



Netherlands-based woodcut artist *Eline Brontsema's* training as a painter and her love for the architecture of Berlin's public swimming pools combine in her perfectly composed printmaking project.

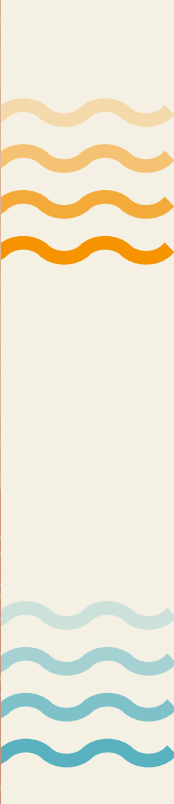
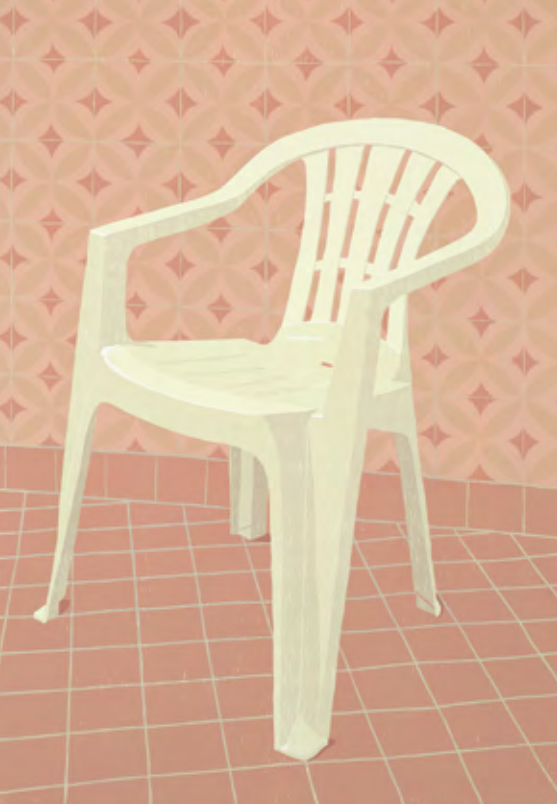


Photos by
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Going Swimmingly





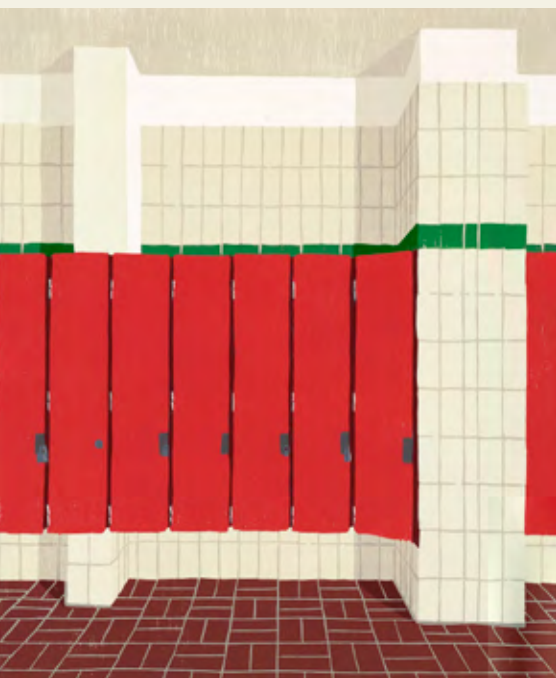
impressive in Europe – the city has more than 60 public pools and at one time had twice as many. There is a wealth of beauty to discover. From my Dutch perspective this is really something very special and I wanted to capture those visual experiences. The pools were built in different time periods and that too seemed to me like an interesting starting point for a series of work.

I wanted to make a portrait of each pool. Before each visit, I asked the Berliner Bäder Betriebe, responsible for the pools, for permission to work in them for a certain period of time outside opening hours. I made sketches and took photos, and also swam in many pools, just to see if it would be interesting to work there. I am mainly concerned with architecture and everything you encounter at a swimming pool, but ultimately, reflections, pool attributes, windows and lockers are only arranged shapes, lines and colours that together form a harmony.

I consider it an ongoing project and I have been working towards my solo exhibition at Galerie Mokum in Amsterdam for a long time. But since my technique is so time consuming, I have only been able to depict and show a small number of the pools. I have visited about 30 public pools in Berlin so far, but I've also made some trips to Northern Germany and Leipzig to visit their pools too. Who knows? There might be something in that too. In any case, I hope to travel to Berlin again soon.

I draw inspiration from both paintings and everyday life. On my way through the city, cycling or walking to my studio, I get all kinds of ideas. Everyday life is a great source of inspiration for me: a simple bus shelter, a waste bin, a shop window. And of course, a swimming pool. T

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It was 2020 when I graduated from the Klassieke Academie voor Beeldende Kunst in Groningen, the Netherlands – an art academy with a strong emphasis on painting. And since I wanted to learn to paint, this was the right place for me. However, in our first year we were introduced to graphic printing techniques such as etching, lithography and woodcut. During my third year, I decided that I wanted to work with wood again and that was when I really fell for it. My teacher Siemen Dijkstra was a very passionate woodcut artist and that definitely helped, so I just started and never stopped.

During my studies I worked as a cleaner in the homes of elderly people. One of the gentlemen that I visited in this job was an etching artist and wanted to get rid of his press. He asked me if I knew of anyone who might like to buy it, and that was how I slowly started to collect all the necessary materials to be able to print in my own studio. My current studio is located in a former university laboratory in Groningen, built in 1912.

The fact that I am trained as a classical painter, with an emphasis on technique and craftsmanship, undoubtedly has influenced my way of making woodcuts. Pictorial elements such as colour, rhythm, tone, contrast and composition are of great importance to me. The composition plays a major role – the rhythm of the shapes, colour harmony and the play of light and shadow determine the atmosphere that I want to depict, with every part of the image contributing something to the whole. Everything matters, and everything that I don't like or that doesn't seem to add anything, I leave out.

Although I still love painting, right now I am concentrated on making woodcuts. From the beginning I have always remained fascinated by this technique, but slowly it has taken up my full attention. I make use of the reduction technique, also known as the 'suicide method', with the print being created from a single wooden plate for all the different colours. The wooden plate is systematically destroyed and a mistake in cutting can spoil a whole edition of prints.

It can also be a very time consuming way of working. For me, making woodcuts is a slow process – I print my woodcuts on a press, and during the printing (which takes about a full day per colour), I am super concentrated but I can also let my

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ELINE BRONTSEMA

thoughts wander about the work. The same goes for the many hours I spend cutting. It requires my full attention, but at the same time I can contemplate a bit about the work, or other things in life.

You use your whole body when printing and cutting – a big difference from painting. The whole process starts with an idea and then I make compositional drawings. When I have something I want to continue with, I cut a wooden plate to size, sand it, transfer the drawing onto it and varnish the plate. Then I make a special custom mould, which I use as a registration method.

My new series of work *Berlin Public Pools* has its origins a few years back. I used to swim in the Helperzwembad – a swimming pool here in Groningen. I felt that the building itself contributed a lot to my swimming pleasure and wondered if I wanted to do something creative with that idea, but it faded into the background for a while. A little later, I also swam at a beautiful historical swimming pool in Rotterdam, but didn't immediately do anything with it then either – ideas often need time to mature. Eventually I started reading about other swimming pools, so that's how I came across Stadtbad Mitte in Berlin and I decided to go there.

For two years I have been visiting the pools regularly. The swimming pool landscape of Berlin is perhaps the most

