

Detel Aurand & Claudia Hausfeld in conversation with Katharina Wendler

Studio Detel Aurand, Berlin
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KW: This series of talks with the pragmatic title in conversation with came about in 2018 because, as a curator, I have found that visiting studios and talking to artists has given me a lot of very interesting information about their works and their working methods, which usually remains hidden from visitors: In the studio, you are shown and explained many things, see unfinished works and sketches, learn things that may not even be visible in the later exhibition. By recording these conversations, my idea was to make this knowledge, the stories and processes behind an exhibition accessible to everyone. Now, there are many types of "conversations" around artistic work and today it's about your exchange, i.e. one between two artists. So, our conversation is something of a meta-conversation about the dialog the two of you've been having by post since 2017. Perhaps you would like to start by telling us when and where you met and how your first meeting went.

DA: I met Claudia on the internet.

KW: Have you been set up?

DA: No, not directly. I was in Iceland in the fall of 2017 and was looking for a place to present my book *We are here*, which has a strong connection to Iceland. So I went to Nyló in Reykjavik, where I read Claudia's name on the list of board members. Such an obviously German name amongst all the Icelandic ones – I found that interesting. A German in Iceland? I had a look at her website and contacted her.

CH: Oh yes, I remember that. You just wrote me an e-mail. I then invited you to my studio.

DA: Looking back, I think it was interesting to have found you that way. I remember how relieving I found it that we spoke the same language, that connected us. I was also directly interested in your work, there was an immediate resonance.

CH: I mean, you hadn't been in Iceland for a while at that point, which perhaps explains why we only met so "late".

DA: That's right, I hadn't been there for four years at that point, which is a really long time for me.

CH: A year later, I hosted your book launch at Nyló. We had already started our dialog by mail; it began shortly after your visit to my studio. Detel had already been in a dialog project with another artist [the *Paper Proud* project with Isabelle Dyckerhoff] and I have a digital "pen pal" relationship with the Danish artist Lotte Fløe Christensen, with whom I send pictures back and forth by email. So the format wasn't new to either of us. We discussed it at our first meeting and then decided to start a dialog of our own.

DA: But we didn't agree to anything specific. So it was all the nicer when I received the first mail from Claudia in January 2018.

CH: I remember thinking for a relatively long time, what do I send now? How do you do that? At the time, I only knew Detel's work from pictures on her website and in the catalog. So, how to start? I then very intuitively drew circles on paper with the words BLUE and WHITE. That was something, but somehow not, something between a sketch and a work. I then put it in the envelope and sent it off, thinking: I just see what happens.

KW: I find it surprising that you opened the conversation with this painterly or graphic gesture and not, for example, with a photograph, which would have been much more obvious for your work. In doing so, you immediately approached Detel's work, perhaps unintentionally.

- CH: That's exactly what I was looking forward to, coming into contact with someone who works in a completely different way to me, with different materials. I saw it as a challenge to try something different, to break out of my comfort zone. And when the first mail came back from Detel, I was really hooked; it was just great!
- DA: I do believe that Claudia's interest in painting forms something of a basis for our dialog. I was aware of this from the beginning, and I don't think it would work without this foundation. And at the same time, I think the different nature of our media is crucial. Because through the dialog with Claudia, I'm excited to deal more with photography, printing, etc. I find this openness towards all materials and approaches very relevant, and it inspires me because then anything is possible.
- KW: *I would go so far as to say that openness is the basic prerequisite for this dialog. And curiosity, of course. And trust! Right from the start, you gave each other "permission" to play with each other's work, to intervene in it, to share your "authorship", so to speak.*
- DA: Yes, absolutely.
- CH: You have already dealt with photography, Detel. For example, as part of your book.
- DA: Dealt with it, of course. But it was never an important means of artistic expression for me, in the sense that the medium itself played a crucial role. I take photos as memories, as observations, they serve as a visual reference system for things that inspire me or that I don't want to forget. More like sketches.
- KW: *The first photos of Detel that you saw, Claudia, were the ones that were published in her book We are here. They have a strong connection to Iceland. Was looking at these pictures perhaps also something like the initial moment when you realized: we are connected by more than our origins, we are also connected by our relationship to Iceland?*
- CH: Yes definitely, that was the big topic right at our first meeting. However, the fact that we both come from divided Berlin was almost more important. We both saw Berlin as an "island" and our life on the other island – Iceland – also played a role, of course, and we talked about that a lot.
- DA: **But we missed each other:** Claudia arrived in Iceland when I had just left, so we experienced it at completely different times. And yet we had many similar experiences that we were able to share.
- CH: That's true, but it wasn't really that important for the postal exchange, was it? We do make a lot of reference to Iceland, but more from an artistic perspective, understanding the island as a visual and tactile object.
- DA: I do find it very interesting to reflect on our relationship with Iceland, especially in the exchange with you, Claudia. I think it's fair to say that this country has become more important for both of our work than Germany ever was. Thus, Iceland as an influence is definitely a topic of our artistic dialog.
- KW: *Much more than Berlin, for example, as an influence, right?*
- CH: Yes, that's true, but it's never conceptual or forced, more intuitive. For me, Berlin has a lot to do with thinking, with confrontation, with reflection. But Iceland is Iceland, it also offers more visually, the colors, the structures, the wind, the weather...
- KW: *Is Berlin more thinking and Iceland more feeling?*
- DA: For me, Iceland is the epitome of nature. Berlin, on the other hand, is dominated by human culture. My artistic starting point, my inner connection to my work is nature, which is why I feel so close to Iceland. Of course, it also plays a role that I spent the first years of my artistic career there, not at the academy but

in nature. And that was essential, because in nature in Iceland you witness creative processes, you can watch them, you take part in them, unconditionally. For me, nature doesn't mean that I *want* to be something, but that I *am*.

My view of Iceland has of course changed over the years, but what still fascinates me is the way in which it is possible in art there to simply allow something to happen, to work quickly and intuitively, to leave things unfinished. It's less cerebral. Coming from Germany, I found and still find that very refreshing. The downside is that some people might be satisfied a little too quickly; then it gets boring. In our German culture, the digestion of finding expression is almost more important than the final work; you can and should devote yourself to it, which is of course great. At the same time, it also harbors the danger of dogmatism, confinement, stubbornness, limitation, narrowness; you become a slave to some kinds of -isms and formulas. In Iceland, you are somehow freer.

CH: That's a nice thought that you have formulated very aptly. And I would say that our respective ways of working are characterized by both approaches and that they inform each other.

KW: *To what extent would you contextualize your work here or there?*

CH: Of course the environment influences my work but that doesn't make it specific to Iceland. I'm interested in certain things and themes; it's often the clash between man-made things and nature, situations that are ambiguous where neither one nor the other dominates. A dilapidated hut, for example, which merges back into nature is a good symbol of this. I'm interested in the in-between, and I find that everywhere, not just in Iceland. But my work would certainly look different if I lived somewhere else, in Berlin for example. I can't say how exactly, of course.

KW: *East Berlin may be your home but you spent most of your adult life and thus your artistic career elsewhere.*

CH: That's right, I moved away from Berlin when I was fifteen, first to Switzerland, then to Copenhagen for four years and finally to Iceland, where I studied at the art academy. Nevertheless, Berlin has always remained a point of reference for me, also a space where it is possible to dedicate myself to art with a depth that is perhaps not possible for me in Iceland. It starts with the fact that I get to see exhibitions here that would never be shown in Iceland, if only logistically. So for me, Berlin is an important place for art, including literature, and I try to take as much of it as possible back to the island.

KW: *Even if the terms are problematic, do you perceive Berlin more as the center and Iceland more as the periphery? I mean that less geographically and more in a mental, emotional way.*

DA: No. In the years I spent in Iceland, I often felt more connected to the world than I did in Berlin. But of course that was before the fall of the Berlin Wall, when West Berlin was a closed-off "island". All the people I met in Iceland back then had been abroad, studied elsewhere, or traveled a lot. Their view of the world was also different, 360 degrees, they had everything in view. You couldn't say that about West Germany back then. It may have been a small country but it seemed more open and international to me than Germany.

CH: We live in a time in which concepts are becoming increasingly blurred, or rather the in-between is interesting here too, where periphery and center meet. Perhaps Berlin sometimes feels like the center of specific discourses, while Iceland feels like the periphery of everything.

DA: Apart from the geographical location, the size of the country naturally plays a role, and Iceland is also an island and therefore has completely different conditions, one mustn't forget that. As a person among millions of other people, we have to find our place somewhere and the conditions for this vary from region to region. Coming from the big city of Berlin, it was extremely irritating for me in Iceland and especially in Akureyri at first. Living in a much smaller community meant never knowing what anyone already knows or has heard about you; there was hardly any anonymity. It's very different in Berlin, of course, also in terms of art, where parallel worlds can coexist that often have hardly any points of contact.

In Iceland or in smaller communities in general, building bridges is much more important; without that, community life doesn't work.

- CH: One big advantage of living in a smaller country is that the hurdles are lower, the distances smaller, the routes shorter. You immediately know someone who knows someone who knows someone who has what you need or want. In terms of artistic work, there may not always be all the materials or processes available but it's much easier to get in touch with each other. I think in Reykjavik it's easier to get into a bubble, to become part of something. I imagine that's much harder in Berlin.
- DA: Especially when – in relation to the art world – the bubble is the whole of Iceland, regardless of whether you're there or elsewhere. I was sometimes blown away by the self-confidence of Icelanders, the fascination of it, but also the ignorance.
- KW: *Apart from your experiences of life in Iceland, I would like to come back to your artistic work. Despite all your similarities and interests, you work very differently, have different thematic focuses and – generally speaking – also different rhythms. Detel, I'd say you keep more of a "classic" studio practice than you Claudia; you tend to make more site-specific and context-related works. How would you situate the works you created together in your dialog in your own artistic practice? What role do they play? And I am also interested in how you approached the joint exhibition at the museum in Akureyri.*
- CH: I can say for myself that there will be works in this exhibition that I have never done or shown before. For example, I've never exhibited a hand drawing before! I'm really looking forward to breaking completely new ground here. My whole working process has been extremely enriched by this project; the dialog has made me do things I've never done before. It's a bit different for you, Detel, isn't it?
- DA: Yes, I didn't change my way of working that radically. But the dialog still had a big influence on my own work, because I picked up on things and continued them elsewhere. I sensed Claudia's desire to get closer to painting, to deal with colors and shapes. Sharing this joy, which plays a major role in my work, with her, was and is a very important aspect of our dialog. I also see humor as something we have in common, a pleasure and joy in playfulness. At the same time, the need to find a certain structure in our own artistic work, not to let it become arbitrary.
- CH: Every mailing, every work is like a word of our conversation, it's always in motion. The game is that your own work always refers to the work of the other, which has already referred to another work before, and so on.
- KW: *Basically, the dialog is about transforming one's own work into something shared, which is otherwise rarely the case with works of art (unless they are created in a participatory or collective way). Normally, a work of art is the expression of one person. What fascinates me about your joint works is the fact that it is still quite clear who has just made something here, i.e. who the intervention comes from. Nevertheless, you have managed to create something completely new, I'd like to call them "small hybrids of individual expressions".*
- CH: We started the dialog completely aimlessly and without an agenda, and in my mind it was never intended to be exhibited. Nor did I expect to ever see the things I sent out again. I think this lack of planning, this freedom was very important. It allowed me to work without thinking too much, which is rather unusual for my practice and my training. In my studies – I studied photography in Zurich – I learned to always be able to explain and justify my work, to proceed almost systematically. Our dialog, on the other hand, allowed me to do things that didn't have to stand up to anything or anyone. Admittedly, I also came up with some strange things that I often wasn't sure about. I then sent them to Detel.
- KW: *It's a huge vote of confidence to hand over your own work in this way.*

- CH: Yes, absolutely. In the process, I learned to let something be good and to recognize that you don't have to explain everything. I always felt safe with Detel.
- DA: That's really nice, thank you, Claudia.
- KW: *Will you continue?*
- CH: Of course, I've got something for you already, Detel. I just haven't sent it off yet. ☺
- DA: Definitely. The exhibition in Akureyri also takes the project to a new level. I think it's exciting and absolutely great to share our dialog with the public. But we still have to keep the freedom that the project has brought, the openness.
- KW: *Nevertheless, you have to make a lot of concrete decisions when you're preparing an exhibition, suddenly there are deadlines and so on. You have to think about what you want to show and what not, how things should come together in the space. This process ran parallel to your postal exchange for months. How did you approach it?*
- CH: There was a very nice moment when we first talked about which of the works sent back and forth we wanted to include in the exhibition. We had created a PDF with images of all the works and wanted to mark which ones should be included in the museum. When we arranged to meet to compare, it turned out that we had marked exactly the same works independently of each other.
- DA: Ha! Yes, that was easy! We are also currently working on a sculptural installation that will be on display in the space and a shared wall space. I think that the dynamics of our dialog will continue quite well in the exhibition space in this way.

Detel Aurand (*1958 in West Berlin, Germany) studied political science at the Freie Universität Berlin and then devoted herself entirely to painting, which has remained the starting point and reference point of her artistic work to this day. For twenty years she commuted between Iceland and Berlin. Today she lives in Berlin. Her works are created from the joy of sharing all of life. They take us wherever we are at home – light-footed, knowing, curious.

<https://detelaurand.com/>

Claudia Hausfeld (*1980 in East Berlin, Germany) studied photography at what is now the Zurich University of the Arts and received her BA in Fine Arts from the Icelandic University of the Arts in 2012. Her work takes photography as its starting point and deals with its materiality and its relationship to reality and spatiality. Images are often associated with or replaced by objects, creating constellations that question the veracity of photographic images. Hausfeld led the photography workshop at the Icelandic University of the Arts from 2016 to 2023 and significantly expanded the analog lab during this time. She continues to teach courses in experimental photography, darkroom work, and the history of the photobook. She lives and works in Reykjavik.

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Katharina Wendler (*1988 in Hamburg, Germany) is a curator and writer. She studied Cultural Studies and Business Psychology at the Leuphana University Lüneburg and Art and Visual History at the Humboldt University of Berlin and the University of Iceland. After working as an assistant at Daniel Marzona, Berlin, Konrad Fischer Galerie Berlin, i8 Gallery Reykjavik, and the Contemporary Arts Museum Tampa, Florida, among others, she directed the exhibition space SAFN Berlin from 2013-2017 and Karin Sander's studio from 2016-2018. She is currently an academic associate at the Faculty of Art and Design at Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, where she is curator of the University Gallery as well as working as a freelance curator and writer. At the beginning of 2018, she initiated the dialogue-based exhibition series in conversation with, in the context of which she has since held 29 conversations with international artists and realized numerous exhibitions and publications.

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in conversation with is a curatorial format that aims to engage in conversation with artists about their work and develop an exhibition, a publication, or other projects from this. The conversations are written down and enable viewers to develop a deeper understanding of the artists' working methods and their artworks. in conversation with is based on the

fundamental assumption that artists themselves are best placed to provide information about their works, their working methods, their ideas and inspirations. All you have to do is ask. The project was initiated in Berlin at the beginning of 2018 and appears internationally in collaboration with changing exhibition spaces and institutions.