How and when did you start taking pictures?

That was when I was 13 years old. I got a camera from my parents. I started taking a course in a cultural center in Netherlands where I grew up. I was 15 years old. Around the same time I also looked at art books, for example at photos of sculptures. In my course at the cultural center, I could develop my own black and white photos. It is there where I learned about analog photography. The photographic process, it felt magical. I was also making and building a lot of things and sometimes I took photos of those crafty things. When I started this photography course, I learnt about the all the fundamental aspects of the medium photography. My mother thought the art academy was a good idea for next steps in education for me, although I always wanted to become a 'doctor without borders' and therefor to study medicine.

When you studied at art academy or before, did you have any favorite artists?

In the very beginning when I was very much into portraits, so my hero of course was Diane Arbus. I found it pretty amazing that she had a curiosity towards people's lifes who were somehow slightly outside of the mainstream visible society. She started to talk with these people, and got into their lives. She worked on very close relationships with her subjects and I found that and the way she made portraits very inspiring. It had something very honest about it. Later I got into Wolfgang Tillmans who works more with his photos. He also had his interest in people, but more in his own intimate environment; the German queer scene and daily life situations. It was amazing what he did with his photos and it was super inspiring because of course how he places the photo's in the space and how he felt so free with changing formats and arranging them in the exhibition space.

<u>As Arbas, you started using cameras and taking pictures. Could you please tell me how have you shifted to the recent style?</u>

Now I am not so 'medium specific' and I don't find it interesting to talk about photography only. Perhaps photography was just a starting point for me, because I studied photography at art academy. I also studied sculpture in the beginning but I dropped it. I think, after I graduated from the art academy my sensibility for space came immediately back in my practice and I started questioning the limits of the medium photography. I have a love and hate relationship with photography. Topics I want to study and address through making works about is are the more important. Later in the process I find the final form for a project, which can vary in several outcomes sucha as performance, photos, sculpture, installations, collage or video.

<u>Could you please tell me more precisely how you were leaving from analyzing the medium of photography?</u>

I found using photos in a 'linear narrative' very boring. I think story telling of course in reportage and journalist photography is very important. But I feel there are many different ways how you can tell stories through imageries. I started to be associative, which means that I could expect little bit more from the viewer, and to be interested in how the viewer reads and relates to imagery and combinations of the works, rather than this kind of conventional way of working in lined-up photo series on a wall. A very photographer thing to be is I think being interested in people. Like talking with people, interviewing them, collaborate with them in performative actions and then taking pictures of them. Soon I got to understand that photography is just a surface and it's then when I started raising questions about the value of photography and it's honesty. The world is much more complex than an image shows us, maybe that thought is another reason why my work became also more complex and layered. Making art is very much a long process, every thing goes step by step. I missed something in expressing

my ideas in working just with photography so I expanded the media to work with.

Perhaps it is a good idea to talk about your recent big project, #EVIDENCE (2015), as an example to understand your present art practice.

The project, #EVIDENCE (2015) started with appropriating the idea of Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel's "Evidence" of which a book was published in 1977. They were one of the first artists who appropriated photos and made a new fictional photographic essay with the photos without using the original context. They had visited 81 American organizations such as government agencies, educational institutions and corporations and took the photos out of their archives. They mixed up all these photos and questioned photography. Like; how much pictures depend on their context. I developed a curiosity that I share with Sultan and Mandel as to what America's ambiguous future will look like, but for me of course now. I research whether a similar act can be performed in a digital age where the image as pure evidence has lost its integrity. The source of imagery I chose is one with clear promotional intent and thus questionable integrity: the Instagram accounts of various American corporations, institutions and governmental agencies. They are from the white House to NASA to Google to IBM…I checked 81 Instagram accounts and saw everything these organisations posted. Then I started to take screenshots. All my works out of this project areased on this research and the found screenshots. The result which are the final works are very far away from the screenshot collection I started with. I transformed these screenshots (read images) into installations, sculptures, collages and photos.

The series of sculptures called 《Neutrals》 (2015) originate from the Instagram account of the TSA (Transportation Security Administration), which is an agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security that has authority over the security of the traveling public in US. They have an Instagram account and post mainly intercepted weapons and drugs dogs on

it. It's so crazy. You have to look at it. Among their postings there are sometimes photos of weapons with a burred identity card next to it.. It's an ID card of someone, who did smuggle a weapon. I took out all this identity cards. In the US, every state has different colored ID card and that's why you see all those different amazing blurred colors. I printed these blurred ID cards on all several flexible transparent materials, such as latex, vynil and PVC. I developed the different shapes of the metal constructions to make sculptures, because I wanted to give new embodiment to those anonymous people of who the ID cards are from. The blurring for Instagram done by the TSA makes those people neutral, but my sculptures got all kind of new characters, or emotions through their shapes and the way the prints on plastics are across those metal shapes.

So, in a way your sculptures 《Neutrals》 are portraits?

Yes, I think they are portraits because it's a representation of those anonymous people of who the blurred ID cards are from. They have all these beautiful color aspects and their shapes are charming, but on the background lies the question about privacy and how government agencies are dealing with 'the private' nowadays. For all the works out of my project #EVIDENCE I made this take away ephemeron, a small newspaper-poster shown as a pile on the floor. There you can read all the background stories behind the works out of #EVIDENCE. I like making work what you don't really understand right away, where you in the first place can be touched by visually, and then when work is appealing to you, you can dive into it's context and get to know it's more informative and conceptual background. The constant and fast growing stream of images we see daily makes them more ephemeral and how we interpret them becomes more fragmented. The Internet and social media have changed the way of looking at images. This whole project #EVIDENCE questions what evidence through photo's actually still means in this time. I think a photo no longer serves as a purpose of being evidence.

As the colour shade of 《Neutrals》 is imposing, colour also plays an important role in your work. What meaning do you hold to the colour?

If there is a huge amount of imagery I work with I organize it on colour in order to created order into chaos. Some projects of the past I really choose a specific color to work with because of its art historical content or psychological meaning like in project called "Becoming Blue" (2004-2006). I made photos of people who I had asked to wear blue clothing in front of a blue background. I wanted to refer to an almost meditative state in relation to the calmness of the sky. the series of portraits shows people in a very stressful position towards people being relaxed. It was a performative portraiture series, where during the shoot I did all kind of interactions with my subjects to get them out of the comfort zone. So, I asked them to handle a balloon with a needle or I worked with sound, insects, touch and used a remote control to make the photos during these sessions The final portraits look like in between moments of something happening just before and right after and exactly that it was, where I was looking for. It makes these portraits as question marks. In this case I picked the colour blue, because I wanted to say something with it. On the other hand it can also be a bit painterly. For me it is natural to work with ordering stuff on colour. Colour can have a strong mental impact on people.

I find something essentially human about your work, 《Becoming Blue》 too. With this approach, do you bring a balance towards non-human nature of digital media with this approach?

I think it's true that the more digital we humans become, the more you get concerned about humanity as well. We are in transition of being our digital persona and our physical persona. I am from the generation who made who represents the transition from analogue to digital. I think it is true that I try to make a bridge between doing very humane, social actions in a general "landscape" what becomes more and more digital. . I have always devoted myself to work with people. I use to do a lot of interviews with people. I

recorded the interviews and used that information for developing projects. For the installation "Push-up" (2013), I asked business people to perform as many push-ups as they could do at the entrance of large corporation buildings in New York. Also in my HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU (2011) project. I interviewed patients about their birthday wishes in a psychiatric hospital. It's always fascinating to collaborate with others and people's opinion or actions surprise me and I learn from these human interactions.

By the way, you also have your own Instagram account. How do you use it for yourself?

For me it's very much about showing steps of the process of making work. So I don't really use it as a personal diary. It's related to work. It's nice to have a digital image platform where it is not about the final work only, like a published book, an exhibition, or my personal website where I show documentation of my work. It's also some sort of addiction; posting on Instagram, because it is a direct output to some public. New digital addictions arise in these times and I am sure also new mental illnesses develop from these addictions. That is interesting to me. Our human emotions and the effects of the Internet is a topic of my interests and something out of this curiosity might be the source of a new future project.

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