

24 OCTOBER 2018

## INTERVIEW: NICKY BROEKHUYSEN

BY ANNA-LENA WERNER



© Nicky Broekhuysen "The Channeling V" (2018)

It can be difficult for artists to express stories of magic and personal memories through their practice, while most of us tend to believe fictional narratives when they are served on a silver plate. **Nicky Broekhuysen**, who works and lives in Berlin, translates one of these highly personal and perhaps even non-logical stories into the artistic project "The Channeling" that she will be presenting at Davidson Gallery in New York. The project is based on a story involving Nicky's grandmother Marge Hugo and her relationship to the impressionist painter Claude Monet. Merging painting and binary code, while referencing her grandmother's practice of channeling and spiritual awareness, Nicky's various artistic techniques accompany her through a journey from the past into the future. Her practice is a reminder of how art is still the most powerful tool for magical narratives and ways of remembering inspiring people.

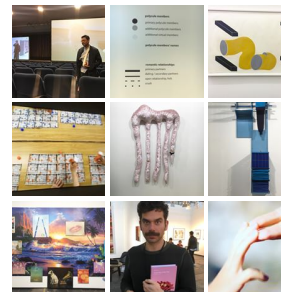
### INTERVIEWS

ARTISTS  
CURATORS

### TEXTS

ACADEMY  
ART FAIRS  
EXHIBITIONS  
THOUGHTS

### INSTAGRAM



### POPULAR POSTS

INTERVIEW: NICKY BROEKHUYSEN  
SO NAH, SO FERN  
ARTIST WATCH:  
PUSENKOFF&PUSENKOFF  
INTERVIEW: U5  
INTERVIEW: LISA OFFERMANN

### LOCATION

BERLIN  
COLOGNE  
COPENHAGEN  
DÜSSELDORF  
ISTANBUL  
LONDON  
NEW YORK  
OTHER PLACES

### ARCHIVE

▼ 2018 (12)  
▼ October (1)  
INTERVIEW: NICKY  
BROEKHUYSEN  
► August (3)



Mine Kaplangi: Your upcoming solo exhibition "The Channeling" comes from a personal story about your grandmother's past, her talent and heritage. Why did you decide to make an exhibition about this story?

Nicky Broekhuysen: The exhibition is centred on a story which unfolded in the last part of my grandmother's life. In 2001 she had what she called a 'spiritual awakening' and began to receive channeled messages from the spirit world in the form of 'automatic writing'. It seemed that Marge – my grandmother - had a very deep connection with French impressionist painters who began to not only communicate in writing through her, but also to paint through her - in particular the artist Claude Monet. Over the next ten years Monet wrote numerous channeled letters to Marge slowly revealing a love story, which exists beyond our normal concepts of space and time – a story of shared lifetimes and deep soul connections.

This story has deeply influenced my life and path as an artist. As it wove itself into the fabric of our family, it embedded in me a deep sense of mystery and wonder in the 'unexplainable'. Marge never spoke publicly of her experience with the impressionists, only sharing the story with close family and friends. She died in 2013 and it was only after her death that we discovered that alongside the many pages of channeled writings that she had kept, she had also written a personal diary recording her own thoughts on these remarkable events. In January 2018 I visited South Africa where Marge used to live and where my family is from. For the first time I read all of Monet's letters to Marge and her personal diary. It struck me how extraordinary this story was and that maybe the world might be ready for it. Or at least the world now seems more absurd than the story of my grandmother channeling famous Impressionist artists.

- July (1)
- June (2)
- April (1)
- March (2)
- January (2)
- 2017 (15)
- 2016 (22)
- 2015 (25)
- 2014 (38)
- 2013 (61)
- 2012 (44)
- 2011 (24)
- 2010 (1)



© Nicky Broekhuysen "The Channeling IV" (2018)

MK: In comparison to previous projects "The Chanelling" is probably the most complex study you have done so far. You also involve binary code. How did you begin working with this technique?

NB: In 2008 when I began using binary code as a visual language in my work, I was interested in the code as a symbolic representation of a moment in time – the age of the Internet. The binary numbers 1 and 0 represent data that creates information. I was interested in pulling this information out from behind the screen, breaking it down into its smallest parts



and making it visible. By doing so I was exploring how the information that we encounter throughout our daily lives forms the building blocks of our perception, which eventually solidifies to form concrete political and social belief structures. What has become interesting in the years following 2008 is the violent 'collapse' of so many of these political, economic and moral structures that we have relied on in the past. It seems that we now find ourselves in a chaotic age of uncertainty and the unknown. Previously, my work explored these ideas of 'broken structures' as a moment of flux, of change, but usually with a view to an 'ordered end point'.



© Nicky Broekhuysen "The Channeling IV" (2018), Detail

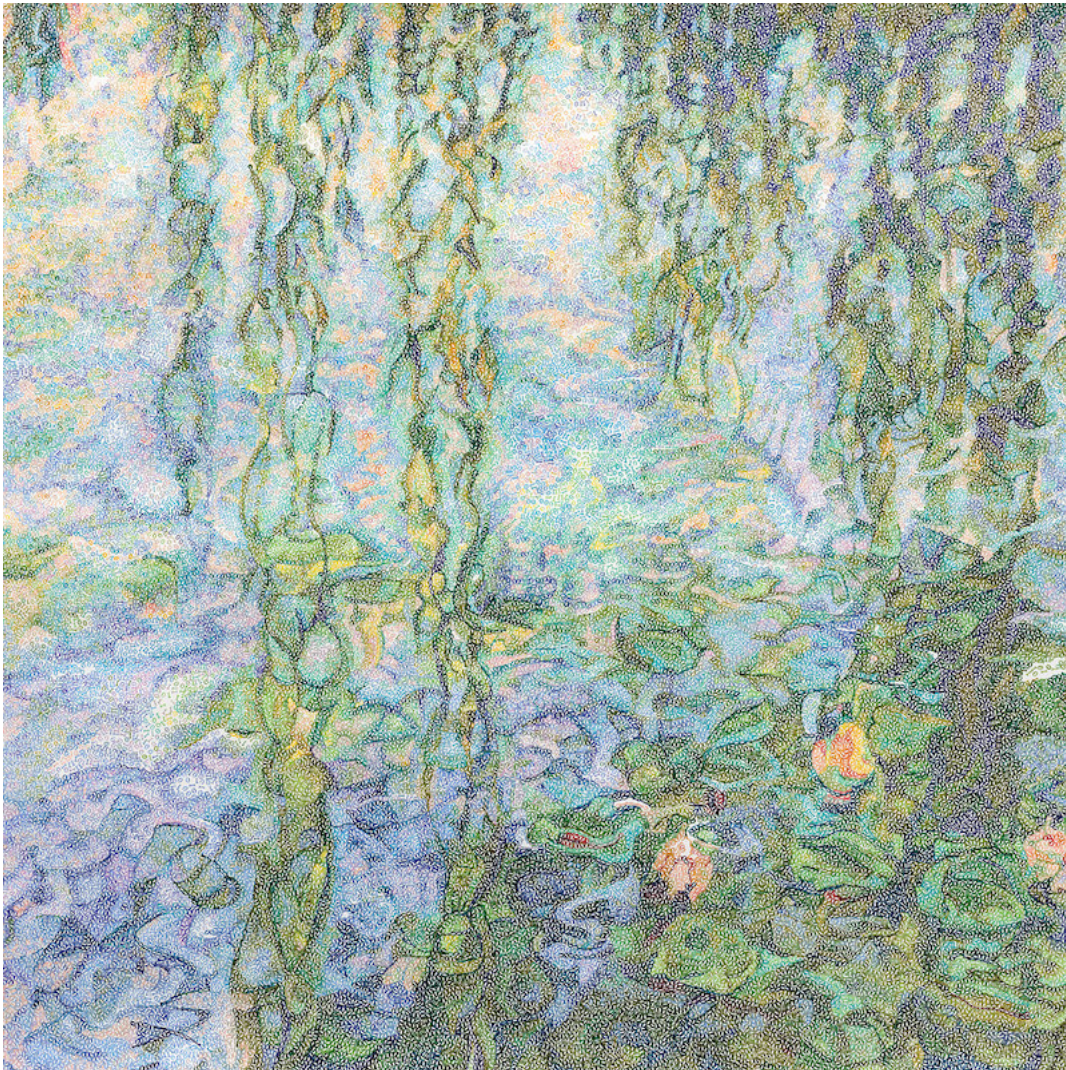
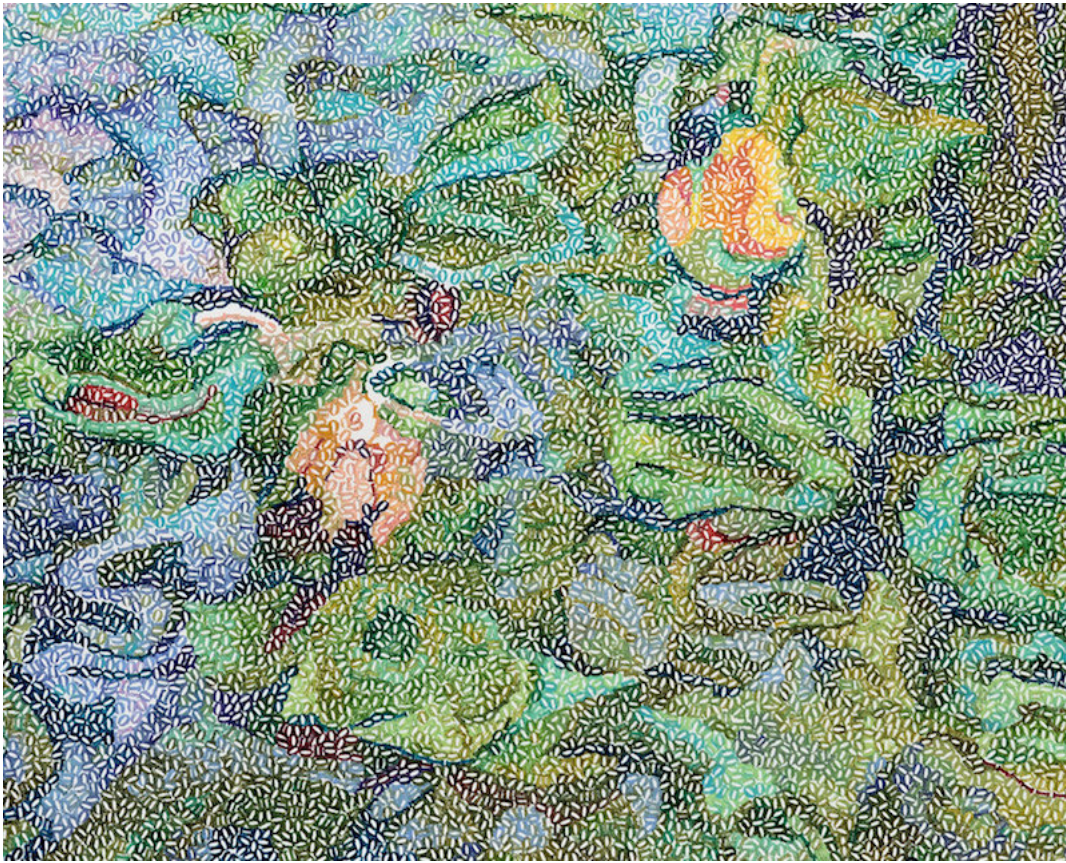
MK: How are these notions involved in your upcoming show?

NB: In this new series of works, which sit within the context of a narrative – the love story between Claude Monet and my grandmother Marge Hugo - I dislodge the binary code from its logical system of information exchange and storage. It becomes an entirely illogical system - bordering on absurd reality - where the information can no longer be read through the 'standard systems of comprehension' or logical brain. The viewers are forced to move from their logical thinking to the part of themselves, which relies on the senses, intuition and the subconscious – the part of their brain which deals with the world of the mysterious. The exhibition becomes a physical space, in which the viewer is asked to suspend certainty and open to the unknown. I think Richard Rohr says it well: "In order to understand the great mysteries of life such as love, faith, truth and mystery we need to clear away the normal mind, which is rather dualistic – it reads everything in terms of either/or, black/white, all or nothing, all of which are not adequate to mystery."

I am occupied with the paradoxical nature of binary code: you have the 1 and the 0, which in computing represent the alternate states of on and off. Individually they are opposites, but their meaning can only be understood in relation to each other. In the polarization of the world today, which is exacerbated by the online world, we can look at this paradoxical nature of binary code as a metaphor that stresses the importance of 'the opposite' or 'the other' in any system. The relevance of context and relationship between things becomes very important – we can look at how Monet used colour in his work to understand this point. He understood that colour builds colour and that the beauty of one colour lies in its relationship to the

colours that surround it. Nothing can exist in isolation. One can also understand this in terms of narrative, where the power of story lies not in the description of reality but in our shared experience of it.







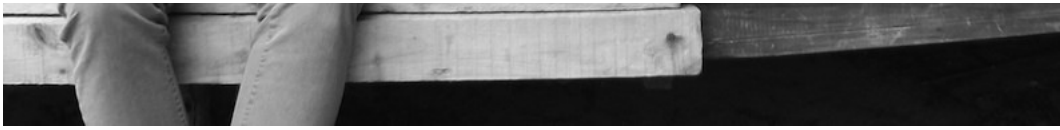
MK: Has your view on binary code changed throughout the past 10 years?

NB: I have realised that there is no final 'ordered end point' rather there is just the space through which one passes on the journey to discovering the beauty and mystery of the unknown behind the chaos. The world has become a place where one can no longer look for security and meaning in the physical spaces and systems in which we live, we have instead been forced to turn inwards, to seek meaning in ourselves and in our connections.

MK: "We read books to find out who we are. What other people, real or imaginary, do and think and feel... is an essential guide to our understanding of what we ourselves are and may become," says Ursula Le Guin\*. You have been working on the book "The Channeling: Love letters between Marge Hugo and Claude Monet" that will accompany the exhibition. What will this book contain?

NB: The first half of the book takes the form of a series of 'love letters', exchanged between Marge and Monet. The channeled messages from Monet are interspersed with extracts from Marge's diary, this forms a conversation between the two, a type of correspondence between the physical world and the spiritual world — each speaking from their own unique voice and perspective. It was important to me that the story was told in their own words, as that was where the beauty and vulnerability of the story lay. You can feel the love between the two, Marge states early on in her diary that if she could have one wish it would be for wisdom and I think that is the narrative thread, which links each message — the wisdom of one world loving and supporting the other. The second half of the book consists of images of artworks that I have made in response to this story and inspired by Monet's "Waterlily" series, which are on exhibit at Davidson Gallery. I often think of my own paintings as 'doorways' through which the viewer is invited to walk through if they so wish and that is exactly how I would frame this book, it is a doorway. You mention Ursula Le Guin and I feel that she too was 'inviting her audience in' to an imagined or alternative world and that is exactly what this story and exhibition aims to do.

[illegible]



© Nicky Broekhuysen "The Channeling Book", book published along the exhibition "The Channeling"

below: Marge Hugo and Nicky Broekhuysen, March 2013

MK: Is there a connection between the act of channeling itself and your practice?

NB: I grew up with channeling as something quite normal, as many of the women on my mother's family's side have had this ability — including my own mother. The notion of 'communication with things unseen' and of the existence of some 'space' beyond that of our physical world, was present in a very un-extraordinary way throughout my childhood. Marge was also an artist herself and it's from her that I first learnt to draw and see the world through colours and shapes. This sense for the mystical, from the perspective of the creative has steered both my personal and artistic life. In this exhibition, I felt that I was being given the opportunity to more intentionally integrate these perspectives into one cohesive artistic vision.

In terms of channeling as an act and how that has influenced how I make art that has also been an interesting journey of integration. The act of channeling is all about connection — connecting with and then translating information from the 'unseen' or spiritual world into the 'seen' physical world. I have found that the act of 'creating art' if one allows for it, can be very close to the act of channeling in that one is required to be in a certain state of being. When I am there — and it's not always the case, I have to be calm and intentional — I can enter a place beyond my conscious self, where time and space cease to exist. I am fully present and open to the moment. My logical brain is switched off. Indeed "I" - my personality, my habitual thoughts and feelings — take a backseat. I am guided by intuition, which becomes my information source. Working in this way forces me to surrender any 'fixed plan' or idea of 'end point' as the process is all about letting go and trusting in what comes. In the end I cannot claim to be the sole creator of the "The Channeling" paintings, they were done in the energy of collaboration and connection to that part of reality, which remains mysterious — for now.

\*Le Guin, The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction

**Nicky Broekhuysen**

"The Channeling"

**Davidson Gallery, New York**

1st of November - 22nd of December 2018.



---

[Home](#)

[Older Post](#)