

Interview

Laura Kikauka for Danielle de Picciotto (Aug. 2017)

1) Where and when (date is optional) were you born.

Hamilton, Ontario, Canada 1963

2) What are your early memories of family life & your home town
Early Family life was being surrounded with beauty, art, music, food, philosophy & laughter. In my birth town I was also being the test driver of my (fun-loving) brother's homemade go carts down steep hills.

3) Any thoughts on Canada? Culturally, historically

Canada is a great place to live as even the cities have much nature to access. As my parents were ,deported persons' immigrating from Latvia, they were able to eventually assimilate and start a new and prosperous life here. . *Though my last name/ family name was pretty unpronounceable at Canadian schools.

4) What were the first two possessions you truly loved

A found living caterpillar (I stroked so much it turned into a worm) later thinking that it might be a metaphor for LOVE: ie. don't over do it, or it may turn into a worm?!“ & second ,possession' was a gift from my Dad: A set of scented markers for colouring! ie. Pink=watermelon or green=apple. So hallucinogenic!

5) What did you want to become as a child (professionally)

ALWAYS an ARTIST! <Which also is an oxymoron, because how can one really make money professionally with that!? My father was always painting, drafting, making models. It seemed to be a magical way of being creative on a daily basis. I instantly desired that, as an „occupational hazard'!

6) What Heroe/Heroines/Rolemodels did you have as a teenager ?

Oh so many! Mainly in the form of artists, musicians, filmmakers, teachers, chefs, mechanic, authors, philosophers, and maybe even some hockey players... Their names, were not as important to me as their occupation.

Oh except-

The Ramones played at my highschool when I was 14. While most kids did not know what to make of it, I was in awe & it split

the sea of being in a modest city. Since then, I gained much inspiration from live concerts & shows. Thus bands & musicians have remained important to me as well as some 2 incredible teachers in high school, who taught art, creative writing & filmmaking. (Una Wilms & David Creighton)

7) Were you a difficult teenager?

Ha! I am still a difficult teenager! Ha!Ha!

My real teenage years were fabulous! Much creativity with the arts, shooting super 8 movies with friends, and dressing up like an eye scandal/ wearable sculpture was fun on a regular/ irregular occurrence. Plus (believe it or not) i was getting good grades in school. (*except for barely passing math) I never made friends with numbers & Let $x = \text{WHAT???$

8) Did you finish school? Study?

Well, WE know that the School of life & study is NEVER finished... but,

Yes, during high school I was selected by my teachers to study at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Later (1981-1984) I studied at the Ontario College of Art and graduated with honors receiving a Joan Chalmers scholarship & the Lieutenant Governor General's medal. It was quite amazing that I made money by going to school! There were many left behind with a fear of graduating. Because I had great teachers, and met like-minded friends there, I always loved school!

9) Did your mother have a profession? Did she enjoy being a housewife/mother?

My mother LOVED being a mother (Her nickname = „Smother“) She was also an amazing „housewife !!“ She had odd jobs from time to time. Mainly a freelance accountant. One of her many specialties was as a kitchen philosopher to her close friends & family. She always started a ‚book club‘ wherever we lived. That drew many like minded people to our house, exchanging insights over books & also new recipes.

My mother's other great passion was gardening. On a 100 acre farm, she transformed the originally simple grounds into an amazement of flora & fauna. She was the one who observed that some of my installations were similar to nature: full of detail & always influx.

The word LOVE could easily be exchangeable for the word MOTHER. Same thing in my world, and how lucky are those feel the same way too!!

10) How did your father influence you.

Oh man! He still does !! (even though he departed in year 2000). He had much passion for all he did. He had a unique way with language . Besides drawing & painting (exploring each of these subject matters to exhaustion) Wrote Sci-Fi fantasy books. Published in Latvia. Also there was the quirky Eastern European aesthetic that set him apart from most artists in Canada. He was very funny in an unconventional way. **in the full sense of the word:**

amusing, humorous, witty, comical, facetious, jocular, jokey, hilarious , hysterical, riotous, uproarious, entertaining, diverting, sparkling, side-splitting, rib-tickling, wacky, zany, off the wall, & somewhat difficult to explain or understand, strange, odd, curious, peculiar, weird, bizarre, freakish, quirky, mysterious, mystifying, puzzling, perplexing, unusual, uncommon, anomalous, irregular, exceptional, out of the ordinary, extraordinary! Oh Yes. Apples can fall from trees!

He always corresponded with us three kids, and then his grandchildren, enriching our lives with hand-drawn illustrations & special thoughts.

11) When did you start being interested in art?

Oh like RIGHT AWAY. Like a FIRST thought.

When you are born into a home or world of art... everything else takes a second interest.

12) What is it that interests you in art?

EVERYTHING and NOTHING. When you visit a gallery or museum you are expected to encounter 'art' but also it can be void of one's notion of art. My favorite experiences with 'art' are when you notice it in the most everyday places, like:

The metamorphosis of images in clouds, super market text/ juxtapositions, an overflowing man hole cover making marvelous mechanical sounds, vegetation with sculptural personality, etc.) So the answer to What interests you in art? Maybe is just to allow 'art' to be interested in you.

13) What artists inspired you?

Still do! Many friends & family (*including YOU + some

fellow readers)

In terms of historic artists, Tinguely had a huge impact on me for his witty mechanical sculptures and turning trash into art. Also Duchamp, for similar reasons, and having a philosophical viewpoint with suave articulation of the subject. Then of course meeting John Cage numerous times was rather mind blowing!

Much was exposed to me through a friend, who's much like family and was my art school teacher (Digital Art, electronics, & more) – a non-pretentious & generous guru to many: Norman White.

14)What is your interest in music?

MAJOR. Music seems to be a fuel that aids the visual world. Literally or figuratively! „If Music is the food of Life...prepare for indigestion!“

15)How did you start djing/performing

Like most things... by accident. Dj-ing is not rocket-science & Rocket Scientists WISH they could DJ. That may even be ‚performance‘. You know anything can be ‚performance‘ EVEN IF NO ONE IS WATCHING! It also lead to a parody of DJing (cause way too many DJs were too serious) i made CD compilations of songs & pretended to play them ‚live‘ on warped vinyl. I mostly got away with it but a few notice i was faking it (Milli Vanilli-esque) & were disturbed! Who's serious now?

16)Why did you move from Canada to Europe?

Actually we were in New York, then & my partner, Gordon (Monahan) got a DAAD grant to do a year residency in Berlin in 1992. We accidentally stayed on for about 17+ years. Geez. I have always felt a strange identity of being both European and Canadian. To live in a big city the timing must be right. The timing was perfect!

17)What inspired you about Germany

When i was first there as a tourist in the 80's I saw these people modifying large billboards & asked someone about it & they said it was sponsored by the German government. What? In Canada you'd be arrested for doing that & in Berlin it was sponsored!? What? I was enamoured by that thought. Plus it was quasi-exotic in that many Berliners looked like they could be in the band ‚Kraftwerk!‘

„Ahhaha later we learn: it's not really: „Fun, Fun, Fun, on the autobahn“

18) What inspires you about Canada

It inspires & perspires! Ohhhhhh the BEAUTIFUL NATURE, the vast open spaces, fresh water, and WILD life! The cities have amazing multi cultural content & exotic foods... Canada continues to feel safe, peaceful, affordable & pretty laid back, eh!

19) You create installations and change spaces – what is your connection to architecture?

Good observation. Yes, often a space or its architecture would suggest the environment which would best encompass an art installation. And in some cases, once installed, it could be defined as archi-torture!

20) How/why did you start the Glowing Pickle?

Oh that's a juicy question!

When Gordon & i were in Berlin in the early 90's (after THE WALL came down) there was an abundance of weird electronic, technical & medical equipment being disguardated. We met Bastiaan Maris who had sourced a lot of this material. Gordon & i had a van & Bastiaan had a garage space FOR FREE. Originally we collected the materials for our own work, but it was obvious that it was ‚more than enough‘. We opened up the garage to sell parts like a surplus store. I remember selling 6 meters of cable to our first customer. It was pretty novel. The police even thought that we were a museum & protected us. Somehow our hours became later, & we opened just one day a week (Thursdays) Our ideas were mostly collaborations. Including hearing about a Glowing Pickle: Put 220volts into a dill pickle & it glows. I built an Automat & we made a lot of Deutschmarks from that though regular patrons would insist i turn the timer on longer, while first time users would pour a lot of marks in! There was also ‚midnight madness‘ – an auction event. We'd auction off crazy items of desire but also include stuff we anted to get rid of. Like one ski. It was ultimately a surplus store of Eastern block Wonderments but we also served cocktails in test tubes as well & cheap beer. When someone asked to buy something we'd ask for what purpose? If it was for a

useful reason it would be a good price, but IF they thought it was art, it would be expensive!

The Glowing Pickle CLOSED just as it was written up in an in-flight (British Airways) magazine of where to go when in Berlin! Too funny.

21) How and why did the Schmalzwald come into life.

Schmalzwald was an off-spring from Späteverkauf, where I was asked to do an installation/event in an über-cute pavilion that was part of the Volksbühne, Berlin. The hosts were opening up a new theatre space in the Prater Bier Garten & I was asked to design their lobby as a bar & performance space (Funny Farm style). This was from the artistic directors of the theatre & the Akademie der Künste Sonambiente Festival curated by Mathias Osterwald. It was bitter sweet, as the artistic people enjoyed it & the technical staff found nothing but flaws. We survived many years with amazing shows and times, with such people as: Gordon Monahan, Gordon W, Melissa Perales, Jennifer Friedrich, Leander Hörmann, York Wegerhof, Tobi Christiansen, Turtle O'Toole, JJ Jones, John Henry Nyenhaus, members of Neubauten, Chico MacMurtrie, and Detlef, the toilet cleaner & organist, who played what we fondly referred to as „Scheiße Musik“. Uhm who am I forgetting? This part sucks. Sorry, eh.

22) Is there a difference in how female artists are perceived in Europe to the Canada?

In general, I am not sure of that. However, I was doing a lot of electronics & mechanical work in Germany in the early 90's & had to get many parts for projects at Conrad Electronics. In a long ‚Stau‘ of dudes came my turn & they would try & mock me while ordering parts, asking if it was for jewelry. I would retaliate by describing the multi-wave oscillator I was building. The jaw drop was priceless!

23) What collaborations have been your most rewarding?

Well, pretty well almost all of them... Yikes, a 10+ page answer. Who put „parenthesis“ in my (parenthesis) !?

24) Please tell us about the funniest /memorable experience you have had exhibiting/performing

Oh lady, that sums up my career!!

Ok let me try this one~ There was one „irritainment „event Gordon W & i did this ERSATZ theremin performance at Schmatzwald, Berlin. The AIR Theremin“ performance. He dressed up as Leon Therman & i was Clara Rockmore (or less). I built 2 foot-contolled car antena’s into vintage bake-lite boxes. We faked a power outage, then backstage a cassette tape of Les Baxter’s perfume music played with theremin. The foot switches launched the antennas into the air & We played „AIR Theremin“ to it... the audience was convinced it was a „LIVE“ show and applauded with much confusion. While Gordon W & I laughed a lot in dismay. In retrospect, i feel this performance was either way ahead of it’s time... or very, very behind anything & everything!

25) Do you enjoy working together with other women?

Yes, Of course! Many great ladies ... & very special times together.

Gender does not always seem qualitative as males can be effeminate & females masculine-like. Therefore i do not think of a division between the two, especially when i feel that gender equality IS gender equality.

26) What are the joys and pains in being a freelance artist?

Oh the JOY is being asked & PAIN is being forgotten...

Freelance is just a clever way of saying ‚unemployed‘.

I ultimately believe that the greatest RICHES of being a freelance artice is owning FREE TIME! MONEY definitely HELPS, but not as much as freedom... To have time is to be a millionare!

27) What are your interests today in comparison to 20 years ago?

Exactly the same & completely different.

28) What is your general motivation in life?

TO WAKE UP.

Get up & go.

Go with the flow...

but also dare to go somewhere else sometimes... break your comfort zone.

29) How important is humor/ off time/ friendship for you?

*HUMOR? BINGO! 100% . That & some more, Please! HaHaHa
Love it!

Friendship coasts along in strange ways... like a garden it needs nurturing.

There will be flowers & weeds.

Off time? That would be called FISHING! It is like meditation mixed with adrinalyn. The only activity i have found that does not just stop time. It reverses it!

30)What responsibility does one have as a female

performer/musician/artist towards the next generation.

I like this one: "**i do believe that children are our future, that's why we have to stop them immediately!**" Jack Hanley of SNL

Well, the future is ALWAYS hard to presume. Values & aesthetics can change drastically in time. I think that no matter what ,WE' have to say to the next generation, they will do what they want. Hopefully a part of the artist will live on in the their works! Meanwhile, being child-less, i enjoy being responsible for my ridiculous responsibility!