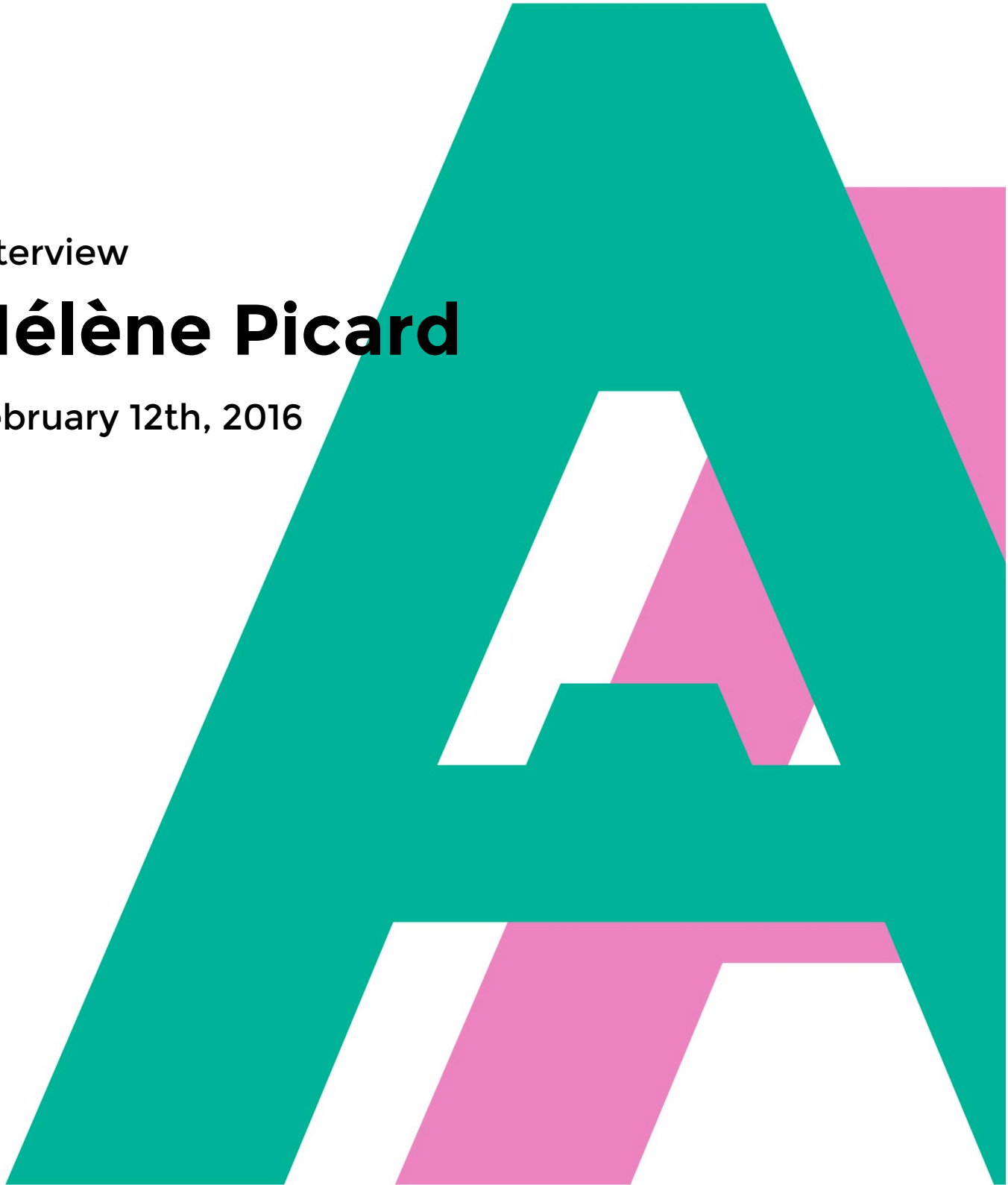


**Age of
Artists**

Interview

Hélène Picard

February 12th, 2016



The interview was conducted by Julia Kierdorf (Age of Artists gGmbH) on February 12th, 2016 over video-conference.

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Interview

Age of Artists: How did you become an artist?

H  l  ne Picard: I think that I have not exactly decided it. As a child I was really interested in drawing. I drew a lot, and I loved sewing. I loved creative things. When I was around 13, I decided to work in fashion, as a designer. At the same time, I loved painting, and drawing. It is the age where you want to decide what you will do in life for a living. For these reasons, I had started to think about fashion designer. I remember, when I was around 16, I met a guy, who was totally passionate about paintings and he transmitted his passion of painting. In this moment I decided to become an artist. I was aware that it will be hard. In a certain way you decide about it, because it is quite hard to be an artist, but in another way, it is because you love so much something that you have to do it. There is no other option and it has been like this.

Age of Artists: Did you have other artists in your family?

H  l  ne Picard: Actually, I have no other artists in my family. I had a very creative grandmother, who was sewing and doing things like

this. I also had a great grandfather who painted like a “Sunday painter”, as we say in French. He painted only for his own pleasure. He made a lot of copies of famous paintings. For a very long time, I saw these paintings in the living room of my grandmother, and all my childhood long I thought the paintings are from my great grandfather. When I went then for the first time to a museum, I said: “Wow, these are the paintings of my great grandfather”. And then my mother had to explain it to me [laughs]. In a way, I had some contacts to the Arts. It has been quite complicated for me, as I wanted to do an artistic career, but my parents didn’t want this. They haven’t the experience in this field, so they were really stressed about it. It hasn’t been very easy. I had to fight for it.

Age of Artists: Do you still face today some moments of doubt about this choice?

H  l  ne Picard: Yes, I have these moments. I had a big crisis, when I was around 36 years old. I developed my work a lot for a while, but I was so obsessed by living from my art, selling paintings, making money, that I arrived at a certain point where I was doing paintings only for selling them, and not for my satisfaction or for searching and finding, such as finding new ways of expression. So, I didn’t have any pleasure doing it. I decided to stop for a while. During three years, I went through a very big crisis. I didn’t know how to go on with being an artist. I wasn’t sure if I was right that I should go on. I thought a lot about that, and after a while, after these years of crisis and doubts, I decided that I couldn’t be anything else than an artist. I have decided that I want to do that. I have no doubt anymore. Even if it is hard, or I have to stop for a while, because I need money, this is fine for me. I can do other things. I need to live with that. It is part of my personal balance.

Age of Artists: What motivates you to do your work as an artist?

H  l  ne Picard: I am a very sensitive person and I feel a lot of things when I am around, about people, about emotions, about

landscapes... Whatever I see, I can receive very strongly and deeply. So, I think as these impressions are quite strong for me, I need to do something with that. I am touched by it, especially by human beings, and the relationship between human beings, how we behave and what we are doing here... All that kind of thoughts, I want to share it! Surely, because it is a question of self-expression, and having too much inside of me. In another way, it is also a way to communicate with other people. Not with words, but with colors in my case.

Age of Artists: Where does your inspiration, ideas and topics come from, is it from the landscapes and people around you, what you described before?

H  l  ne Picard: Many times my inspirations come from my living experience, what I am living now, what I am feeling in my life, what is my actual experience. On another part, it is the observation of other people. My work is mainly about emotions. What we have inside of us. Even if you see a landscape. For me a landscape represents some inner emotions. It is a way of constructing a bridge between both, the external elements and what we have inside of us.

Age of Artists: How does your usual working process look like?

H  l  ne Picard: I worked for many years by routine. I was working every day, I had my studio and everything. Now [laughs]... My life is in a little bit chaotic for the last four years. I have mainly two ways of working. One way of working is to express something that I am experiencing or to treat a specific topic, because I watched a film or I read something that touched me. Lately, I wanted to create a performance about metamorphosis, because I am changing a lot, and I want to show this, including all the difficulties that it brings. In this example, it comes from what I am currently living, and then I am researching and looking around what I can find in relationship with this topic. The other way of working is that I sometimes have an exhibition in a certain place. Then I work mainly from the space,

where I am going to exhibit. It is really important for me to feel how the space is, and what impressions I have from the space. Due to this, I try to build something. For example, if I have the feeling that the space is a small and quite frightened room, then I could do an installation about the fear: what is fear, which color represents fear, which words, which materials and textures. It starts like this, and I also look at a lot of pictures.

Age of Artists: So you adapt to the environment of the exhibition. Do you have then already some pictures before or do you only create new ones in regard to the environment?

H  l  ne Picard: Well, it depends. Mainly I try to do a mix, between pieces I had before and some new ones. Sometimes I create everything for the space. It depends on the time I have, and on the project. Often, I have to do a mix between both.

Age of Artists: Do you work on several pictures at the same time, or do you always finish first a painting before getting to the next one?

H  l  ne Picard: I prefer to work on several pictures at the same time. Before I was working only on one until it was finished, but I am a little bit obsessed [laughs] and it is not good for obsessive people to do that! You end up with discussing with yourself: "Oh this taint. I don't want this taint here". Nobody will see this taint, but you see it. For this reason, I have started to work at several paintings at the same time. Sometimes, I even let them for two weeks standing, without seeing it. Some paintings I did, I painted on it for 1 hour, then I stopped it and waited for two weeks to come back afterwards to look at it again, just to forgetting about the project you have with the picture and the idea. When your idea is too clear you can block the creation.

Age of Artists: Do you balance individual and collective work? Are you doing some processes with someone else or do you do all by yourself, without any help from other people?

H  l  ne Picard: For the creative part, I didn't do a lot with other people. I create by my own. For the rest, it depends. When I had to realize a performance and had to film it, I collaborated with other people for the music, for the image and the filming. For my paintings, I didn't do a lot with other people, I just ask for advices from time to time.

Age of Artists: What means feedback for you?

H  l  ne Picard: I do like it. Last year, for the first time of my life, I had to be present most of the time at my exhibition to welcome the audience. At the beginning, I didn't know if I had to tell the visitors that I am the artist. I let them see the exhibition, and afterwards, when I saw that they were interested, I talked with them. Actually, it was a really good experience for me, because it was very interesting to see how people react. Just to observe them, how they move in the space, and where they stop, the little comments they did... Actually, for painters or for sculptors, we do not have a lot of contact with the public. We only see if we sell or we don't sell. Sometimes you might sell nothing, but it doesn't mean that your work is not good or that people don't appreciate it. You can have a really good feedback from people, when talking to them, even though they do not buy it. Hence, it is quite valuable to me!

Age of Artists: You appreciate feedback from professionals but also from the visitors of your exhibitions?

H  l  ne Picard: Well, from professionals like other artists, this is fantastic. These are people, who know very well what they are doing, and who are from the same field. But it is true, that from the public, in general, it is very interesting as they see it from a

different point of view. There you can see that most of the time, when a painting is good, everybody can see it. That is really strange, but it is like this. For paintings which are in between, good but not amazing, it is not as clear. That is funny to see. We have all a sense of art.

Age of Artists: From where do you get recognition?

H  l  ne Picard: You receive recognition, when you can show your work. This is the main way. The recognition from the sector is as well important, from professionals, from critics... This is really good and you feel good if you have that! You see that people specialized in your field understand what you are doing. But this is not easy to obtain [laughs]. It happens sometimes, and many times it doesn't happen, and you have to go on. This is the main problem in arts, to go on without having recognition!

Age of Artists: What aspects or criteria are important for you so that you can work well?

H  l  ne Picard: I need a peaceful place. I don't need a lot actually [laughs]. I would like to have a lot, like a big space! Since several years I am working in not very good conditions, and this is ok. I can work in a 2-square meter space. This is not a problem, even though I would prefer to work in bigger spaces. Maybe, it would be better for me to work in a sharing place. It is really interesting to see what others are doing, you get more inspirations, and ideas about your work. It is more stimulating. On the other hand, you can also get feedback. Another point is that you see that you are not the only "fool" in the world [laughs]. When you are alone in your studio, you think sometimes: "oh, ok" [laughs].

Age of Artists: It doesn't disturb you, if you have other people around you?

H  l  ne Picard: It is true that it is not easy for me. I need a lot of concentration, and I love to speak so it doesn't work that well for me [laughs]. I shared a studio once, and I had to come by night from time to time, as it was easier to work. Not because I didn't want to see the others, but I needed to work. I think it is more a question of self-discipline.

Age of Artists: You can work by night and by day? Do you have a preference?

H  l  ne Picard: I prefer by day. I know that some people are really inspired during the night. That doesn't work for me. My best moments are during the afternoon. I don't know why, but I realized that my brain is best working in the afternoon.

Age of Artists: What makes it difficult to be creative for you?

H  l  ne Picard: Well, this is something that is quite hard. If you try to create something, you create it from something that already exists as you are not the only one in the world. You have some references and some inspirations about it. However, it is true that the shape that you are going to create is unique. There is nobody doing exactly the same. For example, if you see a class painting a nude, you think first, that it will be the same result for the 10 people, but at the end, you have 10 different drawings. It is a quite difficult sometimes to do something that doesn't exist. That there is nothing like "this". For this reason, I think many artists tend to copy a little bit, to do something very close to a painting that already exists. It makes really nervous, especially when you are doing an exhibition, as you show something, where you have no references about. You have inspirations, but the shape at the end is unique. This is on the interesting thing, but you are quite nervous.

Age of Artists: You are nervous as you don't know how the people react?

H  l  ne Picard: You are afraid about being rejected by the others in case they would not like your work. Sometimes you thought that it was a really good work, and you are afraid that people don't think the same [laughs]. You have a lot of doubts. It is very common, when you speak with artists. They show their work, but when it is the first time that they show it, they always present it like: "Yes, I am not sure. It is new. Maybe this color I should change". This is just because we are afraid that we are showing something that doesn't fit to anything. Once you gain some recognition of what you did, this is different. You feel more comfortable. However, it is true that when you show a new series for the first time you are quite nervous. Well, this is a basic human feeling, to be afraid to be rejected.

Age of Artists: Do you think that we can draw a parallel there with employees in other industries? When they have an idea that is not completely in line with what the company usually does, they might be as well too afraid, and this is the reason why they are not doing it, and therewith employees are less creative?

H  l  ne Picard: Yes, I do. To be honest, I think it starts in school. Some teachers say to children: "Oh that's a nice drawing", or "that is not a good drawing", "You can draw", or "you can't draw". From my point of view, this is absurd. Everybody is creative. We all have different ways of expressing ourselves: some do it with drawing, others do it maybe with theatre. I remember when I gave a workshop in a company, where we created dresses following a specific topic. If I recall, it was about childhood. I didn't choose the topic [laughs]. We had three sessions to create these dresses, and with very different people from the company: from the cleaning lady to the director. The first reactions were: "I don't know how to do this", "I am not creative", "I don't want to do this", "Ugh.. Fashion"; especially from men. You could see that if you allow people to express themselves, and you convince them to just try it, that there is not any competition, to just enjoy doing it; it leads to great engagement. At the end of the last session, they were totally

crazy about doing it, also men! It is true that it is a question of trusting people in the creative part. We are not in a society, where they give you so many opportunities about that. Very, very early, "they", like teachers", decide if you are creative or not. Well, maybe we have better abilities for the one thing or the other, but we have this capacity of creativity. When I do workshops with families, I can see it. I can't understand if children have all these capacities when they are small, why don't we have it anymore as adults?

Age of Artists: Too many limits might have been set by our environment, as we do not lose it just like this. Did you go through a specific evolution or a change of some sort over time? Were there things that mattered but not so much anymore today?

H  l  ne Picard: I think that the main subjects that I am working on are the same subjects since I started. However, I don't treat them in the same way like before. It is not the same shape or the same way. The more I know who I am, and in what I am interested, the more I deal with very selective topics.

Age of Artists: So, at the beginning it was a bit more generic and now more specific?

H  l  ne Picard: It depends on everyone, some people are very mature and very aware of who they are early, but it was not my case [laughs]. When you are young, you are quite influenced by many things. Over time, you take off some of that influence that does not fit with you. It is more like this. For example, I was all the time painting crowd. I think for me it was a way of exploring the human face, and the human expressions. I had to do it like this. I created a whole society with kings, wives, executioners. I painted a whole series of that. I didn't understand for a long time why I was doing it. I actually realized that I was very interested in characters, and all the characters we have inside of us, because we are not only one person. We are many people, and depending on the people we are interacting with, we behave in one way or in another

way. I realized that these characters, like the king, was a way of expressing all the characters we have inside of us. But it wasn't the right way to do it for me.

Age of Artists: You mentioned that you usually work on the same topics, where you are interested in, but on the other hand while doing on the workshop you mentioned, the topic was given. Does it have an impact on the level of your motivation if you can choose the topic yourself or if it is given?

H  l  ne Picard: I have a big problem: if I do something where I am not interested in, I cannot do it. This is horrible [laughs]. Sometimes it would be better to be more flexible. I mean, I am quite flexible and open, but in this case not so much [laughs]. A friend of mine offered me to do an illustration for a book for kids. It is about seagulls. I can't draw this bird. It is impossible. I have tried, but I can't do it. I don't find the inspiration, or I don't know what it is. Also, if I do a workshop I need to have some interests or a connection to my world, in order to make it more alive. I think it is the same for many people. Some colleagues are like: "Ah you need an exhibition for landscape? Ok let's go for landscape. This shape? This size? Ok, no problem". For me this doesn't work, I would like that it does, but I can't [laughs]. In the example of the workshop, I didn't design it, I was only the trainer, but it had a connection with what I like - fashion and working with people. For these reasons it was interesting for me, even though I wasn't very fond of the topic.

Age of Artists: So, there is no big difference between the motivational levels?

H  l  ne Picard: Well, I feel more motivated to work on what I have decided and on what I want, but it is a good challenge to try to do other things, and I think this is why I want to work more and more with other people. It is a good challenge to work with other ideas and ways of seeing things as you have to use your head more. You

need to find a way to combine it, and you develop your things in a certain way. It is richer. Always when I worked with other people, mainly in workshops, I had very good experiences and I improved a lot.

Age of Artists: Is it more important for you that you are satisfied by your picture, or if others are acknowledging it?

H  l  ne Picard: Lately, I am in a period where I am often showing my work. So, I don't have a lot of feedback from external people. I think that I need feedback from the others, but when I finish paintings I have two feelings: either "oh this is ok, but this is not exactly what I wanted", or "wow this painting is good. I like it". After that, I need the validation of the others, but it is not as important as it was before. When I was younger, it was more important. Now I would like to know what they think about it, and if we agree. Sometimes I can like a painting a lot, but no one else likes it. I don't think that artists are good judges for their own work. For the others maybe, but not for their own work. If you spend a lot of time on a painting, you have a special connection with this painting, even if it is not a really good painting. You know what it meant to do it. It is difficult to be objective.

Age of Artists: Some organizations struggle to motivate their employees and to keep job satisfaction up. Do you have any recommendations for them?

H  l  ne Picard: Currently, we speak a lot about self-development and self-confidence, and I can agree with many things that people say about that. I believe that if you want to be satisfied with yourself, you have to trust yourself and to be confident in your capabilities. You have to acknowledge that you do good things, even though some people might not see it that way, that you do what you can and you try to improve. Every day, we do a few very small steps, which are not a lot, but it is still very important to notice them. This is a way of being satisfied with your work, even if

it is not the huge project that you want. Since several months I am doing an exercise with my daughter, she is five years old. At the end of the day, we do a balance of the day. We tell each other's about our days, how it was and what we did. It can be very long or very short. I always have the same question for her and for me: "What did you like today? When did you feel happy today?" This is really interesting as you often think: "Wow, I did that". Sometimes you would not have even remember that. It helps you acknowledge small details of your day and feel more satisfied. For example, it could be like a good conversation you had, or having a coffee with someone, or getting good ideas suddenly about a project you have since long...