



ZEN SEKAI GALLERY

HENK PANDER



THE CAFFA SERIES

2020 - 2021

September 16 - November 11, 2022



ZEN SEKAI GALLERY



HENK PANDER:

THE CAFFA SERIES
2020 - 2021

September 16 - November 11, 2022



FIVE QUESTIONS

1

William Elston: You did considerable research in the process of producing this body of work. Can you give us an idea of the scope of that research?

Henk Pander: Much of my work has to do with my experiences as an immigrant. So when COVID appeared killing thousands of people, I started responding to it with metaphorical still lifes. I painted a portrait of my assistant Sarah in quarantine, lonely and frightened locked in her room. For many years I was aware that one day an epidemic would devastate the world population. In 2020 COVID became this threat.

About ten years ago I purchased a book, titled THE GREAT MORTALITY, an Intimate History of the Black Death, the most Devastating Plague of all Time by John Kelly. A highly detailed and vivid description of the plague as it broke out in Central Asia in 1347.

At the time I thought it would be a source for a powerful painting of human reality, gripping, emotional, sad and out of time. But ten years ago it seemed a bit of a leap so I set it aside. COVID brought the book into focus and painting these histories would become an allegory of current experience and allow for a great level of freedom. Since much of it began in Caffa, a Genoese Italian outpost on the Black Sea in conflict with the Mongolian armies, I started looking at galleys of the period, costumes and the ruins of Caffa. I also found a great number of plague images throughout the centuries from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. I looked and studied Trebuchets, medieval war catapults, and their workings. I ended up making many small composition drawings in sketchbooks and approached out of which ones I selected to scale up for larger works.



5 Questions (continued)

2

William Elston: In our conversations, and in your catalogue raisonné essay, you talk about your European origins and training. You've said that you are not a good fit for the American art scene, that you feel out of place. Can you talk about that?

Henk Pander: I come from a large artist family in the Netherlands and started painting at a very young age. I went to the Rijksacademie voor Beeldende Kunst in Amsterdam, where I won the Silver Medallion of the Prix de Rome. I won the Therese van Duyl Schwarze Prize, (portrait prize of the Netherlands) in 1964, had major commission from the Dutch government (Lauwerszee werken) and commissions from the The city of Amsterdam and sold much work. I met a young American woman from Portland in Amsterdam , we became involved , married in Amsterdam. She wanted to see her family in Portland and against the advice of a member of the Netherlands Art Council, ("They will destroy you.") I naively moved to Portland, where I had a part time teaching position at the Museum Art School, a small school associated with the Portland Art Museum. There was a small close knit art scene here; a bit cliquish. There was one gallery owned by a very wealthy art patron. The trend was color field painting, which conflicted with my classical, figurative, humanist sensibility and visa versa. Immediately one local luminary said when he saw my paintings, "That's not my cup of tea". Frankly it has been that way all along. Their antecedents being Northwest and New York, mine the Rijksmuseum and Dutch contemporary post war art history of which people here know next to nothing. I have done a great deal of experimenting in various means of expression including theatrical installations. It never clicked. Since I have no other income than selling paintings and doing commissions there was an instant conflict of interest between me and commercial galleries. It never solved itself.



5 Questions (continued)

3

William Elston: You moved to Portland OR in 1965. This was in the middle of the counter-cultural revolution. You've spent most of your adult life here. You've seen the Portland art scene evolve over several decades. How has it changed since the 1960s, especially with regard to artists and art galleries?

Henk Pander: The old saw is; the more things change, the more they stay the same. There are far more galleries now than when I came here. Most are struggling somewhat I would guess. There are a great many more artists, yet one major art school, which would create a certain level of insularity I would assume. Yet the art world and its support system is a reflection of society as a whole and Portland still is a middle sized, middle class town. In the sixties, poor, marriage collapsing, moving back and forth between Europe and the US, losing contact with friends and family, my life became unsettled and in turmoil, so was society with the Vietnamese war, cultural shifts and rampant violence and racism. My work at that time reflected that experience.

In 1969 I had a painting show at Portland State University, which caused, to my chagrin and fear, a scandal, and I became the "controversial Henk Pander". I see myself as a serious and thoughtful, hard working artist, so the label was upsetting and hard to shake. It made it difficult to sell work or to be taken seriously, something many artists suffer from in this reactionary society. Now there is simply economic censorship, the Market. Works of mine that were rejected by local galleries, "don't bring those in, can't place those" are now in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. One is considered one of the top one hundred works on paper out of a collection of 800,000 works.



5 Questions (continued)

4

William Elston: You came from a family of prominent Dutch artists. More recently you've been getting more attention in Europe. How did this come about, and what new possibilities have opened as a result?

Henk Pander: Around 2006, I visited my old academy friend, the legendary Dutch painter Willem den Ouden, in Varik on the Waal River. We sat in his ancient garden, where he told me he had sold eighty five etchings to the Rijksmuseum, the national museum of the Netherlands in Amsterdam. Impressive.

I said, "I have a great many sketchbooks drawn in the US, over time becoming a visual journal of my life in America. Would the Rijksmuseum be interested in those?" He said he would talk to the Ger Luijten, head of the print room, Rijksprentenkabinet about me. A few days later I received a call to set up a meeting in Amsterdam. Luijten, now director of Fondation Custodia in Paris, is a highly respected art historian who said "I have to come to Portland to visit your studio and see what you have." Ger Luijten visited me twice in Portland. First he selected seventeen sketchbooks, a survey through all periods. He then saw my watercolor collection and wondered why they were not all over the US. Ask the Americans, I responded. "These are incredible," he said. "They give me the cold shivers they are so good." The next year he came again and selected 27 large watercolors, all my early etchings, all political and cultural posters I made over the years and a great number of drawing for the permanent collection of the Rijksmuseum. Over the years I heard people say, "What is Henk Pander doing here making European art? Why don't you go back to Holland?" Dawson Carr, former curator of European art at PAM urged me to go back. Luijten said "You are the only artist of your generation who moved abroad and did not lose your connection with the Dutch great history of painting." Like a badge of honor.



5 Questions (continued)

5

William Elston: To return to the Caffa Series, there are obvious analogies to the recent coronavirus pandemic. Are there other metaphors, either political, aesthetic or philosophical, embedded in the work?

Henk Pander: What I found interesting reading about the plague was that climate change and epidemics often coincided with fall of empires. This was evident in the Justinian plague of the fifth century which killed a great part of the Roman population, weakened it and precipitated the fall of the Roman empire and the dark ages. Since the years of Trump combined with covid hinted at the decline of the United States, I set most of the paintings in the ruins of Rome, making the works more allegorical and fantastical, allowing for greater freedom and opening a door to new work.



ZEN SEKAI GALLERY

HENK PANDER
THE CAFFA SERIES
2020 - 2021



Henk Pander

Empire" (The Beheading of John the Baptist. After Rembrandt), 2020–2021

40 x 60 inch (h x w)
watercolor on paper



Henk Pander

Plague Ships Fleeing the Burning City of Caffa Study #3, 2020–2021

40 x 60 inch (h x w)
watercolor on paper



Henk Pander

Funeral in Caffa, 2020–2021

40 x 60 inch (h x w)
watercolor on paper





Henk Pander

Lament (Siege of Caffa), 2020–2021

60 x 81 (h x w)
oil on linen



Henk Pander

The Siege of Caffa, 2020–2021

40 x 60 inch (h x w)
watercolor on paper



Henk Pander

Lament (The Siege of Caffa), 2020–2021

40 x 60 inch (h x w)
watercolor on paper





Henk Pander

The Siege of Caffa, 2020–2021

40 x 60 inch (h x w)
watercolor on paper



Henk Pander

Plague Ships Fleeing the Burning City of Caffa Study #2,
2020–2021

40 x 60 inch (h x w)
watercolor on paper



Henk Pander

The Siege of Caffa (Plague Pit), 2020–2021

60 x 81 (h x w)
oil on linen





Henk Pander

The Siege of Caffa (1347), Victim, 2020–2021

40 x 60 inch (h x w)
watercolor on paper



Henk Pander

Plague Ships Fleeing the Burning City of Caffa Study #1,
2020–2021

40 x 60 inch (h x w)
watercolor on paper



Henk Pander

The Covered Wagon (Siege of Caffa), 2020–2021

40 x 60 inch (h x w)
watercolor on paper





Henk Pander

Plague Ships Fleeing the Burning City of Caffa, Circa 1347,
2020–2021

60 x 81 (h x w)
oil on linen



Henk Pander

Bacillus, 2020–2021

40 x 60 inch (h x w)
watercolor on paper



Henk Pander

The Siege of Caffa, (Plague Pit), 2020–2021

40 x 60 inch (h x w)
watercolor on paper





“We find certain things about seeing puzzling because we do not find the whole business of seeing puzzling enough.”

– *Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein.*



ZEN SEKAI GALLERY