



Marian Bijlenga

An Autobiographical Archive

Marian Bijlenga has meticulously re-formed a series of miniature works, especially for this book. Each replicates a work, or a series of works, reflecting 30 years of her artistic career.



Miniatures, Marian Bijlenga

Last year, the year of my 60th birthday, I compiled a group of miniatures reflecting 30 years of my artistic career.

I chose characteristic works, icons.

Most of the miniatures measure 10 x 10 cm (ca. 4 x 4 inch)

Many of the original works are included in museum collections.

It was good for me to reflect and to realize that my work goes in circles.

The last work (2014) seamlessly with the first (1981)

I feel myself halfway my career, hopefully another 30 years to go.

It is an expanding circle, getting more layers in time.

Much of my early work was inspired by calligraphy, but I explored the positive and negative, abstracted shapes created by calligraphic forms, instead of its narrative possibilities, It is very interesting when I cannot read the words — the rhythm of the writing, the space between the letters and the connections between the lines. It is still a source of inspiration, but my work has grown more abstract. Nature is more important than writing. Small circles, ovals and streaks grow into compositions that map positive and negative space.

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These miniatures refers to the collection of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam 1985, 1993, 1994, 1998.

Foreword

If Dutch artists and architects have for a century been noted with Minimal Abstraction, Bijlenga is certainly among them – never more than this volume.

At the turn of the Millennium, I wrote: It is fortunate that Bijlenga's work is collected into monographs and shown in series. Just as each of her works is composed through the repetition of like forms, her expression builds on seeing a succession of pieces.

Most certainly Bijlenga's statement is her own. Her creation of shadow-making silhouettes, the organic forms has qualities in common with Japanese stencils. Her images may be similar to calligraphy, but are made with needle and knotted cords. Her forms are organic, living, sometimes like leaves arranged in whorls by air movements. Others suggest nature under a microscope or far distant galaxies. These are free associations – the stuff of milkweed and midsummer night's dreams.

See here her wonderful expression written both small and large. In itself, each miniature is a tender poem crafted in its own language. Collected together and spanning thirty years, we find ourselves holding a vast Rosetta Stone, uniting and unlocking these complex, unspoken communications.

Brava!

Jack Lenor Larsen

New York

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Dots connected by lines: the work of Marian Bijlenga

*"A lot of things you do, you already know; I like to do things that surprise me"*¹

With her acute sensibility and focused eye, Marian Bijlenga finds dots waiting to be connected everywhere and anywhere, for example termite holes in wooden buildings. Or in trace elements: pinholes on a wall which had been used by her teacher to stretch his work over a lifetime of studio practice. Her most recent series of works began with the dots she discovered in a newly restored 17th century Chinese wallpaper. Whatever the starting point, the final pieces are always a combination of rigorous discipline and an overarching desire to let things 'become', an approach that is also reflected in her career, which has been remarkable in its success (rigour) and its longevity (allowing things to 'become').

Her first exhibition was at the age of 14, and she continued to make artworks throughout her university studies of Pedagogy before graduating from the Art Academy at 28. At the age of 30 she moved into the studio she still occupies, and steadily built her practice over the next 14 years when, in 1996, she was invited to exhibit at the Kyoto Museum of Modern Art. It was here that the gallerist Joanne Rapp saw her work and decided to show it in the USA which resulted in it being seen and bought by no other than Jack Lenor Larsen, who has continued to follow her career. Her CV demonstrates the breadth of the appeal of her achievement, and the volume of her output. Her impeccable and beautifully presented archive is a record of the connections and developments of her work from the very first to the latest. Year-books with images and samples of all works completed within that year are supported by compilation pieces created from elements of those completed works. Now, especially created for this book, she has meticulously re-formed a series of miniature works, each replicating a piece, or series of pieces, from each year of her practice - everything documented: autobiography as archive.

Marian Bijlenga's archive very much represents an accumulation of evidence, a presentation and a refinement of a history for future use. However, the recording of the information contained within any archive is dependent on the standpoint of the holder and recorder of the archive. Inevitably, some elements will not be recorded, leaving an absence between the documented facts.²

These 'presences' and 'absences', and the context in which they are understood are elements acknowledged during the processes of creating and assembling Marian Bijlenga's works, during which she cuts around the shapes and places them in a relationship with other shapes. This can be seen as being similar to the identification and placing of objects within the archive. Similarly, when looking at Marian Bijlenga's works the viewer can choose to read the formal elements - the pattern - or the spaces between. Again demonstrating a parallel with an archival narrative formed either from the information provided, or by the lack

of particular information. The importance of absence is something that Marian Bijlenga is well aware of, and redresses by using those cut-away, absent shapes, the ones formed by the spaces between shapes, to create new works. An archive within an archive. In this way the material and haptic memories are not lost but carried forward into other patterns of light and shadow and connection.

And pattern is always present in her work. The concept of 'pattern' is both simple and complex: a series of infinite sequences, which she explores, tests and develops over and over. Such need for patterns is embedded in our personal, cultural and universal narrative. As American mathematician, John Allen Paulos, described it: *'searching for patterns is basically what art and science is about. We [...] have to search for whatever patterns are out there to stay alive, and whether we do it through art or through science, we need patterns to survive.'*

Marian Bijlenga's patterns are present on the surface and within the surface; and, as Nano technology reveals, every pattern contains another micro-pattern, and every pattern has an accumulated history. Her patterns might be structural, an additive line or reductive trace. They may be created by a tool or by the movement of the body; they may be historically, biologically or psychologically determined; imposed or natural. The pattern may be organic or a designed arrangement of lines, shapes or colours distributed in space. It could be a description of thought processes, or customary behaviour deliberately disrupted. In these patterns there are no repeats, motifs are not identical to one another and the organising principle is not deducible from the pattern. As she says: *"You think you know how to go, and then you don't"*¹

While Marian Bijlenga's patterns are formed from dots, threads and traces, from positive and negative spaces, from marks and gestures, what they contain is light and shadow. The writer Jun'ichiro Tanizaki comments that beauty is *'not only in the thing itself but in the pattern of the shadows, the light and darkness which that thing provides'*. Her studio is large and airy with high windows allowing for contemplative and reflective time spent noting the passage of light, from dawn to dusk, and its effects on her work, the changes of perception as the shadows move and lengthen. She describes how she loves to visit the final destinations of her works in order to see, and document through photographs, how they are altered by different qualities of light observing: *"Every wall has its own light"*¹

Marian Bijlenga's work can be seen as collections of families of form, a kind of visual language made up from a vocabulary that is entirely personal to the artist, which has been arrived at through years of familiarity with materials, pattern and structure, by allowing what the sculptor Antony Gormley describes as: *'the intuition of the un-thought known'*. It is a language, or code, that we, the reader/viewer cannot absolutely read. Her intention is that we don't need to understand everything, just take what is there. It is that essential, and

unpredictable, mystery underlying the formal elements: pattern, light and shadow, which brings us, and Marian Bijlenga, back again and again to her work. We look forward to her next 30 years creativity with anticipation, but one thing is certain: the outcome will always be a surprise.

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Notes

¹ All quotes from Marian Bijlenga are taken from conversation with Lesley Millar at Marian Bijlenga's studio, Amsterdam, 7.8.15

² Gail Baxter (2015) Doctoral Thesis '*Re-Viewing Lace In Archives: Connecting The Lacunae*' gives as example the Lace Archive which will hold information about the type of lace, the merchant who sold the lace, the buyer, the owner, the donator but never about the lace maker who, because of poverty and status, was not considered worthy of recording.

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