I am socializing with this work. People strangely

like art, and dogs don't. If a dog recognizes its own representation in a puppet or a statue, it barks and barks. The only way they experience art is that they don't like it. I quote one thing all the time from Gilles Deleuze: art hurts our animal eyes. But these paintings of yours don't hurt me. In fact they engage me in their stripped-down alphabet-y way. They're almost sporty. They're almost speech. I would put one on the wall of my apartment or house because they're a little bit haunting. I think they've lost a lot. But what remains is wit, I think. It's very smart and funny. How do you feel in the wake of it? When you're writing a book, finishing is the very best part. That's as good as it gets, I always think, when it's done and before I show it to an editor or an agent. I'm thrilled and I'm full of my work. You're about to show this work. What does the gap between the studio and the exhibition feel like? Are you up for the show? Are you in the future? Do you like making work in Europe better than in the United States? What's the difference, and, at least in your imaginings, where do you think you'll go next? **ED**

Ha the projection thing was said by my theory teacher, I assume Amy Sillman would be on the same page with you about painting. She really feels that they do something on their own. And she loves dogs, too. I am grateful to be making work in Europe. I was always so stuck when I was trying to work in New York, so I don't know what it's like to have a practice there. Economically things are so much easier here. And there isn't much going on, so there is less distraction and FOMO. There is something nice about not understanding what most people are saying, although I think it will get old. It was necessary for me to leave home in order to shed myself. Although I miss New York; I love the people and my communities there. So many people helped me figure stuff out, encouraged me, kept me alive. I received so much kindness in that city. It was amazing living on East Third Street, a block away from you. Just walking to the subway I would run into people like Taboo!, Joey Gabriel, Sharon Niesp, and you. What could be better? Next up I have a few more projects to work towards. I don't feel done with this series yet, so I will continue working it through. I am also experimenting with some other paintings, which are quite different. Additionally I have been performing in my girlfriend Anne Imhof's work and will continue to do so. This is a different and exciting mode of expression for me—creating images with my body through improvisation within this world Anne has created. I find the performers I work with in this process brilliant and inspiring—their intuition in genius. I am especially blown away by Franziska Aigner and learn so much from working with her. Anne and I are also making some collaborative paintings and I'm looking forward to having a show of them with her. In terms of my show, I think I will feel proud when it is finally hung and in the gallery context. The works are so large that I can never look at more than a few at once, and my studio is quite cluttered. I will finally get to see the paintings be together. You said finishing a book is the best part. Maybe the equivalent moment for me is when I am putting the paint strokes in. It is when I get physical with the painting, and when it all comes together as a composition and I get to see if it works or not. There's a quote of yours: "We love the feel of making the marks as the feelings are rising and falling. Living in literature and love is the best thing there is. You're always home." This is what it is like for me when I paint, even though I don't know how.

di Caroline Dumalin

Caroline Dumalin parla con Kasper Bosmans al terzo piano del suo studio a WIELS dove l'artista ha una residenza di sei mesi. Bosmans discute il suo uso di materiali culturali e di memorie comuni e familiari per astrarre e organizzare la conoscenza acquisita in legende figurative, composte di fatti enciclopedici e aneddoti mitologici.

Caroline Dumalin Quando ho visitato il tuo studio, circa tre anni e mezzo fa, ti eri trasferito da poco e praticamente non c'era nessun lavoro. Mi mostrasti una foto di un asino che trasportava una bandiera viola, che definisti un dipinto. La tua pittura da allora è diventata meno intuitiva e

più strutturata. Quando e come si è verificato questo cambiamento?

Kasper Bosmans A quel tempo trovavo difficile accettare l'idea di un dipinto come oggetto unico. Perciò ora, ogni volta che si presenta l'occasione per realizzare un nuovo lavoro, provo a fare una "legenda" dell'opera. Si tratta, come indica il nome, di legende utili a leggere o a decifrare l'opera, e non importa se sono state realizzate prima o dopo il completamento del lavoro in questione. Ho iniziato concependole come sostitutive alle spiegazioni testuali e funzionano, infatti, come dispositivi mnemonici utili a condensare e memorizzare le informazioni. Raccogliere informazioni funzionali alla raffigurazione mi stimola a procedere. Preferisco vede-

re che il mio lavoro culmini in una grande opera piuttosto che come un gruppo di opere forzatamente autonome.

CD Quindi concepisci questi dipinti stilizzati e codificati come elementi secondari che ti consentono di affrontare, metaforicamente, il bianco della tela. Quale tipo di informazioni stai (o stanno) trattando?

KB Witte de With festeggia il suo venticinquesimo anniversario con venticinque e oltre commissioni, e sono stato invitato a creare opere utilizzando i loro archivi. Le legende saranno presenti, ma visibili solo in occasione di eventi pubblici. Per ogni casella dell'archivio selezionato ho realizzato una legenda dipinta su carta, che viene incollata all'interno. Quella dell'archi-