

The Museum of **Everything**
Exhibition #4

Conversation with **Christiane Cuticchio**

Christiane Cuticchio

b 1954 (Selters, Germany)

Former set and costume designer Christiane Cuticchio is the founder of Atelier Goldstein in Frankfurt, Germany. Co-curator of *Weltenwandler: Der Kunst Der Outsider* at Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt (2010), Cuticchio has curated several exhibitions including *Interchange* at the Guangdong Museum of Modern Art (2008). Artists from Goldstein in *Exhibition #4* include Hans-Jörg Georgi and Stefan Hafner.

[START]

MoE: **Christiane**, you're the director of **Atelier Goldstein**, one of the most progressive and creative studios of its kind in **Europe**. Can you tell me a little bit about your background?

CC: I'm 57 years old and my professional life was in the theatre. I was a stage and costume designer and encountered many outsiders and obsessive artists along the way, especially among the directors, dancers and actors I worked with.

Obsession and sexuality is normal for any artist, it's part of everyday life. **Atelier Goldstein** was a natural progression.

MoE: Have you always been interested in this kind of art?

CC: Two years ago I visited the village where I was born. In a field near my home was a small sculpture in a field. It was a carving of the **Virgin Mary** holding **Jesus**, an outsider art sculpture. As I looked at it, I realised that this had been the first piece of art I had seen as a child.

MoE: Do you think this is why you started **Goldstein**, because of this early connection?

CC: Yes - I had the chance as an adult to live out what I had experienced as a child.

MoE: Tell me about **Goldstein**. You choose your artists, is that correct?

CC: We are not an open studio, we are a studio for highly gifted artists with special needs. We have 19 places in the studio and nine staff.

MoE: One staff for two artists, like the **Ritz** in **Paris**?

CC: Yes, luxurious in a way: an art space for artists who need assistance. We select our artists because they inspire us, not because they make beautiful drawings. Artists like that are easy to find, but they become boring after a while. Our artists are missionaries, scientists and engineers.

MoE: How does the studio work commercially?

CC: **Atelier Goldstein** doesn't make a profit. We assist our artists to find their way into galleries, museums and art society.

MoE: Tell me about **Hans-Jorg Georgi**.

CC: **Hans** has an incredible story. His life was one of complete misery and reminds me of **Henry Darger**.

I had acquired one of his drawings, an aeroplane construction, via a member of staff at Goldstein. He did not know who had made the drawing and so finding Hans was very difficult. He had no relatives, was single, homosexual and wasn't supposed to go out on his own because people were afraid of him.

It took me 3 months to find where Hans lived. The director of the home told me he was awful, an aggressive and violent maniac. He made Hans sound like Hannibal Lecter! I told him I was prepared to meet him because he was an artist, but I made sure to go with 2 assistants because I was a little afraid.

I'll never forget the moment we stepped into that tiny room. I couldn't see a thing, it was completely filled with cardboard aeroplanes and towers of drawings. You couldn't even see Hans inside - he was completely covered by his art. He had a hoodie on and we couldn't see his face. It was like discovering a saint or a monk in his cell. Everyone was quiet, we couldn't speak, then we asked him if he had made all these aeroplanes.

Hans explained each aeroplane, one by one. He was one of the nicest, most educated people I had ever met. He is homosexual, he loves boys, so what? He was not a monster at all. His carers had just treated him in the wrong way. It goes to show that even somebody with the best intentions can get it wrong.

I met the cleaning lady. She told me she hated the mess Hans made and that she had to clean the room every 6 weeks. I asked her what she did with all the work. She said she'd been putting the aeroplanes in the garbage for the last 6 years.

I took Hans to Goldstein - and from that day on nobody touched his drawings and sculptures. Since he started working with us he's made 84 aeroplanes, including some very strange versions from the Second World War, as well as visionary flying cities, which are the most interesting ones for me.

The aeroplanes also reference his drawings, which are mainly autobiographical. They illustrate a child who has had sexual contact with a man. There is one figure in his drawings who he calls *The Terrorist*. This man is able to fly the visionary aeroplanes and can become a visionary aeroplane himself. In this way, the drawings melt into the sculptures.

MoE: When I look at the drawings they seem to be children in flight, little stories and journeys.

CC: They are young boys and there is sexual attraction between them. If you go into the details, you discover that there are penises and that the boys are doing things together. You can't really see it clearly because **Hans** only gives you just enough. He doesn't reveal his secrets. We have a few thousand of these drawings and some are very sexual.

For an artist like **Hans-Jorg Georgi**, creativity heals. He is on a mission to make the world a better place. He constructs his aeroplanes because he believes that we will leave the planet one day. **Hans** is thinking about the future.

MoE: Tell me about **Stefan**.

CC: **Stefan Hafner** was 40 when he came to the studio. He showed us an album of beautiful photos, a three-dimensional construction called *City of the Future*. He had been working on it for three years and his father had made him destroy it.

Stefan lived in this city in his mind. He could go through every room and knew where every light switch was. At **Goldstein**, he rebuilt the city using the same techniques. He furnished and constructed it like a real building and recycled the windows from his original. It was the act of destruction which showed me how much he had loved this piece of art. For him this was not a model, it was a poster for a better world.

MoE: Does he see the city as a work of art?

CC: No, not art. They are architectural models. **Stefan** is an engineer, an architect with ideas about the future. The buildings don't touch the ground and air passes through them. It is as if he keeps the earth free for animals and the wind.

When he was a child, his father owned the most beautiful toyshop in the area. He used to sell toy trains, but he never let **Stefan** play with them. **Stefan** was tall and his father was afraid he would break them. So **Stefan** ended up making something bigger and more beautiful than the toy world of his childhood. He became a handicapped architect.

MoE: Did his father appreciate the work you did with **Stefan**?

CC: No, **Stefan's** father told me he didn't want us working with his son. I told him that his son was 40 years old and could make decisions for himself. He did not want his father at the studio, so we protected him, gave him space to work and helped him show his work in the **German Architecture Museum**.

Stefan is now a proud man - and his father has finally made peace with his son.

MoE: So your approach is both interventionist and hands-off. You don't push, you encourage.

CC: We admire.

MoE: Do artists work here full-time?

CC: Some of our artists have been working here for over 10 years. When Stefan finished his *City of the Future* he decided to have a break; so for now, he does not come to Goldstein.

Hans is always working on his objects. Recently he asked if he could make his aeroplanes in metal. I have a staff member who is a sculptor and so he is going to work on this project with him and develop techniques to build aeroplanes out of metal.

At the moment - and for the next 3 years - we are going to be working on a project in an 11th Century church by the Rhine. Our artists will work in the building and when we leave it will have been transformed. But it will not be a museum or an art space, it will still be a Catholic church.

The bishop of the church knows us and he protects us. He says if there is a God, it is in creativity.

MoE: This echoes my feelings: that art is a word for adults and creativity is the life-force. What you do at Goldstein could be happening in every neighbourhood in the world.

CC: Definitely! This is what I always say in my lectures. You can find these artists in little villages right around the world, from China to Iceland, everywhere.

[END]

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