

Elfriede Dreyer. Opening *Matrix* by Dr Gwen Miller

Elfriede has been working in the South African arts sector for more than 30 years as an artist, curator, gallerist and academic. With a long history in tertiary art education Elfriede has been affiliated with the University of South Africa as Extraordinary Professor in Art since 2015. Her work has been taken up in major art collections of the Universities of Pretoria and South Africa; Telkom; the Development Bank of Southern Africa; FNB; and various private collections. She participated in group exhibitions at major museums, galleries and festivals throughout the country; with solo exhibitions in Pretoria, Johannesburg, Paris and Oudtshoorn.

The exhibition *Matrix* speaks of hopes and anticipation for a better world – Both as a real place, a fictional space and something in-between – a dream that searches for the ideal.

I immediately think of the 1999 science fiction action film *Matrix* and in my mind's eye see Keanu Reeves flip backwards in an impossible bodily posture. He is enabled by intelligent machines with superhuman abilities. In the film we are confronted with a rebellion against domineering forces that use the human body as an energy source. I read this rebellion in Elfriede's work as an undertone. The film is alluring in its effects, but most fascinating for me is the sense of heightened perception of movement and individual moments.

In Elfriede's painting's I read the emphasis of heightened alert in the particular neon-green colour. Like a nightclub inviting us into the otherworldly dimension of seduction, her neon sign invites us into her world. This colour between emerald green and icy Verdigris green also creates the focus in the series "Time" and it evokes a sense of pulsating electric energy. The greens in her work also seem alchemical and urged me to read more about green.

In 1778 Scheele's Green was a copper arsenite paint that was produced for commercial use and used in wall paper, probably causing many deaths. It is not used any more. The 19th century recipe for making Emerald green describes the reaction of sodium arsenite with copper(II)-acetate and it was also very poisonous. Thus in the use of green one finds a hidden thread lurking. But green has a range of associations: Elfriede describes Emerald Green in her catalogue as "conceptually representing an ideal or utopian green place of betterment (as in "Bodies is space" "Beyond")

Returning to a comparison to the film, The *Matrix* franchise has also inspired theories of the religious and philosophical ideas alluding resurrection. The green colour is a symbol of a new beginning and symbolic of resurrection due to the growth in Spring. The biblical meaning of the color green is linked to immortality. (The leaf shall not wither (psalm 1:3). In alchemy and in the bible, Green is obtained by mixing yellow (trials) with blue (purity as in the Word of God) which implies transformation. It symbolises healing and offers a balance between our body and mind, it implies movement between states of being.

In Elfriede's work it seems to suggest the tensional energy of dystopia (a place of dis-ease) and its dream of utopia. In her video Elfriede captures people wandering through her imagined spaces with all types of baggage of life - each person in their own little world each existing simultaneously in a layer of existence. My own interpretation is coloured by philosophers Deleuze and Guattari who write about layers of existence in a complex world: they describe how one milieu function as a foundation for another. One can therefore read the works' fractured imagery from the angle that these environments are interwoven.

Elfriede achieved this fractured nature of our understanding by manipulating the format – the concertina book format, the flattened plane with pictorial fissured layers, the layered relief assemblages. (“Up there is a green patch” and “Sail, sail away”)

She writes in her catalogue that the *Matrix* “is constituted by relationships, wishes, emotions and connections; it is volatile and can change from moment to moment.” filled with emotions of anxiety, fear or anticipation. We see this in the real worlds today where a war in the North not only leads to untold misery, but also to growing economic collapse and shortage of fuel that will soon impact all of us.

In betweenness in works such as “Connected,” 2021 also refers to the digital techniques such as *Liquify* and the brushstroke of traditional painting creating an intermedial conversation on a technical level that relates to the conceptual level.

Speaking of paint, the flowing painterly media also include fleshy pinks and ash greys. Elfriede says: “In the matrix of a virtual world the anchor remains the physical human body” and the hues recall the body. Melancholy of working with trauma embedded, painting can only remind us of experience, and some artworks, like Elfriede' acknowledge and remind us that terror and horror is *unrepresentable*. At a time when we are all shocked by the brutal acts in Ukraine, these works take on the lament for human nature. Observing how the layers of media evoke the sense of embedded matter, it is that our associated memories of past and recent events that are imaginatively stimulated and uncovered.

At the introduction I referred to the fact that the exhibition speaks of hopes and anticipation of a better world. It is in the poetic matter and evocative images of this exhibition that we are reminded of the precious and precariousness of being alive. Imagined and real spaces always influence another: the way we imagine the world impact on how we structure the world and wish to change.

Congratulations Elfriede.